



CHAPTER 4

PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Webster's approach to preservation planning seeks to engage with broader community planning and economic development initiatives and identify preservation strategies that not only coordinate with those initiatives but that place historic resources and preservation concepts at the center of their successful implementation. Chapter 4 looks at planning initiatives and opportunities appropriate to different areas of Webster and suggests preservation planning approaches aligning with broader community goals as expressed in planning work.

Appendix D of this preservation plan, *Planning Context*, provides an overview of Webster's planning documents over the past two decades. Most prominent are the Town of Webster Master Plan (2014), Open Space and Recreation Plan (2018), and several targeted corridor and economic strategy studies prepared between 2020 and 2024.

Webster is one of 40 communities that are part of the Central Massachusetts Planning Region and are served by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC). Founded by the Massachusetts legislature in 1963 as one of 13 regional planning agencies across the Commonwealth, the CMRPC

provides a variety of planning services to regional municipalities and has assisted Webster with several of its recent planning documents.

The CMRPC is based in Worcester and is leading stakeholders in development of a regional comprehensive plan called *Imagine 2050*, which is projected to be completed by the end of 2024. The plan is currently in the visioning phases and cannot be used in the preparation of this preservation plan. However, a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy completed by CMRPC in 2023 provides strategies underpinning ongoing comprehensive planning and includes goals, objectives, and actions from which Webster can draw.

Webster should establish itself as a player in the region's planning and economic development strategy, defining a role for itself taking advantage of the Town's assets and strengths.

RECOMMENDATION 4A: Actively participate in the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission's development of a regional comprehensive plan, *Imagine 2050*. Define a targeted role for Webster within the plan taking advantage of the Town's assets and strengths. Priority one recommendation to be undertaken by Town staff under the direction of the Board of Selectmen.

One of the primary advantages Webster has is its location on Interstate 395 which connects Worcester and Interstate 90 (Mass Turnpike) twelve miles to the north of Webster with Interstate 95 in Connecticut to the south. I-395 has three interchanges in Webster, with the interchange at East Main Street in East Village being the primary connection.

I-395 provides Webster with a regional connection that enhances the potential for economic development in the historic town. In the immediate vicinity of the interchange, economic development has already occurred, demolishing the historic East Village mill and related residential areas and replacing them with commercial development serving both the interstate and the town. While not good for historic preservation, new commercial development at the interchange was probably inevitable and can perhaps provide an anchor that will benefit economic transformation of downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

The regional goal for Webster should be for its historic core to become a regional attraction for small business, services, and residential living, serving as a traditional main street village and downtown. Historic character, livability, and quality of life amenities are central to its appeal. Webster is transforming into a **commuter suburb** for Worcester and the surrounding region. Webster Lake is also a premier regional recreational attraction and a stable asset strengthening the local economy.

As recommendations for this Historic Preservation Plan were being prepared, the Town of Dudley published a planning document titled, ***Dudley Gateway: A Revitalization Plan*** (June 2024). Prepared by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, the Dudley Gateway Plan includes a number of the same recommendations proposed in Webster's Historic Preservation Plan, including recommendations for branding, mill district redevelopment, greenway trails, public art, and a Main Street approach to revitalization. Implementation of the two plans should be closely coordinated.

The regional goal for Webster should be for its historic core to become a regional attraction for small business, services, and residential living, serving as a traditional main street village and downtown.

RECOMMENDATION 4B: Coordinate with the Town of Dudley on implementation of the Dudley Gateway Plan, this Historic Preservation Plan, and other Webster economic development and revitalization initiatives.

Ongoing recommendation to be undertaken by Town staff and Town boards and commissions under the direction of the Board of Selectmen.

Dudley and Webster share the east-west Main Street corridor and the north-south French River mill district and greenway. Several joint planning documents have been prepared in recent years addressing Main Street and the French River (discussed in other sections of this chapter), though coordinated implementation has not been strong.

Similar to Webster's planning goals as expressed in its 2014 Master Plan and other planning documents and initiatives, the primary objectives of the Dudley Gateway Plan are to facilitate compact, mixed-use development and redevelopment; enhance streetscape aesthetics; and improve infrastructure to foster active mobility, safety, and accessibility.

The Dudley Gateway Plan seeks to cultivate a distinctive Town identity and create a welcoming environment that attracts residents and visitors to Dudley's vibrant business district. The Dudley plan provides guidelines for sign and facade improvements and strategies to fund the enhancement of West Main Street's aesthetic appeal. Considerations for enhancing walkability, bikeability, and connectivity to nearby trails are central to the design framework. Coordination with the Dudley Gateway Plan is discussed further below in relevant sections of this chapter.



Historic 1868 Main Street Bridge over the French River connecting Webster and Dudley, an inventoried historic resource for both towns. Towers of the historic Stevens Mill in Dudley are in the background.

PROMOTING HISTORIC WEBSTER

Economic growth and prosperity provide opportunities for community enhancement through creative growth management strategies leveraging public and private investment to achieve broad community goals. A primary focus in growth management should be given to identifying, preserving, and enhancing the historic character of the built environment, both Townwide in Webster and within individual neighborhoods.

Historic and cultural resources are defining features of community character and identity. Municipal policy and planning initiatives should recognize the role of historic and cultural resources in local quality of life and place a strong emphasis on their preservation. With this in mind, Webster's planning and economic growth strategies should take advantage of the Town's historic character to the greatest extent possible.

The following four topics are baseline strategies in using planning for community enhancement in Webster.

Town Policy and Planning Leadership

Town leadership in policy and planning is provided by the Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator in their management, directives, and allocation of resources. Over the past two decades, Webster's Board of Selectmen has supported innovative planning and economic development initiatives and implementation measures that have strengthened community character in the Town's historic Downtown core, recognizing the importance of historic resources. Most of these initiatives have been supported through grants from state and federal programs.

The Board of Selectmen has participated in the preparation of this Historic Preservation Plan and expressed interest in its recommendations. The Board of Selectmen is essential in providing leadership to Town departments, staff, boards, and commissions in municipal policy, management, the allocation of resources, and the implementation of Town programs.

RECOMMENDATION 4C: Continue to provide leadership in establishing Town policies that recognize and enhance the historic character of the built environment and allocate the necessary resources toward their realization.

Ongoing recommendation to be undertaken by the Board of Selectmen.

The Board of Selectmen should continue to implement and expand initiatives recognizing the role that historic and cultural resources play as character defining features in community identity, character, and local quality of life. They should oversee the inclusion of historic preservation values, principles, and processes into Town policy, planning, and programs at all levels of municipal activity. Webster should continue to take advantage of available state and federal programs that support and help implement the Town's planning vision.

Identity and Branding

An important step Webster can take in emphasizing community character is adoption of the Town's historic character as the identity Webster projects to the public it is trying to attract. Identity and branding should be key marketing tools central to the Webster's economic development strategy of making Downtown a regional hub of public activity and promoting its historic neighborhoods to regional audiences as desirable places to live and invest.

Identity and branding support economic development by projecting a visual impression to residents and visitors that is recognizable, appealing, and immediately communicates a sense of quality and expectation. Branding is critical in creating a visual presence and in conveying Webster's message about quality of life. The graphic identity that Webster should adopt as an aspect of branding should establish visual communication that is immediate and experiential.

While Webster's 2014 Master Plan and other economic development studies make note of the Town's unique history, they do not, however, suggest using that history to project community identity or brand. They do not take advantage of Webster's unique history as a marketing tool, which is a missed opportunity. Identity and branding should have been the first step in crafting an economic development strategy for Webster, especially given its unique story.

While many New England towns have mills, and several towns have mills associated with Samuel Slater, no New England town is so closely connected to Samuel Slater and his family. Samuel Slater is known as the "Father of American Textile Manufacturing" and "Father of the American Industrial Revolution." His impact on New England's industrial development was profound and widely recognized. Slater's decision to concentrate his endeavors in Webster, and in fact create the Town, is foundational. The Slater family's presence in Webster and their management of its mills tracks the history of the American Industrial Revolution for over a century, from 1811 into the early 20th century.

Webster should make the most of its history by adopting Slater as its identity and brand and proactively projecting this brand as central to its marketing.

Webster should make the most of its history by adopting Samuel Slater as its identity and brand and proactively projecting this brand as central to its marketing.

RECOMMENDATION 4D: Adopt Samuel Slater and the Slater family's mill history and story as Webster's identity and brand to be prominently used in marketing and economic development. *Priority one recommendation to be undertaken by the Board of Selectmen and Webster's economic development stakeholders.*

Creation of a Slater brand for Webster places the Town's history at the center of its identity and economic strategy. Its implementation emphasizes using historic character and historic resources for economic benefit, aggressively promoting Webster's Downtown, mill districts, and historic neighborhoods as economic attractions.

Webster's branding should be developed as part of a broader **creative marketing campaign** for use in economic development and promotion. The broader campaign should include development of a graphic identity and messaging as well as the means by which they will be used to promote Webster.

The Town should retain a **marketing and design consultant** to assist in development of its identity and brand and in the development and implementation of its marketing campaign going forward.

Webster should **coordinate** its marketing campaign with that proposed for the Town of Dudley in its Gateway Plan, which suggests using Merino Village as the basis for Dudley's Main Street brand, which relates to the Samuel Slater brand proposed for Webster.

A **graphic identity** should be developed for Webster visually conveying its Slater brand. The graphic identity should be appropriate for use in marketing products associated with the Town's promotion, such as the Town's website, wayfinding, advertising, brochures, publications, orientation materials, Town documents, interpretation, maps, and other media formats and materials.

Design of Webster's graphic identity should include a Town logo, related graphic elements, fonts, colors, and other components. It should be developed for use in a variety of anticipated formats and media and in coordination with the creative marketing campaign for the Town.



Logos used by the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Area in Massachusetts and Rhode Island and The Last Green Valley National Heritage Area in Connecticut and Massachusetts as part of their branding and graphic identity.

Guidelines should be established for use of the Town's graphic identity by the Town and by stakeholders and partners in their promotion. Use of Webster's graphic identity by stakeholders and partners should be encouraged but closely monitored and only undertaken by permission and adherence to the Town program's guidelines.

Webster's proposed graphic identity should:

- Convey and communicate Webster's Slater mill identity;
- Express the Town's character and quality of life;
- Convey Webster's small-town accessibility and friendliness.
- Be easily recognizable under the variety of conditions of its use;
- Be easy to use and adapt to different formats;

- Convey a sense of enjoyment and fun in the experience of Webster’s Downtown, mill district, and historic neighborhoods; and
- Also embrace and be associated with Webster Lake and its recreational context.

The marketing campaign developed for Webster should use the graphic identity and brand in promoting the Town in a variety of media as may be available.

Marketing and promotional campaigns generally include:

1. Defining a **Brand Promise** and corresponding public-facing messaging for Webster to inform and inspire unified communications and advertising.
2. Using the Slater history to create a **Campaign Theme** guiding marketing and communications going forward.
3. Preparing a **Campaign Toolkit** for use by the Town and its stakeholders and partners.

Marketing campaigns often begin with development of a Creative Brief as an internal document describing the concept and embodying the Brand Promise, the creative vision, and key messaging points for the public-facing campaign. The Creative Brief serves as a foundation for future communication decisions, providing direction for the marketing and promotional actions.

A unified and creative Campaign Theme should be prepared around the concept of Webster’s character and the Slater story, reflecting the Brand Promise and intended for general market advertising, promotion, and communications. The Campaign Theme may be presented for use in a variety of media formats.

A Campaign Toolkit provides a working toolkit of graphic materials developed as part of the graphic identity for use and repurposing by the Town’s and stakeholder’s marketing staffs going forward. The toolkit generally includes a detailed primer on how and where materials are to be used, including a campaign summary, downloadable graphics, and print-ready materials with use guidelines and examples. The Campaign Toolkit provides the graphic basis for development of additional promotional formats.



Preserved tower from Slater’s East Village mill on East Main Street.

Community Preservation Act

Chapter 2 discusses the importance of the Community Preservation Act as a program Webster can adopt to fund historic preservation projects and initiatives enhancing quality of life in the Town. As discussed there, the CPA enables adopting communities to raise local dedicated funds for open space preservation, preservation of historic resources, development of affordable housing, and the acquisition and development of outdoor recreational facilities.

CPA funds are raised locally through imposition of a voter-authorized surcharge on local property tax bills of up to 3%. These local funds are matched by annual distributions to the community from the state's Community Preservation Trust Fund, a statewide fund held by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue. Webster property owners currently pay into the state Trust Fund without receiving any returns. Adoption of the CPA will not only provide Webster with access to this state funding, it also demonstrates local support for investment in quality of life initiatives as a basis for other potential grant opportunities.

The importance of the CPA is reaffirmed in this chapter because its adoption and use is an investment in projects that implement creative, forward thinking planning and economic development strategies. These projects are talking points for use in Webster's marketing and promotion.

RECOMMENDATION 4E: Use Webster's adoption of the Community Preservation Act and resulting projects as demonstration of the Town's commitment to quality of life initiatives. *Priority two recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen and Webster's economic development stakeholders.*

Suggested steps toward adoption of CPA by Webster are outlined in Chapter 3. Town staff, the Board of Selectmen, Historical Commission, Conservation Commission, Webster Housing Authority, and other local preservation, conservation, and recreation entities should support and collaborate in working toward adoption of the Act.



Adoption of the Community Preservation Act will provide funding for desired open space and recreational projects at Webster Lake and elsewhere in Webster.

Context Sensitive Design

While this Historic Preservation Plan emphasizes community character and the preservation of historic buildings, it recognizes that Webster's ongoing economic revitalization will also include new construction and change. When changes occur within a historically significant area, such changes should be designed in a manner that is respectful of the existing historic context, which is known as context sensitive design.

New construction that is well designed and of high quality can make interesting and meaningful contributions to a historically significant area by adding creative visual elements that respond to and reinforce established patterns and context. As communities and lifestyles change, buildings and neighborhoods often need to adapt and evolve to accommodate new situations and needs. Buildings are routinely adapted in response to changes in contemporary living and how buildings and properties are used.

Desired building changes often include new everyday entrances related to driveways where residents park; larger, modernized kitchens; new informal dining areas and family rooms; larger and increased numbers of bathrooms; and outdoor decks and terraces. Some older historic buildings were modest and very small when originally constructed—part of their inherent charm—but have been expanded with additions over time, adding needed interior living space.

Desired neighborhood and community changes often include new commercial uses providing needed services to residents or mixed uses intended to economically revitalize an area. Webster's Master Plan, for instance, calls for new mixed-use infill projects that simultaneously provide new housing types along with retail uses serving surrounding residents. New uses may be accommodated in historic buildings and historic neighborhoods in ways that allow the building or neighborhood to evolve while still preserving their historic character.

Chapter 1 of this Historic Preservation Plan includes a discussion of historic preservation principles that recognize context sensitive design and the incorporation of needed change. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Buildings, also discussed in Chapter 1, addresses needed change as well.

New buildings are sometimes constructed in historic neighborhoods, filling spaces where buildings have been lost for various reasons and increasing density where space allows. Webster's mill districts and some of Webster's historic neighborhoods have significant opportunity for new buildings to be added where vacant lots are currently present. Such new construction can help strengthen the historic neighborhood by attracting investment, bringing in new owners, and filling unnatural gaps in the neighborhood fabric where they exist. The construction of new buildings will continue to occur in historic neighborhoods throughout Webster. Context sensitive design is helpful in facilitating appropriate design and implementation.

RECOMMENDATION 4F: Encourage the use of context sensitive design that helps new construction to relate positively to its historic surroundings.

Ongoing recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and Webster's economic development stakeholders.

The challenge in historic preservation is to accommodate desired change in a way that reinforces rather than diminishes historic neighborhood character, whether addressing an addition to an existing building or a completely new building. New buildings should be designed in a manner that is compatible and sympathetic to the character of the historic neighborhood, ensuring that the character and integrity of surrounding historic resources are preserved. New buildings should be consistent with the site layout, orientation, scale, form, materials, features, and detailing established by surrounding structures. The design of new additions to existing historic buildings should relate to the character and appearance of the specific existing building to which it is attached.

Inappropriate additions and changes can diminish the integrity of a historic building or neighborhood. Carefully designed additions and changes that are sensitive to historic character can enhance neighborhood character as well as new uses.



These new buildings use traditional forms in a contemporary manner to help fit within their surrounding historic contexts, a new retail building in a historic commercial area at left and new multi-family housing in a historic neighborhood at right.

The character of a historic neighborhood relies upon the visual continuity and interplay established by the presence of similarly designed and harmonious buildings. Yet, individuality is important as well. Webster's historic neighborhoods are comprised of a number of different residential building types designed during different periods for different owners. Together, both the continuity and individuality of historic buildings combine to create neighborhoods of distinctive character.

New buildings that are added to a historic neighborhood should express their individuality while relating to their context. They should speak of the time in which they are built in a contemporary way that is respectful of their historic surroundings. They should not seek to replicate historic buildings or styles,

though they may choose to reference historic styles in their design. While contemporary to their time and place, new buildings constructed in Webster's historic areas should fit in and contribute positively to the overall character of the neighborhood.

Webster can incorporate context sensitive design into its requirements for new construction in a variety of ways. Local Historic District designation and Neighborhood Conservation District designation, discussed in Chapter 3, are preferred for historically significant neighborhoods. Webster's Planning Board has the authority to review the design of proposed new projects as outlined in the Zoning Bylaw (Sections 650-55 & 57) and should use that authority to promote context sensitive design. Planning Board negotiations during the land development process can be important, especially when concessions and approvals such as Special Permits are needed. Webster should make it clear that context sensitive design is highly desirable in its land development standards. Design guidelines for new construction would help inform the design of proposed new buildings within Webster's historic neighborhoods.

Webster can encourage context sensitive design through the land development review process.



Though contemporary in design, Webster's Gladys E. Kelly Public Library contributes positively to the character of the historic Municipal Buildings National Register Historic District through the high quality of its design.



Similarly, this contemporary apartment building was constructed within a historic mill district, relating to its context while being thoroughly contemporary in design.

DOWNTOWN WEBSTER

Webster's historic downtown commercial area developed over the late 19th and early 20th centuries, beginning as Depot Village with the opening of the Norwich and Worcester Railroad along the French River in 1840 and growing into a mature regional commercial center by the 1870s and 1880s. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the early 1980s, buildings within the Downtown core include two- and three-story brick commercial buildings constructed between 1875 and 1925.

Following the closing of mills in Webster by the mid-20th century, the historic Downtown fell into decline with loss of retail and other businesses. Several of Downtown's historic buildings have been demolished over the years, leaving gaps in the streetscape. Nonetheless, the overall historic integrity of the Downtown streetscape remains intact.

Continuing Revitalization

Beginning about 2005, the Town of Webster began focusing its economic development strategies toward the revitalization of Downtown, undertaking a number of significant improvement projects over the years that have transformed the physical landscape and laid the groundwork for renewal. An initial commercial property improvement program sought to fund façade and signage improvements. Planning documents from 1989 to the present summarized in Appendix D of this plan trace Webster's continued focus on Downtown revitalization.

The demographics of Webster's Census Designated Place (CDP) and 2010 designation of Downtown's deteriorated conditions as blighted under state and federal criteria allowed the area to be eligible for access to federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding which has been instrumental in Downtown's physical revitalization. Downtown's blight designation was extended in a study completed in 2021 and currently under review by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Urban Development, which will allow continued access to CDBG funding for another ten years.



Webster's Downtown Riverwalk and French River Park implemented in phases since 2010.



Behind-building parking and French River Park, part of Downtown’s revitalization.

Phased implementation of the Webster Riverwalk and French River Park began in 2010, the same year that rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the Sitkowski School next to Town Hall and adjacent to Downtown was undertaken. Phased improvements have included the construction of parking behind the historic commercial buildings, the reworking of pedestrian and vehicular circulation, and significant streetscape improvements along Main Street, including replacement of water and sewer lines, roads, curbs, sidewalks, and new lighting. Construction of the Gladys E. Kelly Public Library adjacent to Town Hall and Downtown was completed in 2018. The fourth and final phase of the Riverwalk improvements are scheduled for construction in the fall of 2024.

These improvements have transformed Downtown Webster. Adaptive reuse and new construction by MAPFRE Insurance, Webster’s largest employer, for offices Downtown have contributed significantly to revitalization. While the Covid epidemic placed a pause on momentum, Downtown Webster is close to realizing its goal of transformation into an active regional service center. The Town is currently meeting with commercial property owners Downtown to plan additional steps to be taken. This Historic Preservation Plan commends the Town for the significant revitalization work it has completed and urges them to continue.

RECOMMENDATION 4G: Continue to focus on the phased revitalization of Downtown Webster. *Ongoing recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen and Webster’s economic development stakeholders.*

Downtown Webster’s character and appeal is based on the character of its historic building stock, which is widely recognized and accepted in the Town’s planning documents and initiatives. National Register designation allows property owners to make use of **federal and state rehabilitation tax credits**, which should be considered if property owners plan to undertake substantial rehabilitation of their buildings.

Among the issues property owners face is the vacancy of upper floor levels, which is exacerbated by the lack of elevators. While use of federal rehabilitation tax credits generally involves a substantial project, use of Massachusetts state rehabilitation tax credits is friendly to smaller projects and should be considered

by property owners for needed rehabilitation projects, such as installation of elevators.

An overview of federal and state tax credit programs is provided in Appendix B of this preservation plan. The use of federal and state rehabilitation tax credits requires adherence to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, a set of best practices for historic preservation discussed in Chapter 1.

RECOMMENDATION 4H: Consider the use of federal and state rehabilitation tax credits in the rehabilitation and improvements to historic Downtown commercial buildings. *Priority two recommendation to be implemented by Downtown commercial property owners with support from the Town.*



Downtown Webster with streetscape improvements and other significant enhancements.

Though designated as a National Register Historic District, no local regulatory controls are in place to ensure that historic buildings are preserved and appropriately treated. National Register designation is a mostly honorary recognition and places no obligations upon property owners.

Though not currently perceived to be under threat, it would be in the interest of the Town's investment in Downtown as well as in the interest of property owners to have Downtown Webster designated as a Local Historic District in order to guide future changes to historic buildings, including façade changes, such that the historic character of buildings is preserved and enhanced. The background and use of Local Historic Districts is discussed in Chapter 3.

RECOMMENDATION 4I: Consider establishing Downtown Webster as a Local Historic District to guide future rehabilitation and change. *Priority two recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen, Historical Commission, and Webster's economic development stakeholders.*

Business Improvement District

A Business Improvement District (BID) Feasibility Study was prepared for the Town of Webster by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) in 2023 to explore the applicability of the BID model to Downtown Webster. The study provided a snapshot of what a BID could look like in the community and offered alternative models for Downtown revitalization for the Town to consider.

BIDs are special assessment districts in which property owners vote to initiate, manage, and finance supplemental services or enhancements above and beyond those municipal services already provided. BIDs use funds raised from assessments on participating property owners to provide a range of services to the district, such as economic development, maintenance and beautification, marketing and events, landscape and streetscape enhancements, and security.

BIDs are nonprofit entities managed by a Board of Directors comprised of property owners or their representatives. The local municipality collects the established property assessments on behalf of the BID and disburses the funds to the BID's management entity.

Webster's BID study analyzed the feasibility of two potential BID districts, the first limited to Webster's downtown core (Main Street and South Main Street) and the second extending the entire length of Main, South Main, and East Main Streets from the French River to the I-395 interchange.

Webster should implement a BID as a marketing and enhancement strategy to provide funding for services needed to function as a successful Downtown center. Consider coordinating the BID as a joint initiative with Dudley in its implementation of the Dudley Gateway Plan.

RECOMMENDATION 4J: Implement a Business Improvement District (BID) as envisioned in the 2023 study prepared for Webster. *Priority two recommendation to be implemented by Downtown property owners in coordination with the Town.*

As analyzed, the first district option above would raise \$162,154 a year based on an assessment fee of .0035 of assessed value per property, which would be enough to cover proposed program costs. The second district option would raise \$318,868 using an assessment fee of .002 of assessed value, which would be enough to cover proposed program costs.

Main Street Manager

Closely associated with the potential for a Business Improvement District (BID) is the importance of implementing a Main Street program for Downtown Webster. Main Street programs are proven techniques for the revitalization of historic downtown centers. With its infrastructure improvements and other enhancements, Webster has already adopted portions of the Main Street four-point approach. Lacking is the ongoing staff work a Main Street Manager would provide in proactively attracting high quality restaurants, services, and stores; organizing events; and marketing.

The National Main Street Program was created in 1977 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation through the introduction of three pilot projects in communities in Illinois, Indiana, and South Dakota. Based on the success of these pilot projects, follow-up Main Street programs were established in six states in 1980. Statewide and regional Main Street programs are managed through accredited “Coordinating Programs” that work with local communities across the state or region.

Since 1980, the National Trust’s Main Street Program has expanded to include many local communities and coordinating programs. As of 2020, there were 860 nationally accredited local Main Street programs and 44 state or regional coordinating programs. These designated programs follow best practices in Main Street revitalization, including support of a full-time Main Street Manager to implement the program locally.

In 2014, the National Trust’s program was spun off as an independent non-profit subsidiary called the National Main Street Center, Inc. Today it does business as Main Street America.

Massachusetts does not have a state Main Street program, but many successful Massachusetts communities use the Main Street approach, some as official accredited members and others unofficially by simply adopting the approach.



The Main Street approach is a proven means of revitalizing historic downtown centers. Webster has begun implementing the approach through its Downtown revitalization initiatives.

The Main Street approach is implemented through work in four broad areas, known as the Four Points:

- **Economic Vitality** focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drives local economies.

Main Street’s focus on creative economic restructuring involves (a) analyzing current market forces to develop a long-term strategic approach customized to the individual community; (b) strengthening

the competitiveness of existing merchants and service businesses, recruiting new businesses, and diversifying the economic base; (c) creatively converting unused space for new uses; and (d) seeking appropriate solutions for historic commercial buildings that ensure their continued occupancy, maintenance, and preservation.

- **Design** supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the downtown center apart. Most importantly, design focuses on preserving and enhancing the historic character of the downtown center.

In the early stages of a Main Street program, achieving high visibility before-and-after rehabilitations of historic storefronts is a common activity and "best practice." This work often includes implementation of grant-supported facade improvement programs that helps to build momentum for downtown revitalization. This design element also includes keeping the downtown area clean; implementing public improvements; and encouraging creativity in storefront and directional signage, street furniture, lighting, and public art.

- **Promotion** positions the downtown area as the center of the community and a hub of economic activity while creating a positive image that showcases the community's distinctive character. Many participating communities establish Main Street organizations focusing on this element. Individual businesses' marketing activities are supplemented with collective promotional activities, including marketing and events.
- **Organization** involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the downtown center. Business and property owners associated with the historic downtown and other supporters are encouraged to organize and hire at least one full-time staff person to serve as Main Street Manager. Some level of public funding is usually a part of the organization's financial sources.

Main Street programs focus on quality and authenticity—they make the downtown come alive. Main Street initiatives emphasize collaboration by bringing partners together in mutual support. They emphasize finding the fit for the individual community, balancing the needs of residents and visitors to ensure that programs and services benefit everyone. It is important to understand and plan for the specific kind and amount of visitation that the individual community can handle.

RECOMMENDATION 4K: Implement a full Main Street program in Downtown Webster with a Main Street Manager coordinating programs. *Priority one recommendation to be implemented by Downtown businesses and property owners in coordination with the Town.*

Webster is in a strong position for implementation of a Main Street program to help bring its Downtown revitalization initiative to fruition. In addition to its focus as a regional and community center, Downtown Webster has a built-in

target market at Webster Lake, with lakeside visitors and residents looking for somewhere interesting to go.

A Main Street Manager is needed to coordinate the effort, proactively recruit businesses and services Downtown, organize events, and undertake promotion. Webster's small economic development staff does not have the capacity to perform these needed services. The Main Street initiative could be a shared program with Dudley in implementation of the Dudley Gateway Plan, and it could be funded through the BID as discussed in the previous section.



Restaurants are probably the most important business type to recruit for Downtown.



Example of wayside signage design types prepared for a community in Pennsylvania.

Wayfinding

Webster is in need of a wayfinding system to complement its streetscape improvements and help guide visitors to key locations throughout the town. Most important for Downtown revitalization is to direct visitors from the I-395 interchange to the Downtown center. Webster Lake locations will benefit from wayfinding as well, as will primary attractions such as the Samuel Slater Experience.

Webster's wayfinding system should be developed in concert with its branding and graphic identity, discussed earlier in this chapter. It should reflect the Slater

brand and use colors, fonts, logos, and other design elements adopted as part of the graphic identity. The wayfinding system should also be coordinated with Dudley in their implementation of the Dudley Gateway Plan.

RECOMMENDATION 4L: Design and implement a wayfinding system for Webster reflecting the Town’s proposed Slater brand and graphic identity.

Priority two recommendation to be implemented by the Town in coordination with businesses, attractions, and property owners.

THE FRENCH RIVER MILL DISTRICT

Historic mill towns across Massachusetts and New England have undertaken the adaptive reuse of their mill districts over the past four decades, revitalizing their historic communities. Such revitalization was spurred by enactment of the federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program enacted in the 1970s and which gained widespread use in the 1980s. Recognizing the success of the federal program in the revitalization of historic communities, Massachusetts enacted a state level Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit program of its own in 2004 supplementing and reinforcing the federal program. The federal and state programs are outlined in Appendix B of this Historic Preservation Plan.

Mentioned regarding Downtown revitalization in the previous section of this chapter, the federal and state tax credit programs can be instrumental in the revitalization of Webster’s French River Mill Districts focusing on historic North Village and South Village. Webster’s East Village mill area, adjacent to the I-395 interchange, was demolished and redeveloped as a commercial shopping area after its mills closed in 2009.

Webster has been a decade or two behind other communities in addressing revitalization of its mill districts, choosing to focus its limited resources first on Downtown. With Webster’s Downtown area in progress, it is important to turn to the next opportunity in revitalization of its historic mill districts, which will reenforce overall Downtown and community revitalization by attracting new renters and drawing attention and investment to adjacent historic mill neighborhoods. Timing is good — there are many good examples to follow.



The historic mill district in North Andover, near Lawrence, was rehabilitated in 2010.

Owner/Developer Support and Recruitment

Most important is for the Town of Webster to actively support private sector developers interested in and capable of undertaking mill rehabilitation projects. There are two such current initiatives within the French River Mill District, the Stevens Mill in Dudley and the Perry Yarn Mill in North Village. Webster has provided support for the Stevens Linen Works project, as outlined below, but is not actively involved. Webster has not yet been involved with the proposed Perry Yarn Mill project.

RECOMMENDATION 4M: Actively engage with and support private sector developers interested in and capable of undertaking mill rehabilitation revitalization projects. *Priority one recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and economic development staff.*

The historic **Stevens Linen Works** is located in Dudley off of Main Street immediately west of the French River and Downtown Webster. Its prominent granite main building was constructed about 1862 and is well suited for rehabilitation. The Stevens Linen Works was designated as a National Register Historic District in 2010, including the large main building, additions, and other related buildings in the vicinity. National Register designation qualifies the property for use of federal and state rehabilitation tax credits, as mentioned above.

Known locally as the Stevens Mill, rehabilitation planning began in 2020 when the almost 7-acre mill property was purchased by a Columbia, SC based development company. Planning for the project proceeded, including approvals by the National Park Service and Massachusetts Historical Commission for use of federal and state tax credits. An announcement in February 2023 stated that development was set to begin, but construction has not yet started. The rehabilitation will produce 156 rental apartments and cost \$53 million.

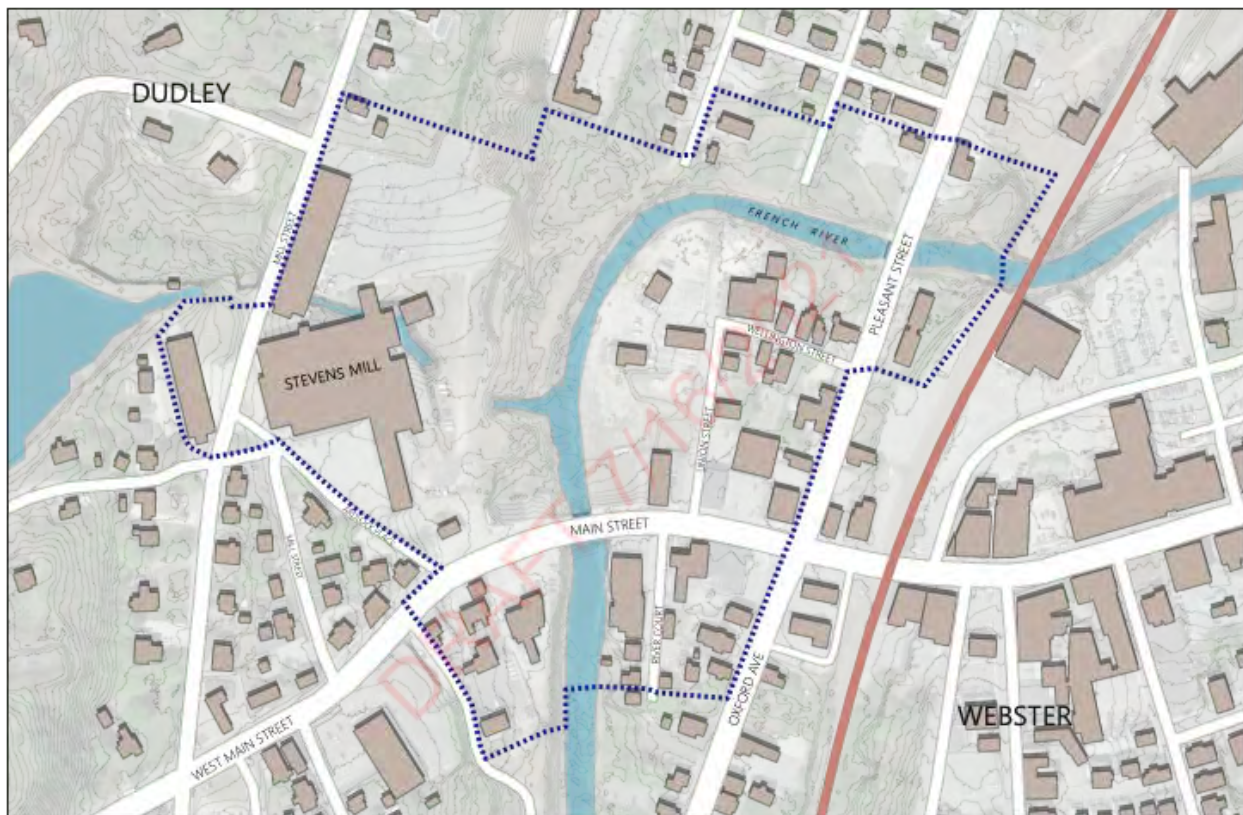
In support of rehabilitation of the Stevens Mill and other potential projects, the Towns of Dudley and Webster established an Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing District (UCH-TIF) along the French River in 2021, under approval of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, now known as the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a method for financing new development projects using anticipated taxes on future gains in real estate values to pay for the necessary public improvements such as streets, sidewalks, sewer and water, and similar improvements that make private sector development projects possible. The towns borrow the needed funds for the project by issuing bonds, which are then paid back to the bond holders using a portion of the higher taxes generated by the project. TIFs are authorized by state law and begin with designation of a geographic area as a TIF district.

The French River UCH-TIF District contains sixty-one properties, including residences, offices, restaurants, and retail operations. Per the Zoning Bylaws of both towns, commercial and multi-family residential development is allowed on all of these properties either as-of-right or via special permit. Rehabilitation and

adaptive reuse of the Stevens Mill and associated improvements within the French River UCH-TIF District are a major rehabilitation effort significant to both towns. Their implementation should continue to be actively supported. The project will:

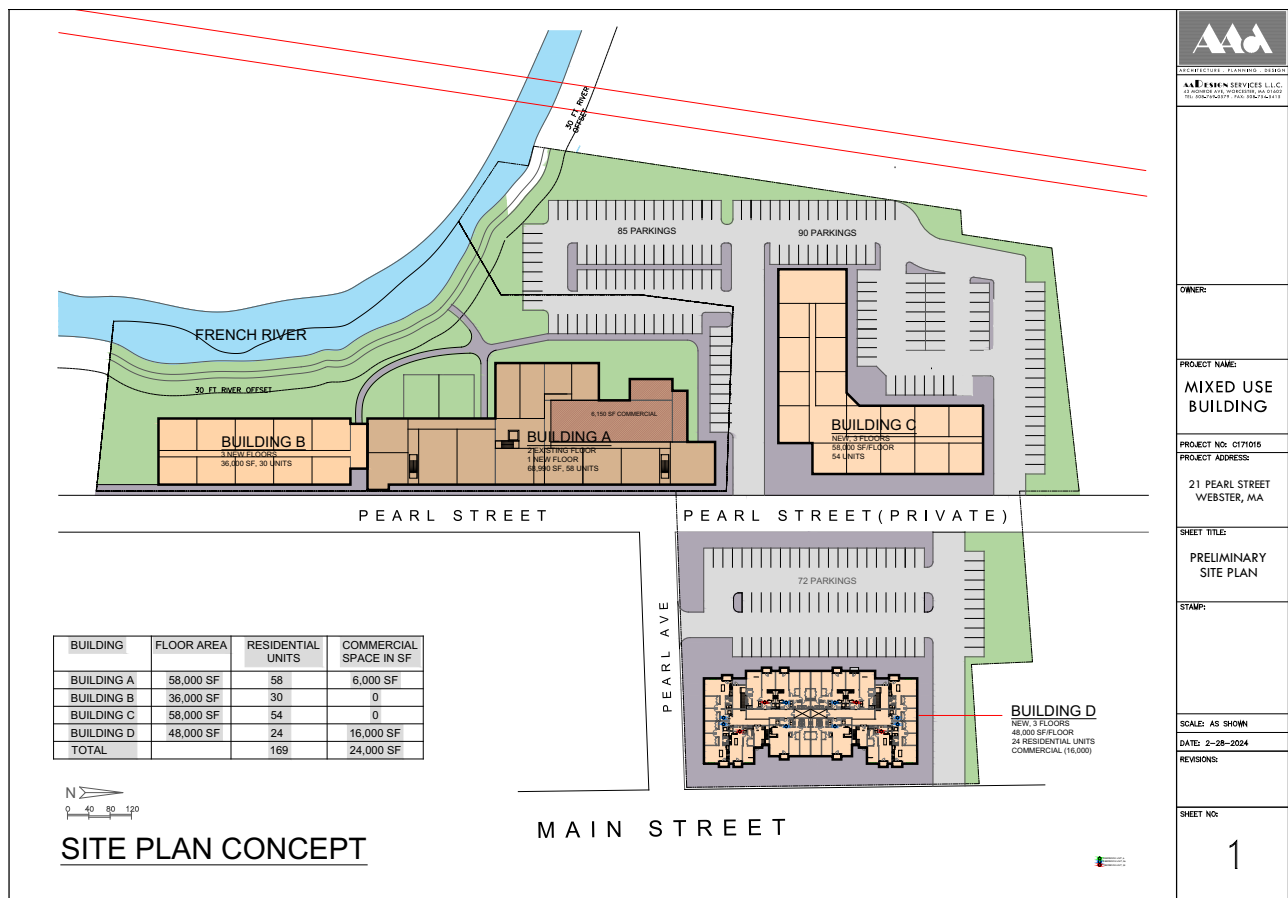
- Provide attractive market rate multi-family housing,
- Revitalize existing businesses along the Webster-Dudley Main Street corridor,
- Encourage additional mixed-use development of other French River Mill District industrial sites,
- Promote rehabilitation of adjacent historic mill neighborhoods,
- Encourage infill development to fill in vacant parcels, and
- Restore access to the French River and implement a portion of the French River Trail.



The Webster-Dudley French River UCH-TIF District



Rendering of the proposed rehabilitated Stevens Mill.



**Conceptual plan for rehabilitation of the Perry Yarn Mill with proposed new adjacent apartment buildings.
(Plan courtesy of 21 Pearl Street LLC)**

A second private sector project within the mill district currently in the planning stages is the rehabilitation of the historic Perry Yarn Mill at 21 Pearl Street, the southern end of Webster's North Village. Being undertaken by a group of investors based in the Worcester area, the project will include rehabilitation of the historic mill building constructed in 1901 into apartments and three new adjacent apartment buildings on vacant land where former mill buildings were demolished.

Online records indicate that the Perry Yarn Mill was submitted to the National Park Service for Part 1 review for listing on the National Register in October 2023, which would enable use of state and federal rehabilitation tax credits. Part 2 preparation of architectural plans for approval by the National Park Service as required for the tax credit process is ongoing along with securing of financing.

Both the Stevens Mill and Perry Yarn Mill projects should be actively supported by the Town of Webster. It does not appear that Webster's Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, or economic development staff or stakeholders have yet reached out to the developers of the Perry Yarn Mill.



The Perry Yarn Mill on Pearl Street in Webster's North Village.

Master Plan

Additional planning is necessary for the revitalization of Webster's French River Mill District. An assessment should be undertaken of the potential for the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of surviving mill buildings in North Village and South Village; assessment should be undertaken of the potential for new buildings along the lines of those proposed for the Perry Yarn Mill; and planning for new public infrastructure necessary to support redevelopment should be undertaken, including planning for and implementation of extension of the Riverwalk from Downtown through North Village.

RECOMMENDATION 4N: Prepare a master plan for redevelopment of the French River Mill District including the historic industrial areas of South Village and North Village. *Priority one recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and economic development staff.*

The first step in undertaking the redevelopment of the French River Mill District is preparation of a master plan that assesses the potential for redevelopment and outlines the design concept. Such planning could be undertaken by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission with grant support from the state or other sources. (See potential funding sources listed by CMRPC in the Dudley Gateway Plan.)

The proposed master plan should document existing conditions in an engineering base survey plan. Identified historic site features documented in the survey plan, such as foundations, raceways, ruins, and other features, should be preserved and incorporated into the master plan's conceptual design. Existing buildings should be preserved for rehabilitation and adaptive reuse. Webster's North Village and South Village mills were reviewed in detail in the Town's 2000 historic resource inventory, which will provide background information for the sites and their remnant features.

Redevelopment of the French River Mill District is a long-term project that will be undertaken in phases. Different surviving buildings will have different potential reuses. The master plan is the essential first step in planning and assessment of development potential and phasing priorities. Once that potential is determined, the Town can discuss potential implementation projects with private sector developers.

An additional step that could be undertaken during or immediately following the master planning process is the proactive survey and pursuit of National Register district nomination of surviving mill buildings, which would eliminate a step in their future redevelopment using federal and state tax credits. CPA and MHC grant funds may be used for such survey and nomination work.

The success of the Stevens Mill and Perry Yarn Mill projects will provide proof of concept and momentum. The Webster-Dudley French River UCH-TIF District may provide a model for public improvements associated with long-term development. Webster's implementation of its Downtown revitalization projects demonstrates the Town's capabilities in undertaking such a long-term vision.



Surviving historic buildings and site features in Webster's French River Mill District — South Village buildings at top, North Village buildings in the middle, and South Village dam, raceway, and bridge at bottom.

French River Trail

Enhancement of the French River has been a focus of local and regional planning efforts for many years, dating back to the 1990s. A series of planning studies have laid the groundwork for transformation of the French River from an industrial resource into an open space and recreational resource:

- **French River Greenway Plan** prepared in 1990 by a citizens advisory group provided a resources inventory of natural and cultural resources, envisioned protection of the riverine ecosystem with a riverwalk and park system, and outlined suggestions for making the river a community resource.
- **The French-Quinebaug Watershed Plan** prepared in 1999 by the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, provided comprehensive background about the watershed, including its landscape character, hydrology, biodiversity, and settlement patterns, and it provided a preliminary vision for future growth scenarios.
- **French River Revitalization Concepts** prepared in 2006 by French River Connection with the Green Valley Institute and landscape architecture students from the University of Connecticut laid out conceptual plans for trail systems along the French River in Webster, Dudley, and Oxford. The 2006 plan presented conceptual plans for open space, trails, and river access for Collins Cove, the North Village, Downtown Webster, Stevens and Ethan Allen Mills (Dudley), and Perryville Step Dam.
- **Open Space and Recreation Plans** for Webster, Dudley, and Oxford cited the French River Greenway as a priority open space and recreational project.

To date, however, only the Riverwalk and French River Park in Downtown Webster have physically implemented the vision. The proposed Stevens Mill rehabilitation project, discussed above and on the verge of being implemented, is expected to improve the French River shoreline and install its portion of the trail on the Dudley side of the river. The Perry Yarn Mill project, also discussed above, is poised to construct its portion of the trail as it is developed.

Webster should undertake planning for the phased design and construction of the trail, extending the Riverwalk from Downtown Webster northward through North Village. While such planning could be undertaken as part of the master plan for the French River Mill District discussed above, it is suggested that separate targeted planning be undertaken in parallel with the master planning so that agreements with property owners can be completed, funding can be sought, and phased construction can begin. Conversations with the developers of the Perry Yarn Mill should begin as soon as possible.

RECOMMENDATION 40: Take the next steps in planning and implementation for extension of the Riverwalk from Downtown Webster through North Village. *Priority one recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and economic development staff.*



Current end of the Riverwalk in Downtown's French River Park (left). At the southern end of North Village, below the Perry Yarn Mill, the Riverwalk will need to follow a portion of Pearl Street to avoid the backyards of homes bordering the river.



French River flowing adjacent to South Village.



Dammed mill pond adjacent to the North Village mill.

Concept plan for the trail at the Stevens Mill along the Dudley side of the river. (Dudley Gateway Plan)

EAST & SOUTH MAIN STREETS

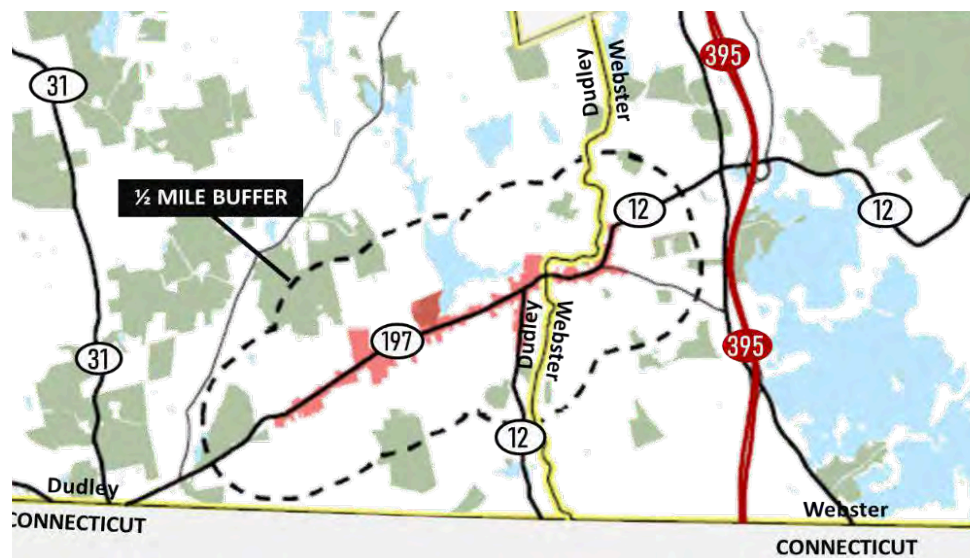
Downtown Webster connects to the I-395 interchange through South Main Street and East Main Street which over the past two decades have been developing as a suburban-style commercial corridor. Several recent studies have focused on the importance of this corridor to Webster's economic development.

In 2020, the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) completed a Corridor Study of the shared commercial district between the towns of Webster and Dudley through a grant provided by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA).

The 2020 **Webster-Dudley Corridor Study** analyzed Main Street through Webster and Dudley looking at the character of the streetscape and adjacent building uses in order to make recommendations for their improvement. It advocated for a smart growth approach to development emphasizing a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and community engagement. Recommendations included development of the Stevens Mill, mixed use adaptive reuse Downtown, a Main Street approach to marketing and development as discussed above in this plan, and close coordination between Webster and Dudley.

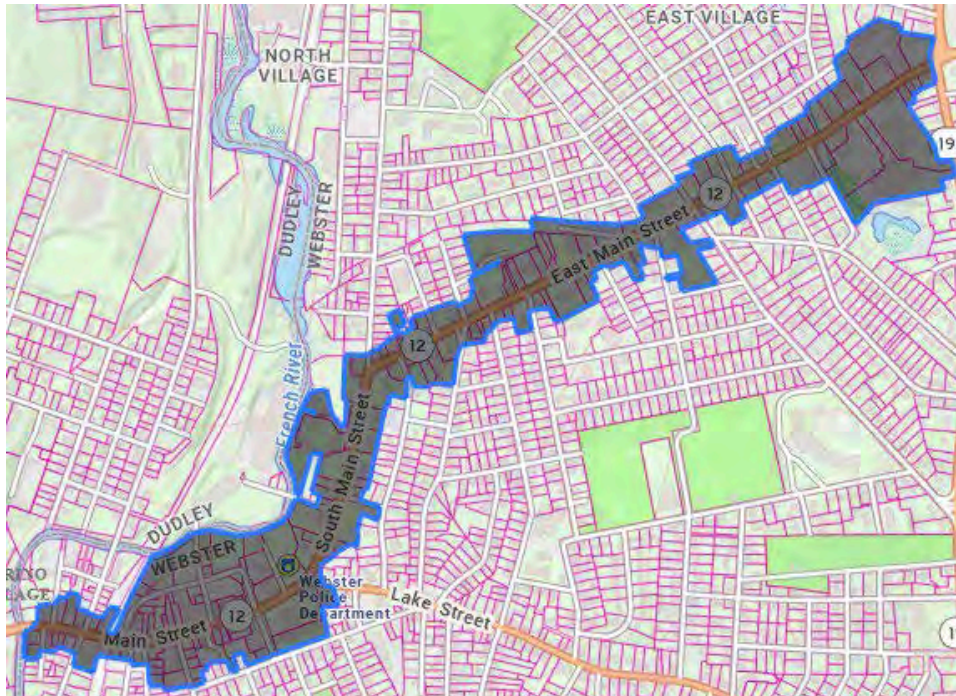
The character of the portion of Main Street in the vicinity of the I-395 interchange is important to the economic development and marketing of the Webster-Dudley corridor as a whole.

This Historic Preservation Plan embraces the recommendations of the 2020 Corridor Study and supports their implementation. The 2020 Corridor Study did not, however, extend all the way to the I-395 interchange or emphasize the importance of the I-395 link. The importance of conceptualizing and marketing the corridor as a whole is of particular importance and is supported by branding, Main Street, and other revitalization recommendations in this plan. It is important, however, that the corridor extend all the way to the I-395 interchange and that planning for the character of the corridor near the interchange be included.



Study area for the Webster-Dudley Corridor Study shown in black dashed lines.

The 2023 **Town of Webster Business Improvement District (BID) Feasibility Study** was prepared by the CMRPC to explore the applicability of the BID model to downtown Webster and included two options, a BID solely for Downtown Webster and a BID extending all the way to the I-395 interchange.



Option for a BID encompassing the entirety of Main, South Main, and East Main Streets

The previous section of this chapter on Downtown Webster encourages adoption of a BID, whether solely for Downtown or extending all the way to the I-395 interchange. Regardless, planning for the entire corridor is important, including wayfinding, as discussed above.

In planning for the Main Street corridor connecting Downtown with the I-395 interchange, its physical character and appearance should be taken into account, defining, enhancing, and strengthening its desired character over time as redevelopment occurs. The character of the Main Street corridor helps establish the character of Downtown to visitors. It should be of high quality.

Two issues important to the character of Main Street are of concern: (1) the loss of historic buildings and character, and (2) the design quality of new construction.

Historic Building Preservation & Reuse

Webster's Main Street corridor connects Downtown Webster with South Village and East Village. All three areas are of historical significance and contribute to the Town's historic character, which is central to Webster's identity and brand. Preservation and enhancement of Webster's historic character is a primary economic development strategy, as outlined throughout this preservation plan as well as in other of the Town's planning documents.

The preservation and enhancement of Downtown Webster is discussed earlier in this chapter. As also mentioned, East Village adjacent to the I-395 interchange

has been redeveloped into a services and shopping area since its mill closed in 2009. South Village retains historic integrity and should be preserved and enhanced as discussed in this plan.

As Downtown and East Village have developed over the past two decades, the Main Street corridor has transformed from a largely residential but lightly developed corridor into an emerging suburban commercial corridor. In this process, a significant number of historic buildings have been lost, altering the character of the area.

Further loss of historic buildings along the Main Street corridor should be prevented.

Further loss of historic buildings along the Main Street corridor should be prevented. Remaining historic buildings should be preserved and, where appropriate, adaptively reused. Historic buildings should be incorporated into proposed new commercial development.

This recommendation can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Some municipalities, such as Worcester, establish an **Urban Design District** in which any proposed development requiring municipal support or funding of any kind must comply with the district's design guidelines. It could also be accomplished through designation of a **Local Historic District**, as discussed in Chapter 3.

It can also be accomplished informally through **zoning, planning, and development policies** simply stating expectations that new development along the corridor should preserve and appropriately treat remaining historic buildings. In such cases, **Planning Board negotiation** as possible through Special Permit and other needed approvals is a key tool in implementation of the policy. The Planning Board should prepare a **master plan for the Main Street corridor** demonstrating how the corridor could best be developed over time including the preservation and adaptive reuse of remaining historic buildings.

RECOMMENDATION 4P: Enact policies and planning initiatives to prevent the further loss of historic buildings along the Main Street corridor. *Priority two recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and economic development staff.*



These two historic buildings in East Village at the intersection of East Main Street and Thompson Road are already slated for demolition for construction of a new gas station. While the gas station is important in servicing the I-395 interchange, the loss of these buildings is unfortunate. The building at left is reported to have been a guest house for visitors to the Slater mill.



Examples of historic buildings along East Main Street that should be preserved but may be adaptively reused. Historic buildings should be incorporated into proposed new commercial development.

Design Standards

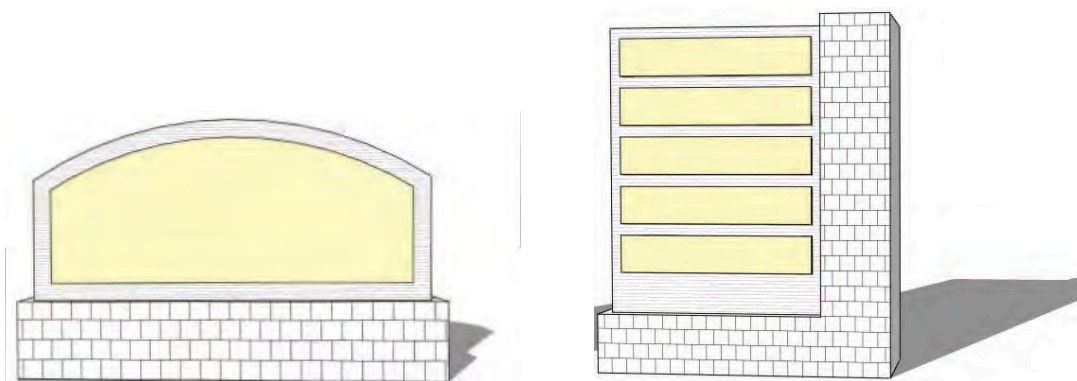
As South and East Main Streets develop into a suburban style commercial corridor, their character is impacted by the lack of high-quality design standards in Webster's zoning bylaw and subdivision and land development regulations. The Main Street corridor is devolving into an ordinary suburban sprawl roadway rather than a corridor of distinctive commercial character that would strengthen Webster's identity, enhance the entry into Downtown, and promote high-quality development.

Webster should engage the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) in upgrading its commercial development **design standards**. Of particular importance are signage standards that diminish visual clutter and landscape standards that include landscape islands and canopy trees. The possibility of placing overhead wires underground should be a long-term goal. The possible **master plan** for the Main Street corridor mentioned in the previous section could demonstrate how design standards might be implemented.

RECOMMENDATION 4Q: Establish upgraded design standards for new commercial development along South and East Main Streets. *Priority two recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and economic development staff.*



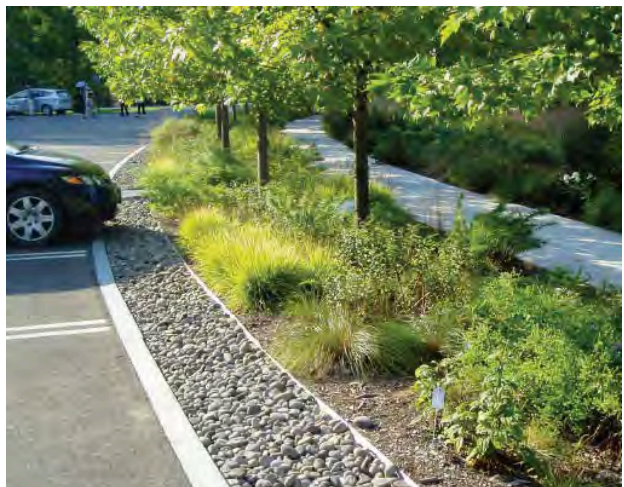
Webster's emerging suburban-style East Main Street corridor.



Creative sign standards can produce results that are effective yet appealing.



Signs can be smaller and still be effective if visual clutter is reduced.



Landscaping softens the hard, unfriendly appearance of paved roads and parking areas and can be designed to be ecologically sensitive. Street trees, when mature, create spatial scale and shade.

HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

The preservation and enhancement of Webster's historic neighborhoods is a key focus of this Historic Preservation Plan. Most historically significant are the North Village and South Village neighborhoods that were closely associated with the Slater mills located there. As discussed elsewhere, little remains of the East Village neighborhood due to redevelopment adjacent to the I-395 interchange. Nonetheless, the remnants of the East Village neighborhood should be preserved when possible.

Beyond and between the historic mill villages, Webster's historic neighborhoods continued to expand through the early 20th century, especially south and east of Main Street, South Main Street, and East Main Street.

Because of their integrity and importance, Chapter 3 of this plan, *Inventory, Recognition, and Treatment*, is largely devoted to Webster's historic residential neighborhoods. Recommendations in Chapter 3 include:

- **Updating historic property inventories for North, South, and East Villages** taking into account resources that have been demolished and resources that were not previously included;
- **Inventory of historic neighborhoods beyond North, South, and East Villages** that have not been inventoried previously so they may be recognized and appreciated;
- **Nomination of North and South Villages to the National Register of Historic Places** to raise public awareness and recognition;
- An ongoing program of **public outreach** to engage and support property owners in the appreciation and appropriate treatment of their historic properties;
- Preparation of **design guidelines** for the treatment of historic buildings for use by property owners;
- Designation of North and South Villages as **Local Historic Districts** to guide their preservation and appropriate treatment;
- Designation of other historic neighborhoods as **Neighborhood Conservation Districts** encouraging their preservation and appropriate treatment;
- Encouraging the establishment of **neighborhood associations** where there is local interest and energy; and
- Initiation of **rental landlord programs** to engage and communicate with landlords.

Phased implementation of these recommendations is encouraged as priorities, preferences, interests, and capacity allow.



Representative historic residential buildings within Webster's historic neighborhoods.

WEBSTER LAKE

Webster Lake is a distinct and important residential area within the Town and the region and has a unique history separate from Webster's mill story. Also discussed in Chapter 3, Webster Lake developed largely in the early 20th century as a recreational cottage community through subdivisions and speculation. Over the decades, Webster Lake has continued to develop and intensify, with additions and new construction, impacting its integrity as a historic area or district. This change will continue into the future, as property owners continue to add to existing residences and build new residences.

Webster Lake's residential neighborhoods have not been inventoried. Chapter 3 recommends that a history of the development of Webster Lake as a recreational destination and cottage community be prepared to document and better understand its evolution.

It is recommended that an overall history of Webster Lake be prepared from its pre-European use by Native Americans to its development as a recreational destination in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In undertaking this history, areas and resources that retain historic integrity can be identified and documented. The lake's history is important not only for documentation but can be used to encourage preservation of remaining cottages and to influence potential future change around the lake. The history will help build community identity and awareness and to highlight Webster Lake as a destination and economic driver.

Webster Lake Association is an important stakeholder within the Town and should be engaged in the recommended adoption of the Community Preservation Act, which is a high priority action for the short term. Lake residents are among the most active in Town governance and volunteerism and should be engaged in community development and preservation. They are also a **primary market** for revitalization of Downtown Webster as a regional attraction with restaurants, arts, retail, and services. Downtown Webster should market to its Webster Lake neighbors and clientele.

RECOMMENDATION 4R: Recognize the importance of Webster Lake residents and visitors as a market for services provided by a revitalized Downtown.

Ongoing recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen and economic development staff.



Webster Lake is a market for revitalization of Downtown.

ZONING AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Webster's zoning, subdivision, and land development regulations have an important role in promoting the preservation and appropriate treatment of historic resources as renovation and new development projects are taking place. In general, it should be the policy of the Town that historic resources should be identified during the site planning and design process and that these resources should be preserved, incorporated into new development projects, and appropriately treated.

While the Town cannot legally require the preservation and appropriate treatment of privately owned historic resources in new development projects except in areas where there are specific protections, such as Local Historic Districts, it can use its authorized powers to work with and negotiate with developers toward this end. If developers know that the preservation and appropriate treatment of historic resources is expected, many will do the right thing and incorporate the resources and treatments into their projects as a matter of course simply to ensure a smooth review and approval process. Where the Town has negotiating leverage, such as with the Special Permit process where conditions can be applied and projects can be denied, the Town's influence in promoting preservation and appropriate treatment can be considerable.

The appropriate treatment of historic buildings helps preserve and strengthen neighborhood character, which positively impacts the economy and local quality of life. Webster's ordinances and regulations should reference and make use of the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* and related guidelines in promoting the appropriate treatment of historic buildings in private sector projects. Architects and planners have decades of experience in applying the principles outlined in the Standards and achieving good preservation results while accommodating needed change.

RECOMMENDATION 4S: Incorporate preservation language into Webster's Zoning Bylaw and Rules and Regulations Covering the Subdivision of Land to encourage the preservation and appropriate treatment of historic buildings.

Priority three recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, and Zoning Board of Appeals.

Chapter 650, Zoning

Webster's Zoning Bylaws are listed on the Town's website as Division 3 of the Town's General Bylaws and Zoning Bylaws and includes a single chapter, Chapter 650, Zoning. First adopted in 1967 and periodically amended and updated. The following language changes are suggested within Chapter 650

Article I, General Provisions

Under Section 650-1, *Purpose and interpretation*, add statement: *To encourage the preservation and appropriate treatment of historic buildings and To preserve and enhance neighborhood character.*

Article VII, Site Plan Review

The Zoning Bylaw outlines requirements for site plan review by the Planning Board in Article VII. Proposed projects subject to review include all proposed commercial and industrial projects and proposed residential projects involving more than two residences or residential units. Construction of single family or two-family residences are not subject to review. Construction of parking lots with fewer than five parking spaces is not subject to review.

Submission requirements include general site boundary information, topography, wetlands, and natural features. No mention is made of existing built site features or the identification and description of historic features. The following is suggested:

- Under Section 650-55, Paragraph B, *Submission requirements*, add statement: *Locations of inventoried historic buildings within 100 feet of the perimeter of the development activity.*

The Planning Board may require the submission of exterior elevations of proposed buildings, schematic floor plans, proposed exterior materials and colors, and photographs of existing and adjacent buildings. The implication is that the Planning Board may undertake design review and consideration of existing and historic buildings as noted under Section 650-57, *Decision criteria*. This authority may be used to encourage **context sensitive design**, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The following is suggested to emphasize the importance of historic character:

- Under Section 650-57, *Decision criteria*, alter statement (9) to read: *Achieve greater compatibility with the surrounding area as to building design or scale, historic neighborhood character, or site design.*

Additionally, the Planning Board may require impact studies for traffic, environmental resources, and public infrastructure. The following is suggested to permit requirement of a Historic Resource Impact Study:

- Under Section 650-55, Paragraph C, *Submission requirements*, add statement: *Historic resources impacts: impacts on historic buildings and resources in the vicinity and on historic neighborhood character in general.*

Site plan review procedures (Section 650-56) include the distribution of proposed plans to a variety of Town boards and commissions, including the Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, and others. The Historical Commission is not mentioned; however, the Planning Board may provide plans to any relevant board, commission, and committee for review and comment. Plans should be provided to the Historical Commission when located in proximity to inventoried historic buildings or neighborhoods.

MHC notes that the Town of Lexington has specific regulations relating to historic resources and special permit review which might be useful in considering changes to Webster's Zoning Bylaw. They allow for incentives and relief from some requirements, such as setbacks and parking, when historic building rehabilitation is involved.

Rules and Regulation Covering the Subdivision of Land

Webster's Rules and Regulations Covering the Subdivision of Land were adopted in 1954 and have been revised through March 1992. The rules state that no subdivision or related construction may be undertaken without prior approval of a subdivision plan by Webster's Planning Board.

Copies of plans submitted for subdivision review are provided to the Planning Board, Town Clerk, Board of Health, Department of Public Works, and Conservation Commission, which is responsible for wetlands and stormwater compliance. Copies should also be provided to the Historical Commission for review and comment when proposed subdivisions are adjacent to or in the vicinity of historic resources.

The process for review of a proposed site plan involves two steps, (1) review of a **Preliminary Plan** showing the basic layout and concept, and once approved, (2) review of a final **Definitive Plan** showing details as required for construction. The final plan must be in accordance with the Design Standards for subdivision included in the Rules and Regulations as approved by the Planning Board. The following additions are recommended to include the protection of historic resources within a proposed subdivision:

- Under Section I. *Purpose and Authority*, paragraph A, *Purpose*, *The Power of the Planning Board shall be exercised with due regard for*, add statement: *Protecting, promoting, and enhancing the historic character of the Town.*
- Under Section 2. *General*, (A) *Definitions*, add: *HISTORIC RESOURCE: Building, structure, or landscape feature associated with a property identified in the Town's Historic Resource Inventory or as may otherwise be identified by the Historical Commission.* And: *HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CONTEXT: The immediate landscape area associated with and significant to a historic building resource.*
- Under Section 3. *Procedures*, (A) *Preliminary Plan*, (4) *Contents*, add a paragraph requiring identification of historic building and landscape features and resources on the property being developed.
- Under Section 3. *Procedures*, (B) *Definitive Plan*, (6) *Contents*, add a paragraph requiring identification of historic building and landscape features and resources on the property being developed.
- Under Section 3. *Procedures*, (B) *Definitive Plan*, add a section titled *Historical Commission Review. Where historic resources are present within or adjacent to the property being developed, the Historical Commission shall review the proposed subdivision and provide comments and recommendations to the Planning Board for their consideration. Preparation of a Historic Resource Impact Study by the applicant may be required.*
- Where significant historic resources are present, require the applicant to prepare a Historic Resource Impact Study that (1) identifies the historic resources, (2) outlines their historical development and

significance, (3) discusses the proposed treatment of the historic resources, and (4) if negatively impacted, requires and proposes mitigation measures for negotiation with the Planning Board.

As a basic requirement, Webster's current **Design Standards** for subdivisions require that applicants explore all methods and means to maintain as much of the natural topography, drainage, and vegetation as possible so that disruption of these natural features and characteristics is kept to an absolute minimum. All natural features, such as trees, wooded areas, water courses, scenic points and **historic spots**, shall be preserved as much as possible. Other than the brief mention of "historic spots" noted above, no mention is made of historic resources or neighborhood character. The following addition is recommended.

- Under Section VI. *Design Standards*, add a section titled *Protection of Historic Resources. It is the policy of the Town that historic building and landscape features and historic landscape contexts shall be preserved, incorporated into proposed new development, and appropriately treated in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.*

Scenic Roads

Beyond the historic mill villages and Webster Lake recreational development, much of the Town of Webster is tree covered and rural in character, and significant portions of the Town are conservation lands under the ownership of governmental or non-profit entities. Rural roads within these areas are not under threat nor do they appear to be associated with significant historic resources or landscapes, such as historic farms. They are, however, scenic in their relationship to the surrounding natural landscape.

Some protection of these scenic road corridors could be provided through enactment of a Scenic Road Bylaw as authorized by Chapter 40, Section 15C of the Massachusetts General Laws. Webster's Zoning Bylaw requires the identification of scenic roads in accordance with Chapter 40, but it does not appear that the Town has ever adopted the bylaw nor designated scenic roads within its boundaries.

A Scenic Road Bylaw allows a municipality to officially designate local roads as Scenic Roads. Once designated, any repair, maintenance, reconstruction, or paving work done shall not involve or include the cutting or removal of trees or the tearing down or destruction of stone walls without prior written consent of the Planning Board. Numbered routes and state highways are exempt unless the entire length of the route is contained within the municipality.

A Scenic Road Bylaw would provide a measure of recognition and consideration of the impacts to Webster's local scenic roads by development and other actions.

RECOMMENDATION 4T: Consider enactment of a Scenic Road Bylaw in Webster in accordance with MGL Chapter 40, Section 15C to provide review and protection for the scenic character of historic local roads. Priority three recommendation to be implemented by the Board of Selectmen and Planning Board.