

Lisbon Downtown Revitalization Plan



Lisbon Falls ~ Lisbon Village

Town of Lisbon, Maine

Plan Update 2014

Adopted September 2014

Acknowledgements

This update of the Lisbon Downtown Plan was developed from the 2010 Lisbon *Envision Downtown* and other downtown planning documents and materials.

Envision Downtown, Lisbon 2030
Walking Audit Reports (Lisbon Falls, Lisbon Village)
Route 196 Corridor Master Plan
Comprehensive Plan

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Photos courtesy of Amanda Bunker and Google Images.

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Introduction

Lisbon Comprehensive Plan Policies

- Maintain and upgrade village areas.
- Continue to develop Lisbon Center with a mixture of retail, service, public and residential uses.
- Maintain and improve pedestrian facilities in village areas.
- New development, redevelopment and signage in village areas shall be undertaken in way that present pleasing visual qualities.
- Maintain Lisbon Falls as a commercial/business and service center of Lisbon with the traditional residential mix.
- Maintain Lisbon Village as a retail, service and residential center.



Lisbon's Villages have served as the town's centers for civic, economic, and cultural activity since their establishment. However, the vitality of the villages has been something the community has struggled with for decades. Along with state and national trends of declining downtowns and loss of industry, Lisbon continues to bear the consequences of regional change, where Lewiston and Topsham's growth as major service centers has the effect of limiting economic opportunities for Lisbon.

This Downtown Revitalization Plan serves to update previous planning and visioning efforts, maintaining the content and recommendations that are still in progress, while adding and refining current content. In particular, this Plan incorporates recent planning efforts, such as the *Route 196 Corridor Master Plan* and other studies that contribute to the vision and direction for Lisbon's Villages. It is hoped that the community will continue to build on the recent public and private efforts (both program and physical improvements) to improve the vitality, quality, and resilience of Lisbon Falls and Lisbon Village.

PROJECT GOALS

Through the development of this plan, the Town will seek to:

- ❖ Review the strategies and actions from previous plans and downtown efforts – what's been done, what hasn't been done?
- ❖ Include a vision and strategies for Lisbon Village (previously not included in downtown planning).

“The unplanned town leads to strip-commercial sprawl, the proliferation of franchise businesses, too much commercially zoned land, disregard for the pedestrian, the migration of anchor businesses (like banks and professional offices) from the down-town, and a loss of connectivity between the down-town and the surrounding community. Unplanned corridors create a poor first impression, favor cars over people, and suck the vitality from the towns and communities they border.

On top of the loss of sense of place and degradation of local vernacular, some studies have found that "for every job a big box creates, one and a half local jobs are lost and that many of the jobs pay less and offer fewer benefits" (Arendt, 2010)."

Envision Downtown, Lisbon 2030

- ❖ Create a comprehensive downtown plan for both villages, which will provide the Town with a “road map” for revitalization.
- ❖ Define the extent of the downtown (village) areas.
- ❖ Identify areas for improvement and redevelopment, to improve the overall image and economic viability.
- ❖ Keep recommendations and strategies from the previous Downtown Plan that are still relevant and important.
- ❖ Supplement the previous Downtown plan with some new ideas, recommendations, and opportunities to the Downtown Plan.
- ❖ Set priorities and identify some achievable short-term goals.
- ❖ Help develop critical partnerships and unite the community in support of the Downtown (both villages).

DOWNTOWN VISION

Adapted from/inspired by the content of “Envision Downtown, Lisbon 2030”, the Lisbon Comprehensive Plan, and the Route 196 Master Plan.

Lisbon's traditional village areas, Lisbon Village, Lisbon Center and Lisbon Falls, were each historically anchored by a major manufacturer. This manufacturing history was what built the neighborhoods, architecture, cultural heritage of the community and its villages. Over the years, the widespread loss of the traditional manufacturing industries has had great impacts on many Maine communities, including Lisbon's historic villages. However, Lisbon's village centers still hold much of the qualities that are so important to Lisbon's character: a traditional, mixed-use downtown or village center, the buildings and places that are unique to Lisbon's history, and residents that embody the heritage of their community or come to the community ready to embrace Lisbon's heritage.

The Town of Lisbon envisions the future revitalization, prosperity, and the preservation of local heritage for each of its villages, with emphasis on the primary community anchors, Lisbon Falls and Lisbon Village. These represent areas with significant economic and community importance, places that have traditionally been the very heart of the Lisbon community. They must continue to serve as mixed-use centers that celebrate their civic, social, historic, and natural assets and opportunities. Though the history of these downtown areas is critical to maintaining their authenticity, they must remain dynamic and seek to innovate and improve while still protecting their local character. And both Lisbon Falls and Lisbon Village will continue to rebuild the community's physical and cultural connections to the Androscoggin and Sabattus Rivers.

Downtown Lisbon Falls is perfectly situated at the juncture of several vectors: the Androscoggin River, Route 196, and the growing Lisbon Trail System and future regional rail-trail. The historic Main Street and surrounds shall remain a walkable, traditional, mixed-use downtown with easy access to Route 196, downtown neighborhoods, the river, and the developing trails system. Maintaining the character of the Main Street area and reconnecting to the Androscoggin River will continue to be highly important to Lisbon Falls' prosperity and sense of place. The waterfront area and its larger scale redevelopment opportunities, including the Worumbo Mill and Knight-Celotex sites, represents areas long envisioned for "a new life" and economic opportunity. The Route 196 corridor has been envisioned to reclaim Lisbon Falls' village character as it is redeveloped, with emphasis on rebuilding a positive image of Lisbon Falls and opening up opportunities for the Main Street area and waterfront area.

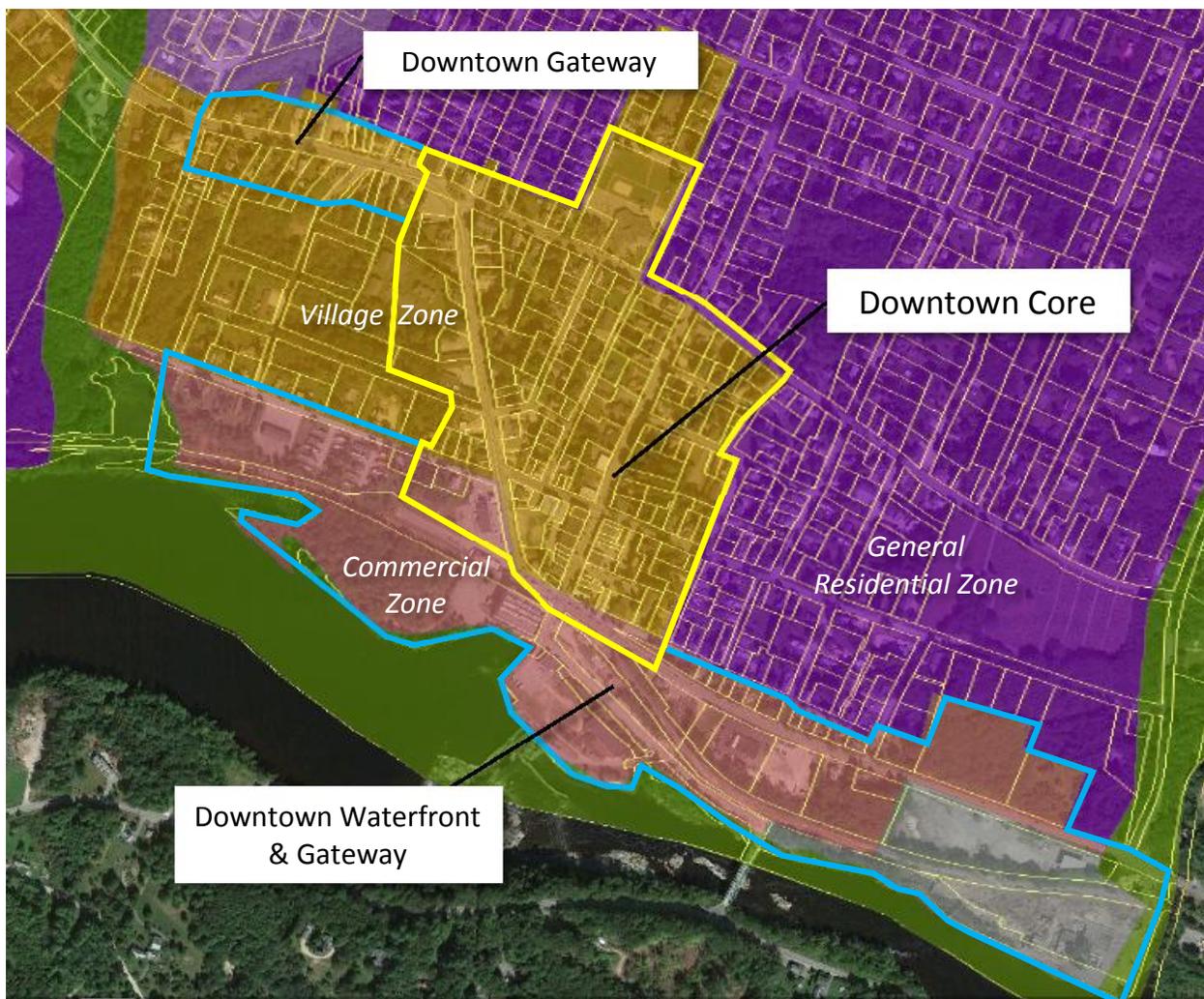
Lisbon Village lies at the juncture of the Sabattus River, Route 196, and the future regional rail-trail (railroad corridor). Village Street remains a walkable main street that includes many historic buildings, with the adjacent, revitalized Farwell Mill serving as a significant community anchor. Like Lisbon Falls, the Route 196 corridor in Lisbon Village has been envisioned to reclaim its village character as it is redeveloped, and to seek to reconnect to the Sabattus River.

"The strength of this document lies in its potential application not just to the downtown Lisbon Falls area, but to all other areas of town as well, including Lisbon Center and Lisbon Village. While historically these three parts of town have evolved and expanded along different lines and have different histories, they may collectively take advantage of the efforts outlined in this document including the establishment of a National Trust Main Street program. Despite their differences, for the purposes of this document, the three individual villages (Lisbon Falls, Lisbon Center, and Lisbon Village) will be collectively referred to as Lisbon." *Envision Downtown, Lisbon 2030*

STUDY AREA

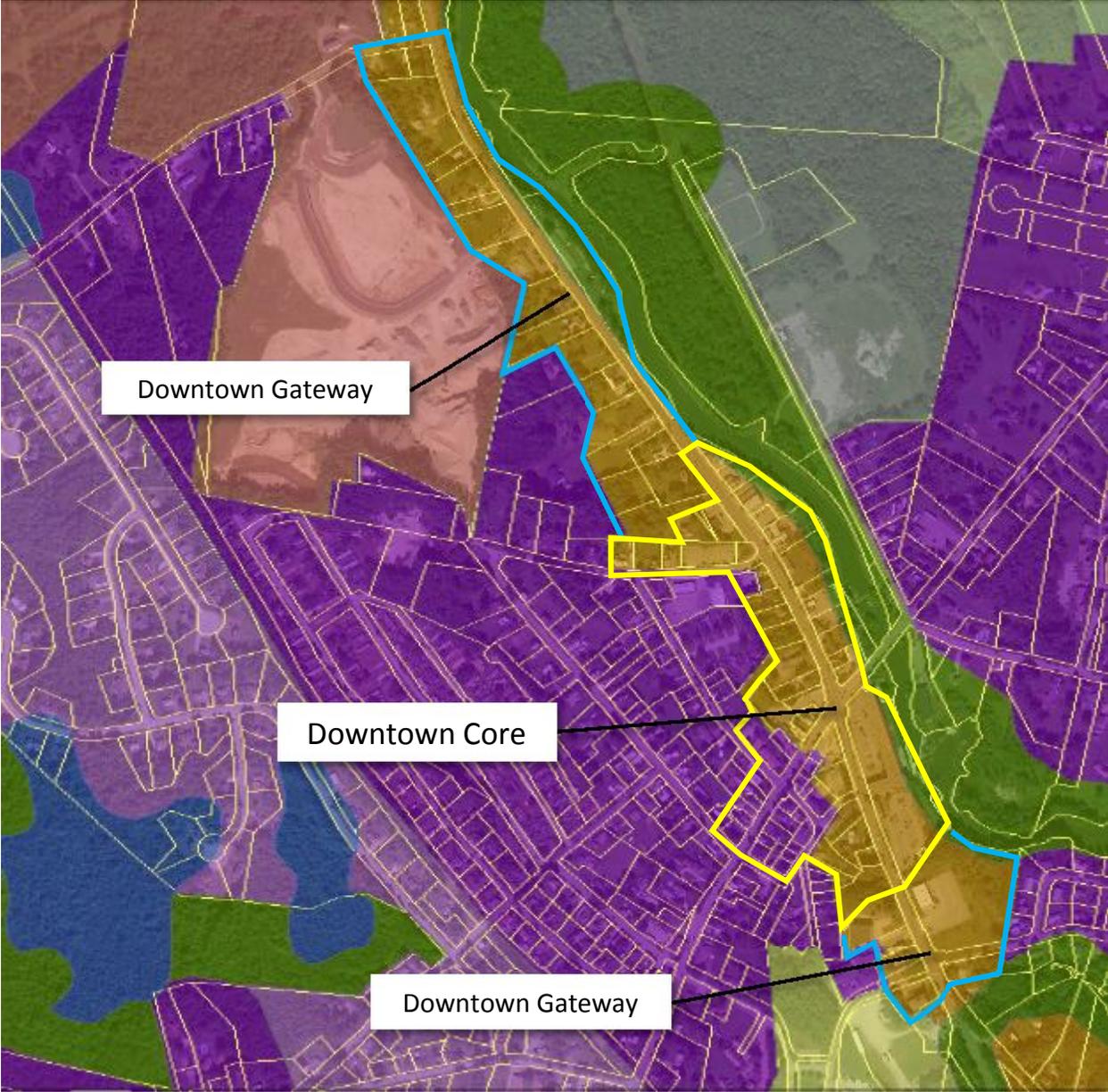
This Downtown Plan formally incorporates both Lisbon Falls and Lisbon Village, as the two economic, historic, and social centers for Lisbon. Although the statement above from the previous Downtown Vision document reflected the sentiment that the downtown recommendations also applied to Lisbon Village and Lisbon Center, there is now strong community support for the formal and official inclusion of Lisbon Village to provide recommendations specific to that village's future.

Lisbon Falls Study Area



For purposes of this Plan, the downtown area of Lisbon Falls includes a Downtown Core (Main Street and adjacent Route 196 corridor); the Waterfront and Downtown Gateway to the southeast (formerly industrial land use in transition); and the Downtown Gateway to the northwest (mixed residential and village businesses along Route 196).

Lisbon Village Study Area



For purposes of this Plan, the downtown area of Lisbon Village includes a downtown Core (centered on the Village Street/Route 196 intersection); the Downtown Gateway to the southeast (adjacent to the Diversified Development zone); and the Downtown Gateway to the northwest (along the Sabattus River).

General Assessment & Recommendations

In this Section:

- Revitalization Objectives
- Downtown Assessment
- Revitalization Strategies
 - *Design*
 - *Economic Development*
 - *Marketing & Promotion*
 - *Organization & Communication*



Since there are many issues and recommendations that apply to both of the villages, this section first outlines those universal items. The sections that follow provide the unique assessments and strategies for each of the villages.

GENERAL REVITALIZATION OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Create villages that draw in visitors and investment, and that serve local residents
- ❖ Build business and community support for, and participation in, the revitalization of villages
- ❖ Improve the marketing and promotion of the villages
- ❖ Improve the overall image of Lisbon's downtown areas
- ❖ Attract new and support existing downtown businesses, explore new/appropriate economic potential
- ❖ Create family, senior citizen, and child friendly downtowns
- ❖ Enhance cultural and social opportunities, celebrate both villages' unique histories and people
- ❖ Develop an actionable plan, with priorities and funding opportunities

“The revitalization of its downtown core will be accomplished by connecting to the river, reinvesting in downtown sites, and providing an overall design which will have a good balance of cars, pedestrians, active transportation and transit; be a good place to live and work with high quality design of both building and landscape; and enforce progressive smart development that is site sensitive and adds to the character of the town.” *Envision Downtown, Lisbon 2030*

DOWNTOWN ASSESSMENT

Downtown Strengths & Weaknesses

For Lisbon, there are several key strengths and weaknesses that have remained unchanged in recent years. Fortunately, many of Lisbon’s downtown strengths have remained constant; unfortunately, most of the weaknesses have largely gone unaddressed.



Assets/Strengths:

Many of these are “opportunities waiting to happen” or strengths that have not yet been fully used to the community’s advantage.

- Traditional “Main Street” building scale, layout, density; scale and density of neighborhoods
- Historic architecture/buildings
- Local/village heritage
- Proximity to the Androscoggin and Sabattus Rivers (although limited access)
- Generally walkable (proximity between destinations, neighborhoods)
- Some existing pedestrian-scale lighting, street trees
- New “Lisbon” and “Moxie” light pole banners
- Municipal sewer & water to serve downtown areas
- Design standards and guidelines to influence new development and redevelopment



Weaknesses/Threats:

These represent the major challenges that Lisbon’s downtown areas face:

- General shift from economic activity from downtown “Main Street” to Route 196 corridor
- Loss of historic buildings gradually reduces local character and uniqueness
- Blight and poor building and streetscape conditions still pervasive
- Need to address poor image (people’s perception of Lisbon)
- Pedestrian safety and enhancements needed
- Route 196 businesses/sites still mostly auto-oriented
- No streetscape character on Route 196

- Condition of existing streetscape, lights, and trees typically fair to poor, need replacement
- Marketing and promotion for the village, possibly branding, needed
- No public river/waterfront access
- Need to cultivate business opportunities appropriate for the downtowns, and that will work within Lisbon’s regional markets (economic)

Conditions

There is much documentation within Lisbon’s planning reports that the need for physical improvements to enhance Lisbon’s image and visual character. Lisbon downtown areas suffer from a lack of investment and maintenance, both public and private. Many residential and non-residential buildings have been degrading visibly over time, resulting in negative impacts on neighbors and the Town in general. Years ago public improvements were made in the downtowns that now show significant wear and deterioration in many areas. Pedestrian safety and walkability must continue to be addressed, including upgrading existing sidewalks and crosswalks.

These conditions – the blight and deterioration that persists within Lisbon’s downtowns – has a direct impact on Lisbon’s economic viability, the viability of existing downtown businesses, and the potential to attract new, quality businesses and jobs. Not addressing these conditions will mean the continued loss of Lisbon’s character, unique sense of place, and quality of life.

Left: Evidence of the deteriorating streetscape – sidewalks, light poles, benches, and tree plantings.



Right: There are many commercial properties currently vacant and/or in poor condition.

Left: Cracked or broken brick and concrete sidewalks, found in both villages.



Right: Example of façade conditions in need of repair and restoration.



Left: Streetscape improvements are a priority for redevelopment areas, to show public investment.



Right: Several sections of Route 196 in the villages have no sidewalk or streetscape elements.

Left: Example of inadequate pedestrian access, overgrown vegetation, deteriorated poles and fixtures.



Right: Some downtown buildings are only in need of relatively minor façade improvements, while others require substantial physical and exterior improvements.

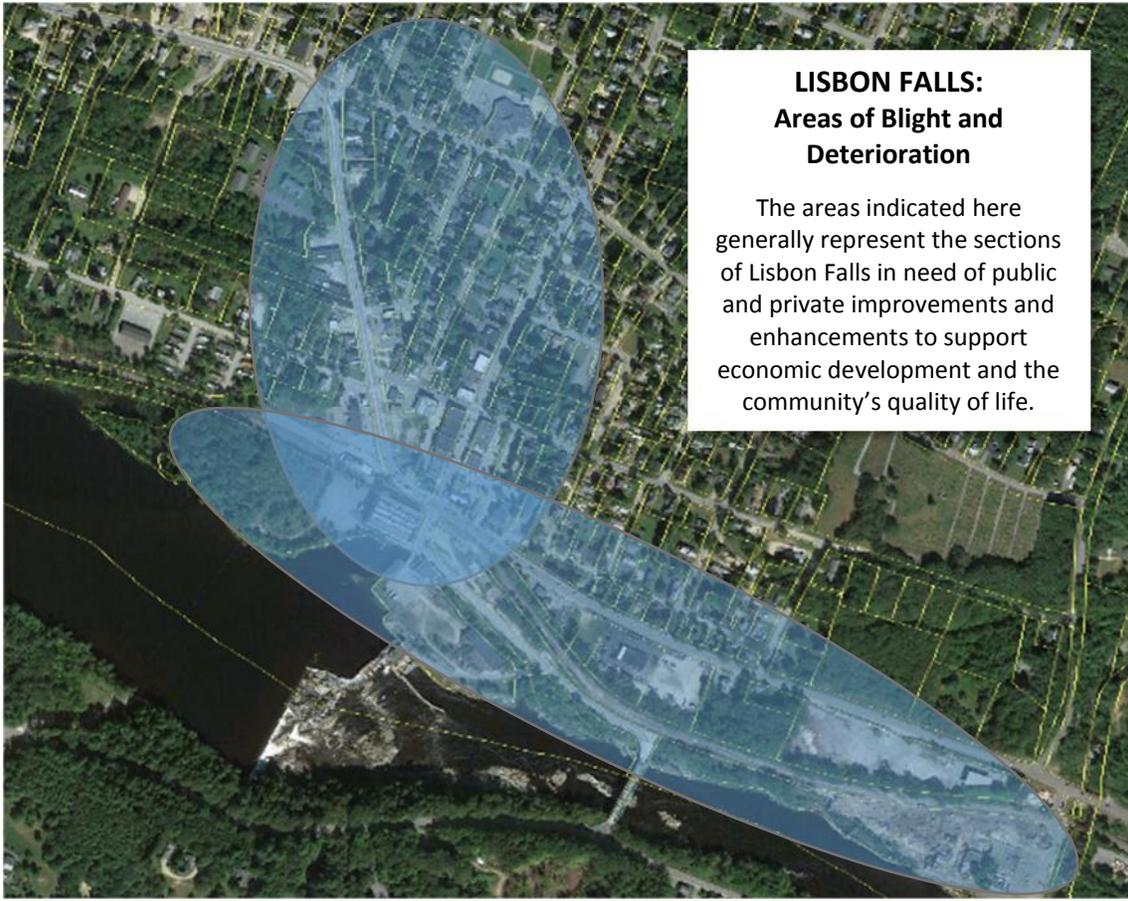
Left: Overgrown grass and shrubs, and damaged and abandoned infrastructure reflect a lack of maintenance and investment..



Right: Both villages have development along the river that fails to make any connection to the river.

The maps that follow indicate the general areas in the two villages where blight and deterioration of non-residential buildings and potential non-residential buildings are in need of improvement. These areas represent the highest need for downtown revitalization and investment, for economic development, community preservation, and quality of life.

Not all properties, buildings, or public infrastructure in these areas are in deteriorated condition, but rather this diagram identifies the general areas where blighted conditions have been identified as negatively impacting the community and economic opportunities.



**LISBON FALLS:
Areas of Blight and
Deterioration**

The areas indicated here generally represent the sections of Lisbon Falls in need of public and private improvements and enhancements to support economic development and the community's quality of life.



**LISBON VILLAGE
Areas of Blight and
Deterioration**

The areas indicated here generally represent the sections of Lisbon Village in need of public and private improvements and enhancements to support economic development and the community's quality of life.

In the sections that follow, the ideas, strategies and recommendations are summarized, to address Lisbon’s downtown conditions, and the strengths and weaknesses of the villages. These sections, *Design, Economic Development, Marketing & Promotion, and Organization & Communication*, are derived from the *Envision Downtown, Lisbon 2030* and from the Main Street Maine program’s “Four Point Approach” to revitalization. To read more about this program and approach, visit http://www.mdf.org/mdc_main_st_maine.php.

Table of the Priorities for Community Action, in Envision Downtown, Lisbon2030
(Several of the strategies from the 2011 plan have been addressed.)

	Suggested Tool to use from Lisbon Falls Toolbox	Priority			
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Communication					
Murals to be painted on downtown buildings	BID / Civic Branding & Identity		■		
Develop and enforce a Signage Ordinance	Civic Branding & Identity / Signage & Wayfinding	■			
Replace existing "Village Gateway" sign on 196	Signage & Wayfinding			■	
Directional / Promotional Signage to be replaced at 196 and School Street	Signage & Wayfinding			■	
Organizational, Programming, & Recruitment					
Develop and enforce a Street Light Ordinance	Design Guidelines	■			
Consider implementing a Façade Improvement Grant for all Lisbon businesses	Façade Improvement Program	■			
Bring a Farmer's Market to the downtown area	Festivals and Events		■		
Improve volunteerism	Support for Volunteer Organization		■		
Physical Improvements					
Lisbon has identified street lights, sidewalks, and furnishings to be replaced	Streetscape Improvements			■	
Repair downtown pocket parks and provide for better ongoing maintenance	Streetscape Improvements / BID / Green Villages			■	
Screen backside of Main Street buildings from Route 196	Streetscape Improvements / BID / Green Villages		■		
Improve downtown parking opportunities	Street and Parking Improvements			■	
Reuse former ballfield adjacent to Worumbo Mill as a park area for summer concert series and other events	Waterfront / Riverfront Improvements			■	
Design and provide a new "Village Gateway" landscape and signage for Route 196	Civic Branding & Identity / Signage & Wayfinding			■	
Connect Androscoggin Trail System to downtown	Trails and Open Space Master Plan	■			
Provide interpretive signage and wayfinding for Androscoggin / Lisbon Falls trailhead	Trails and Open Space Master Plan / Civic Signage & Wayfinding Strategy		■		
Construct new planter boxes for downtown through the volunteer efforts of the local school	Streetscape Improvements		■		
Marion T. Morse Recreation Center:					
Needs new landscape plan including Gazebo, planting plan, and ornamental fencing	Green Villages			■	
Is looking to expand the building with potential for green roof or LEED construction	Tax Incentive Funding				■
Would like to enhance pedestrian connection to Main Street	Streetscape Improvements				■

Priorities based upon existing funding and community support vs. required organization and funding for implementation

REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

For Lisbon Falls and Lisbon Village

These recommendations are consistent across most of Lisbon’s recent planning documents, including *Envision Downtown, The Route 196 Corridor Master Plan, Lisbon Falls & Lisbon Village Walking Audit Reports, and Maine Downtown Center Team Visit Report*.

Design

The strategies under Design include programs, initiatives, and physical improvements that address the downtown's visual character. Design strategies also address functionality and safety, in addition to physical appearance, such as with pedestrian infrastructure.

Recent accomplishments towards improving Design in the downtowns include the adoption of Design Standards & Guidelines for new development. The development of a funded façade program is also anticipated within the year.

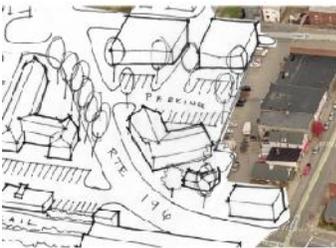


Image & Visual Character

Priority items indicated with an asterisk ().*

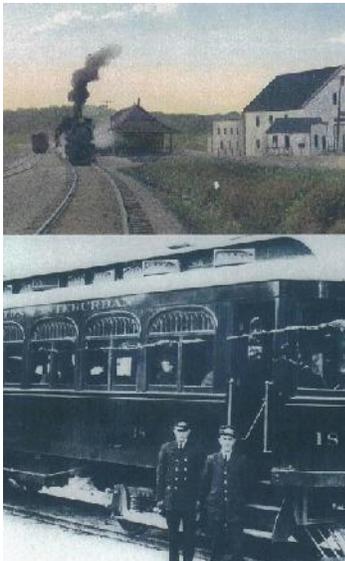
- Establish **façade and design assistance** programs/incentives to address visual character of existing buildings and development. Utilize the existing Design Standards in developing façade programs.*
- Make **streetscape improvements** along the “Main Streets” and Route 196 through the villages, including street trees and landscaping, decorative lampposts, and other streetscape amenities.*
- Add new and enhance existing **parks and green spaces** in the downtown areas and along Route 196, with priority for the river front areas (Androscoggin and Sabattus Rivers).*
- Maintain and improve the **eastern gateway** (entering from Topsham) character, in particular addressing streetscape and landscaping, and the impact of potential waterfront development on the gateway.
- Support a long-term strategy for relocating **overhead utilities** underground (high cost, but dramatic impact on visual character).
- Find opportunities to incorporate **public art** projects in the villages, such as sculpture or building murals, whether temporary or permanent.

Physical Improvements & Infrastructure

Priority items indicated with an asterisk ().*

- Continue to make **pedestrian and bike improvements**, such as sidewalks/ADA accessibility, safety and design of crosswalks, and bike lanes or designated routes.*

- Follow up on needed **long-term transportation planning**, addressing traffic capacity and road design for Route 196 and the impacts to village character and future development.
- Bring **utilities and infrastructure** to the villages that enhance economic opportunities for Lisbon, such as natural gas, and improved broadband capacity.
- Explore opportunities (public-private partnerships) to improve **off-street parking** in the villages.
- Continue to pursue the long-term vision of a **regional rail trail** between Topsham and Lewiston, for alternative transportation and economic development.



History & Culture

Priority items indicated with an asterisk ().*

- Develop a complete inventory of the locally significant historic buildings and architecture in the downtowns, seeking opportunities to develop educational materials (for residents and tourism) and/or adding listings to the National Register of Historic Places.
- Consider a “Museum in the Streets” type program with historic interpretive signage to tell the story of Lisbon’s special places and historic buildings and villages.
- Explore new opportunities to promote and share Lisbon’s unique history and culture during Moxie Festival.
- Consider applying for the Orton Family Foundation’s “Heart & Soul” program, as a way to enhance community planning and development through the telling of Lisbon’s “story” (and its residents’ stories).
- Support historic, art, and cultural activities that focus on the downtowns, such as programs of the Library or Historic Society.

Economic Development

Also called Economic Restructuring under the Main Street Maine program.

Economic Development strategies for a downtown are unique from other areas of local commercial development, and it is important for communities to develop appropriate strategies for their downtowns

given their particular local and regional market context. A key resource for Lisbon in the continued development of a downtown economic development program is the recent reports, *Lisbon Trade Area Analysis of Retail Sales*, and *Lisbon Retail and Service Sector Gap Analysis*, which provide data on the town's particular economic markets and needs.

Note that economic development strategies do include marketing and promotion, but in this plan, consistent with the *Main Street Maine* program, marketing and promotion are addressed in a separate section (next).

Priority items indicated with an asterisk ().*



- Seek opportunities to incentivize the revitalization of key downtown properties and develop public-private partnerships – with priority for the Worumbo Mill and Knight-Celotex sites in Lisbon Falls, and the Graziano's site in Lisbon Village.*
- Establish a Downtown TIF and other TIF program opportunities to both provide development incentives and support town investment in visual character and infrastructure improvements as well as marketing and promotion.*
- Establish a Downtown Economic Development Committee, Downtown Business Association, or similar entity in partnership with the Town Economic Development Director, to better address economic development needs and marketing and promotion specifically for the downtowns. Consider whether separate entities are needed for Lisbon Falls and Lisbon Village.
- Ensure that downtown businesses and services are equally targeting and serving local residents; develop specific programs and strategies to increase Lisbon residents' use, enjoyment, and patronage to the two villages.*
- Promote existing programs and financing available for business assistance and growth within the downtowns.
- Utilize the recent Lisbon Retail Trade Analysis reports and Retail & Service Sector Gap Analysis to market and encourage appropriate businesses for Lisbon and for the downtowns.

Marketing & Promotion

Lisbon has had some success in building its marketing and promotion for economic and community development, but not as much progress in

specifically addressing the promotion of its downtowns. Many communities who find their staff and budgets too limited rely on volunteer participation and community groups, which can be a successful model with good communication and coordination.



Priority items indicated with an asterisk ().*

- Promote Lisbon’s recent achievements to residents, businesses, and potential developers: the completion of the Androscoggin River Trail, the establishment of new design standards and guidelines for development, and the (anticipated) revised signage standards.*
- Explore opportunities to provide regular promotional and information materials within Lisbon, such as through a downtown newsletter, regular articles sent to local newspapers, improved website opportunities. Content should focus on recent achievements, new programs and development, or regular highlighting of different local business.*
- Develop marketing brochures for each of the downtown areas, including business listings, maps, and points of interest.*
- Community events and activities are critical to the vitality of Lisbon’s villages; continue to promote and expand activities from the Moxie Festival, to concerts, to sporting events.*
- High School sporting events draw large numbers of residents and visitors every year to Lisbon Falls. Explore opportunities with the School Department to allow for new local business marketing opportunities, as appropriate.
- Continue to consider developing a brand (professionally) for Lisbon and/or the downtowns.

Organization & Communication

Lisbon’s greatest challenge in downtown revitalization will be within organization and communication – not that this is a problem unique to Lisbon (other downtowns struggle with this as well). No plan or document makes a downtown thrive, it is the people and partnerships that make it happen.

Lisbon must focus immediately on boosting communication, volunteerism, and sharing roles across public and private lines. Town staff can provide many opportunities and work towards revitalization,

but without the community's and businesses' support and work, revitalization will not truly be successful.



Priority items indicated with an asterisk ().*

- Lisbon should be taking advantage of the programs and resources of the **Main Street Maine program** and the **MDF Downtown Center**, as a “Network Community”.*
- The **Downtown Committee must be reinvigorated**, with long-term consideration as to whether this would be a municipal committee or become an independent entity or organization. If volunteer capacity allows, subcommittees should be established for Design, Promotion, and Economic Development.*
- Town staff will continue to work to implement the recommendations of this Plan, however, successful revitalization will require participation by businesses and community volunteers. Lisbon must work to **build the community volunteer base** in support of downtown revitalization, and gain support and participation from village businesses.*
- As Lisbon builds its volunteer capacity and business and community support for the downtowns, and builds the successful operation of the Downtown Committee, **consider the capacity to have two separate committees, one for each of the villages.**
- Coordination with the recently established **Positive Change Lisbon**, as a grass-roots non-profit already making progress on revitalization improvements and activities, will be critical organizational step for the Town and the Downtown Committee.*

The Main Street Four-Point Approach® From Main Street Maine

The four points of the Main Street approach work together to build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort.

Organization involves getting everyone working toward the same goal and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a Main Street revitalization program. A governing board and standing committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of the volunteer-driven program. Volunteers are coordinated and supported by a paid program director as well. This structure not only divides the workload and clearly delineates responsibilities, but also builds consensus and cooperation among the various stakeholders.

Promotion sells a positive image of the commercial district and encourages consumers and investors to live, work, shop, play and invest in the Main Street district. By marketing a district's unique characteristics to residents, investors, business owners, and visitors, an effective

promotional strategy forges a positive image through advertising, retail promotional activity, special events, and marketing campaigns carried out by local volunteers. These activities improve consumer and investor confidence in the district and encourage commercial activity and investment in the area.

Design means getting Main Street into top physical shape. Capitalizing on its best assets — such as historic buildings and pedestrian-oriented streets — is just part of the story. An inviting atmosphere, created through attractive window displays, parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, sidewalks, street lights, and landscaping, conveys a positive visual message about the commercial district and what it has to offer. Design activities also include instilling good maintenance practices in the commercial district, enhancing the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging appropriate new construction, developing sensitive design management systems, and long-term planning.

Economic Restructuring strengthens a community's existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying its economic base. The Main Street program helps sharpen the competitiveness of existing business owners and recruits compatible new businesses and new economic uses to build a commercial district that responds to today's consumers' needs. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability of the district.

Lisbon Falls

In this Section:

- Lisbon Falls Assessment
- Revitalization Strategies
 - *Design*
 - *Economic Development*
 - *Marketing & Promotion*
 - *Organization & Communication*



“Like many early-century Maine communities, Lisbon Falls thrived and grew around a river. From the town's inception, the Androscoggin River has played a key role as the economic engine which powered and built factories and industries- giving rise to the growth of the town... If there is one overarching design consideration behind the social, cultural, and economic revitalization of downtown, it is to reconnect with the river.”
Envision Downtown, Lisbon 2030

DOWNTOWN ASSESSMENT

Lisbon Falls Strengths & Weaknesses

In addition to the strengths and weaknesses listed in the General Assessment section, the following is an assessment of issues particular to only Lisbon Falls.

Assets/Strengths:

Many of these are “opportunities waiting to happen” or strengths that have not yet been fully used to the community’s advantage.

- Located close to the Androscoggin River
- Androscoggin River Trail
- MTM Center
- Near schools
- Library
- Post Office



“The downtown area is perfectly situated at the juncture of several vectors; the Androscoggin River, The Lisbon Trail System, Route 196, and the train transportation corridor; all of which can play a strong role in the cultural and economic development of downtown. Harnessing these factors, tying them together, and utilizing their properties to create a unique, viable, and significant downtown is the aim of this endeavor.”

Envision Downtown, Lisbon 2030

- Historic buildings: Old/former churches, Moxie Building, diner, etc.
- New housing development
- Primary location of Moxie Festival
- New development (redevelopment) starting to fill in
- Traffic volume – many people traveling through (just get them to stop!)
- Main Street has on-street parking, walkable for pedestrians
- Waterfront development opportunities

Weaknesses/Threats:

These represent the major challenges that Lisbon’s downtown areas face:

- Challenges to waterfront redevelopment (environmental, developer concerns)
- Route 196 not as pedestrian friendly
- Limited on-street parking for Route 196; need to explore more off-street parking options
- No downtown park or outdoor gathering space, no public waterfront access
- Main Street businesses don’t get much foot traffic; traffic routes around Main Street on Route 196

LISBON FALLS REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

Design

These recommendations are in addition to the Design recommendations listed in the General Assessment & Recommendations section.

Priority items indicated with an asterisk ().*

- Add streetscape elements such as lampposts, street trees, and benches, to Route 196 through the downtown*
- Replace deteriorated streetscape elements on Main Street
- Plan to require or encourage similar streetscape elements as part of potential waterfront development(s)
- Focus on improving pedestrian safety and accessibility along Route 196, with connections to the Trail and other key destinations*
- Support regional efforts to mark the shoulders of Route 196 as a bicycle route; provide or replace/upgrade bike racks at the Library, post office, and MTM

- Provide wayfinding signage for the Androscoggin River Trail, and destinations such as the Library and MTM center

Economic Development

These recommendations are in addition to the Design recommendations listed in the General Assessment & Recommendations section.

- Continue to provide town support and encourage public-private partnerships to realize the redevelopment of the Worumbo and Knight-Celotex waterfront sites; utilize programs such as TIF to aid in gap funding.
- Consider the need for a Lisbon Falls business owners association or mailing group, for communicating with town staff and/or the Downtown Committee
- Increase business retention activities through actively seeking input on what support local businesses need – through town staff and/or the Downtown Committee

Marketing & Promotion

These recommendations are in addition to the Design recommendations listed in the General Assessment & Recommendations section.

- Reach out to owners of vacant storefronts to encourage or assist with maintaining window displays (for promotion and/or visual interest)
- Develop a local “neighborhood” promotional activity that targets residents in the adjacent neighborhoods and encourages them to patronize Lisbon Falls businesses
- Continue to build on/expand current Lisbon Falls events such as Moxie Festival and summer concerts; consider adding a winter event if possible
- Utilize downtown public venues such as the Library and MTM center to promote downtown businesses and activities.

Lisbon Village

In this Section:

- Lisbon Village Assessment
- Revitalization Strategies
 - *Design*
 - *Economic Development*
 - *Marketing & Promotion*
 - *Organization & Communication*



Lisbon Village's issues were not fully addressed in the *Envision Downtown* document, though it indicated that the strategies for Lisbon Falls applied to both downtowns. In this section, some of the specific issues or recommendations for Lisbon Village are represented, in addition to the content of the General Assessment & Recommendations Section.

DOWNTOWN ASSESSMENT

Lisbon Village Strengths & Weaknesses

In addition to the strengths and weaknesses listed in the General Assessment section, the following is an assessment of issues particular to only Lisbon Village.

Assets/Strengths:

Many of these are "opportunities waiting to happen" or strengths that have not yet been fully used to the community's advantage.

- Located on the Sabattus River
- Historic churches (converted uses)
- Farwell Mill, housing and commercial
- Near Beaver Park and railroad corridor (potential trail)
- Nearby trail access
- New development opportunities at Kelly Park subdivision
- Active interest in redevelopment of the Graziano's site



Weaknesses/Threats:

These represent the major challenges that Lisbon's downtown areas face:

- Route 196 village business strip in need of visual character improvements
- Limited on-street and off-street parking for Route 196 and Village Street
- Some development limitations surrounding Resource Protection and Aquifer Protection Overlay zoning
- Few Village Street businesses, not much commercial/mixed use presence
- No civic buildings, no parks or public gathering spaces

LISBON VILLAGE REVITALIZATION STRATEGIES

Design

These recommendations are in addition to the Design recommendations listed in the General Assessment & Recommendations section.

Priority items indicated with an asterisk ().*

- Add streetscape elements such as lampposts, street trees, and benches, to Route 196 through the downtown*
- Replace deteriorated streetscape elements on Village Street, and surrounding the future Graziano's redevelopment site
- Support regional efforts to mark the shoulders of Route 196 as a bicycle route; provide or replace/upgrade bike racks at the Farwell Mill

Economic Development

These recommendations are in addition to the Design recommendations listed in the General Assessment & Recommendations section.

- Increase business attraction activities to bring new businesses to Village Street and Kelly Park

Marketing & Promotion

These recommendations are in addition to the Design recommendations listed in the General Assessment & Recommendations section.

- Develop a local “neighborhood” promotional activity that targets residents in the adjacent Lisbon Village neighborhoods and encourages them to patronize Lisbon Village businesses
- Identify opportunities for one or more community activities or events for Lisbon Village, whether an expansion of current community events or a new activity

Action Plan

In this Section:

- Priorities
- Strategies & Implementation Phasing
- Funding



While the Town of Lisbon has been actively working on and making recent strides in economic and community development generally, there has not been as much attention to the Main Street and Village Street/Lisbon Village areas. The development of the Route 196 Corridor Master Plan incorporated the two downtown areas generally, but in order to fully address the sustainability and vitality of the downtowns, the community will need to find ways to focus specifically on these special places.

Priorities

The priorities below are listed from within this plan. Upon the adoption of this Plan, the Town's focus must be:

- 1. To direct a committee (new or existing) to be responsible for setting annual goals and priorities to support the staff's work and coordinate with Lisbon Council.**
- 2. To work to re-build the community volunteer support for the downtowns, re-establish a downtown committee, and re-engage with the Maine Downtown Center.**

The following summarizes the priority actions from within the General Assessment & Recommendations section of this Plan. See the Lisbon Falls and Lisbon Village sections for additional priority items.

DESIGN

- Establish **façade and design assistance** programs/incentives to address visual character of existing buildings and development. Utilize the existing Design Standards in developing façade programs.*

- Make **streetscape improvements** along the “Main Streets” and Route 196 through the villages, including street trees and landscaping, decorative lampposts, and other streetscape amenities.*
- Add new and enhance existing **parks and green spaces** in the downtown areas and along Route 196, with priority for the river front areas (Androscoggin and Sabattus Rivers).*
- Continue to make **pedestrian and bike improvements**, such as sidewalks/ADA accessibility, safety and design of crosswalks, and bike lanes or designated routes.*
- Seek opportunities to incentivize the revitalization of key downtown properties and develop public-private partnerships – with priority for the Worumbo Mill and Knight-Celotex sites in Lisbon Falls, and the Graziano’s site in Lisbon Village.*
- Establish a Downtown TIF and other TIF program opportunities to both provide development incentives and support town investment in visual character and infrastructure improvements as well as marketing and promotion.*
- Ensure that downtown businesses and services are equally targeting and serving local residents; develop specific programs and strategies to increase Lisbon residents’ use, enjoyment, and patronage to the two villages.*

MARKETING & PROMOTION

- Promote Lisbon’s recent achievements to residents, businesses, and potential developers: the completion of the Androscoggin River Trail, the establishment of new design standards and guidelines for development, and the (anticipated) revised signage standards.*
- Explore opportunities to provide regular promotional and information materials within Lisbon, such as through a downtown newsletter, regular articles sent to local newspapers, improved website opportunities. Content should focus on recent achievements, new programs and development, or regular highlighting of different local business.*
- Develop marketing brochures for each of the downtown areas, including business listings, maps, and points of interest.*

- Community events and activities are critical to the vitality of Lisbon’s villages; continue to promote and expand activities from the Moxie Festival, to concerts, to sporting events.*

ORGANIZATION & COMMUNICATION

- Lisbon should be taking advantage of the programs and resources of the **Main Street Maine program** and the **MDF Downtown Center**, as a “Network Community”.*
- The **Downtown Committee must be reinvigorated**, with long-term consideration as to whether this would be a municipal committee or become an independent entity or organization. If volunteer capacity allows, subcommittees should be established for Design, Promotion, and Economic Development.*
- Town staff will continue to work to implement the recommendations of this Plan, however, successful revitalization will require participation by businesses and community volunteers. Lisbon must work to **build the community volunteer base** in support of downtown revitalization, and gain support and participation from village businesses.*
- Coordination with the recently established **Positive Change Lisbon**, as a grass-roots non-profit already making progress on revitalization improvements and activities, will be critical organizational step for the Town and the Downtown Committee.*

Strategies & Implementation Phasing

This plan includes a list of key strategies for downtown revitalization, but does not include more detailed and specific strategies. The intent is to keep this plan focused on primary goals and strategies, with more detailed actions being referenced in other existing town plans and reports.

More detailed actions and strategies can be found in the supporting documents for this plan (see Appendix):

- Envision Downtown, Lisbon 2030
- Lisbon Falls Walking Audit
- Lisbon Center Walking Audit
- Route 196 Corridor Master Plan
- Maine Downtown Center Start Up Team Report for Lisbon

Lisbon should continue to reference the action items in these documents to supplement this Downtown Plan.

The priorities and actions in this Plan and the supporting documents will be phased in over time as town staff and community volunteers are able to take them on, and when funding is secured to complete projects.

Funding

Funding improvements and “man hours” will be the primary challenges to implementation. Many projects and improvements call for increased public funding, which can be straining on local budgets. Meanwhile, many more projects require a considerable time commitment from staff, community volunteers, and private partners to accomplish, which is often slowed down by limits on everyone’s time.

For smaller projects or those requiring less funding and more time, reasonable priorities must be set to prevent personnel burnout and show measurable progress.

For larger projects or those requiring more funding, such funding will likely come from the following sources:

- **Maine state grants** – Department of Economic & Community Development or Department of Transportation are currently the most likely funding agencies for downtown improvements and projects.
- **Local TIF funding** – once the Town establishes a Downtown TIF District and program, funding will be generated as new development and redevelopment increase local tax base.
- **Private and non-profit assistance** – several communities have had some success in partnering with local non-profit and community groups to raise funds, and even gained private assistance such as through local banks’ charitable programs.

The Town has currently included in its budget funding to support a local match for state grant funding. While state grants are increasingly competitive in Maine, these are the best sources for funding larger projects, and Lisbon must continue to make the commitment to provide some level of local investment for projects. When well used and leveraged against grant programs, this investment will pay off with the improved vitality and economic improvement of the downtowns.