



A Plan for Igniting Economic Recovery in  
the Greater Nashua Region

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

## Recommendations

**Icon Key:** These icons denote shared or similar goals and recommendations found in the following documents.



Economic Recovery & Expansion Strategy, a 2020 plan developed by the NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs



2021 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, by REDC



2019 NRPC Regional Housing Needs Assessment

## Goal 1: Establish a comprehensive marketing strategy for the Nashua Region

While many people in other states know about New Hampshire, not as many are aware of the economic opportunities and attractive living available in the NRPC Region, nor are they aware of our proximity to the Boston Metro Area. Many New Hampshire residents are also unaware of all that Region has to offer. The NRPC Region needs to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy for different audiences: young professionals, businesses considering expansion or relocation, real estate investors and developers, tourists, and other target audiences.

### Action 1-1: Getting started

As part of this initiative, NRPC is working with a marketing consultant to make the first steps toward developing a comprehensive marketing strategy, including the creation of a new website named *Spark*.

**Recommendation 1:** NRPC will work with a marketing consultant to create and maintain the Spark website, including generating new content to promote the region as an ideal place to live, work, start a business and invest.

**Recommendation 2:** NRPC will work with a marketing consultant to create other marketing materials that could be made available in a variety of media including print.

### Action 1-2: Working toward a comprehensive marketing strategy

To implement a comprehensive marketing strategy, a broader coordinated effort is needed beyond getting the Spark website up and running.

**Recommendation 1:** NRPC will collaborate with local Chambers of Commerce, community and economic development professionals, economic development committees, and other community partners to further develop and strengthen the Region’s marketing strategy.

**Recommendation 2:** NRPC will explore grant opportunities to expand and fully implement a multi-pronged regional marketing strategy.

## **Goal 2: Foster entrepreneurship through expanding access to resources and breaking down barriers**

The Greater Nashua Region is not particularly well known for its entrepreneurship culture. However, there is a long history of innovation in the region and many people have taken the initiative to start new businesses in recent years even during the midst of the pandemic. The Region should support these new entrepreneurs, as well as existing ones, by expanding access to entrepreneurship resources to strengthen the region’s overall economy by stimulating new business formation and job creation.

### **Action 2-1: Expanding financing resources for business start-up and expansion**

A critical barrier to starting and expanding businesses in the region is limited access to financing for start-up capital and to maintain a healthy cash flow. Women-owned businesses and certain “high-risk” businesses such as restaurants are particularly challenged. Expanding both private and public financing resources will be key to accelerating economic recovery and fueling business expansion.

**Recommendation 1:** NRPC will work with regional stakeholders to explore new financing resources with local banks, credit unions, community-based lenders, with a special focus on resources for women-owned businesses and restaurants.



Goal 4

**Recommendation 2:** Collaborating with economic and community development professionals, the SBDC and other community partners, NRPC will seek to engage angel investors and venture capital firms to explore opportunities to increase investment in the region and to connect entrepreneurs with potential investors.



Goal 4

**Recommendation 3:** NRPC will leverage the Spark website to serve as a resource for entrepreneurs to access information on public and private financing and funding opportunities including access to SBA, City of Nashua Economic Development Office, Regional Economic Development Center (REDC), Capital Region Economic Development Council (CRDC), Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA) and other community and nonprofit lenders.

**Recommendation 4:** The City of Nashua Economic Development Office, REDC, CRDC and other community and nonprofit lenders should continue to grow their revolving loans funds and develop new lending products to meet the changing needs of the region’s entrepreneurs.

## **Action 2-2: Expanding resources to support business success including marketing, networking opportunities, regulations, taxes, human resources, finances, insurance, commercial rental agreements, and legal advice.**

Entrepreneurs need to maximize their limited resources to establish and grow their businesses. Expanding these resources, from business operational assistance to mentorship programs, will help new businesses succeed, and thereby strengthen the regional economy. Though the NRPC Region has relatively few support services for entrepreneurs, neighboring regions provide good examples that could be replicated in our region.

**Recommendation 1:** Leveraging the Spark website, NRPC will facilitate information sharing about existing programs and support services (e.g., SBDC, SBA, SCORE, Chambers of Commerce, and trade/industry groups), promote local success stories and provide links to valuable data and other resources.

**Recommendation 2:** NRPC will seek funding to create an online “toolbox” for both existing businesses and entrepreneurs. The toolbox would provide access to available support services and programs, financing and other resources including real estate, leases, finances, hiring, human resources, insurance, and legal assistance.

**Recommendation 3:** NRPC will work with community partners to explore the feasibility of developing one or more business “accelerator” programs to support entrepreneurship in the region. Business accelerators such as Boston-based *MassChallenge*, or the Lowell-based *Entrepreneurship for All* have a proven record of supporting new business formation through intensively structured peer-to-peer and business experienced mentorship.

**Recommendation 4:** NRPC will work with community partners to explore the feasibility of developing one or more business “incubators” in the region. Business incubators, often targeted toward a specific industry sector, provide office, workshop, kitchen, or studio space along with support services to foster new business creation. Incubators can include makerspaces, community kitchens or professional office-oriented facilities. Nashua’s *Makelt Labs* is New Hampshire’s first and largest makerspace. Other examples include the *Hanna Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship* in Keene, *Greentown Labs* and *Artists’ Asylum* in Somerville, MA, and *Commonwealth Kitchen* in Boston.

**Recommendation 5:** Among the highest-ranked priorities identified by entrepreneurs during the planning process were networking and marketing. The region’s Chambers of Commerce currently provide multiple networking opportunities and frequently promote member businesses but there appears to be a lack of awareness or sense of connectedness to these groups on the part of many entrepreneurs. Other networking opportunities include business and professional associations and service organizations. The region’s chambers and other business and professional associations should consider broadening their outreach to entrepreneurs and other businesses that may be underrepresented within their memberships and explore evolving or expanding networking events to appeal to a wider audience.

## **Action 2-3: Eliminate barriers to women and minority entrepreneurs, especially in funding and real estate**

The Greater Nashua Region sports a diverse group of entrepreneurs, including women and minority entrepreneurs, who face traditional barriers in launching and conducting their business. Eliminating these barriers is a priority for the development of an equitable, inclusive regional economy. Moreover, the region’s diversity should be promoted and celebrated.

**Recommendation 1:** Collaborating with community partners, NRPC [will work with local chambers of commerce, the SBDC, banks, and real estate groups to](#) eliminate barriers through outreach, education, and targeted programming.

**Recommendation 2:** Leveraging the Spark website, NRPC will facilitate information sharing on available business resources (e.g. Center for Women & Enterprise, Chambers of Commerce, SBDC) that offer services specifically targeted toward women and minority entrepreneurs.

**Recommendation 3:** NRPC will highlight women and minority-owned business success stories on the Spark website and through other media.

### **Goal 3: Ensure the availability of a robust supply of commercial and industrial space to meet changing demands**

The pandemic brought profound changes to the commercial and industrial real estate industry and many of these changes are likely to continue well into the future. Remote work has reduced the need for office space and the accelerated shift to online shopping has reduced demand for retail space while placing a greater demand on space to accommodate warehousing, distribution, and fulfillment logistics. Restaurants have adapted with expanded outdoor seating and increased take-out and delivery. Retail has also increased pick-up and delivery services. At the same time, lifestyle changes have resulted in the growth of different businesses and industries that may not meet traditional definitions of retail, office, or industrial uses such as craft breweries, distilleries, and wineries, specialized athletic or recreational facilities and daycare centers. The demand for both owner-occupied and rental housing has increased, and vacancy rates are at historic lows. These changes present both challenges in addressing the redevelopment of obsolete properties as well as opportunities to redevelop empty storefronts, vacant mills, and underutilized properties for new uses. A range of strategies should be pursued to foster a healthy and balanced commercial real estate market in the region.

### **Action 3-1: Facilitate the development of new commercial and industrial facilities, especially in opportunity zones and areas supported by major transportation projects**

**Recommendation 1:** NRPC will continue to work with the region's economic and community development professionals and other stakeholders to continuously update the regional Opportunity Sites Map and promote and prioritize development sites including strategically located vacant land and buildings and brownfield sites on the Spark website and through other media.

**Recommendation 2:** NRPC will work with economic and community development directors and other stakeholders to promote and facilitate the use of tax credits and other incentives available to developers and businesses including federal Opportunity Zones, New Markets Tax Credits, NH Economic Revitalizations Zones, NH RSA 79-E, and other incentive programs.

**Recommendation 3:** The Region's municipalities should review their local zoning ordinances and site plan review regulations to ensure that district boundaries and requirements are consistent with changing market conditions and to identify opportunities to provide greater flexibility in commercial land use codes such as allowing certain light industrial or hybrid uses in commercial zones (e.g., micro-breweries), and conversion of commercial and office uses into industrial, residential or mixed-uses. use development.

## Goal 4: Expand the region's workforce through attraction, retention, and recruitment

The NRPC Region is experiencing a significant labor shortage due to a shrinking labor force coupled with an increasing demand for workers as the economy recovers from the depths of the pandemic. This trend is exasperated by an aging population, a limited housing supply, lack of childcare, low migration and immigration, and challenges in attracting younger workers to live and work in the region. As the regional economy begins to recover, the effects of the labor shortage are being felt across all sectors and industries, demanding quick and creative solutions to minimize disruption to business activities.

### Action 4-1: Increase housing availability and affordability



Goal 1, Objective 3

The lack of housing availability and affordability, which was already an issue before the pandemic, is one of the greatest factors contributing to the ongoing labor shortage. Owing to local land-use policies and market forces, many potential workers simply cannot find an affordable place to live in the NRPC region. To address these challenges the region must increase its overall housing supply, provide a more diverse range of housing types, and increase affordability.

**Recommendation 1:** NRPC will undertake a comprehensive update of its *Regional Housing Needs Assessment* and broaden its scope to address changing housing needs with a specific focus on workforce.

**Recommendation 2:** Business and community leaders should encourage and support community-based workforce housing developers such as *Neighborworks Southern New Hampshire* to identify new opportunities for workforce housing development.

**Recommendation 3:** Local municipalities should consider adopting land-use policy and zoning ordinance language that will facilitate and streamline housing development, including leveraging public land for housing production and expanding rental, owner rehab programs, more permissive Accessory Dwelling Unit ordinances, inclusionary housing ordinances, and the use of Tax-Increment Financing (TIF) districts and Community Revitalization Tax Relief Program (NH RSA 79-E). (NHRLA recommendation)



Recommendations 2 & 3

**Recommendation 4:** NRPC will work with local municipalities to plan for infrastructure expansion including water, sewer, and transportation projects that could expand opportunities for higher density housing development.



Recommendation 1

**Recommendation 5:** Business and community leaders should support new and expanded housing assistance programs such as portable housing vouchers, first-time homebuyer programs and employer-assisted housing.

## **Action 4-2: Attract young workers to live and work in the region**

A range of factors, including the region's high housing costs and lack of supply, a perceived lack of options for social engagement and entertainment, and the draw of larger urban centers deter many young workers from living and working in the NRPC Region. The Region needs to recognize the importance of attracting and retaining young workers to grow the workforce and protect the economic and civic future of the Region.

**Recommendation 1:** The Region's municipalities, Downtown and Main Street organizations such as Nashua's *Great American Downtown*, and other community partners should continue to build upon the strength of our downtown areas, town centers and other unique places where people want to live and work and enhance efforts to promote local cultural assets, social experiences, and outdoor resources in the Region.



Goal 2

**Recommendation 2:** NRPC and other community partners will work with *Stay, Work, Play NH* to enhance regional branding and promotion to young people, as well as to employers that employ young people.

**Recommendation 3:** The Region's Chambers of Commerce should work to enhance young professional networking opportunities and foster greater connections to local employers. (*Stay, Work, Play NH* recommendation)

**Recommendation 4:** Employers should consider monetary incentives such as housing stipends, pet insurance, and student loan repayment programs to attract younger workers. Other incentives could include allowing dogs at work and the opportunity to volunteer on company time (*Stay, Work, Play NH* recommendation)

**Recommendation 5:** Employers should foster and support the establishment of social groups (running groups, knitting groups, reading clubs) and provide opportunities for young employees to join and participate in them both at the workplace and in the community. (*Stay, Work, Play NH* recommendation)

## **Action 4-3: Tap into unconventional strategies and populations**

Special times demand special solutions. The Region should explore unconventional employment strategies such as employee-sharing and employment trial programs to maximize available labor, as well as encourage the employment of recent immigrants, refugees, retirees, ex-convicts, people recovering from substance misuse, and other populations not typically considered by employers.

**Recommendation 1:** Employers should consider innovative ways to share employees between two or more businesses, especially businesses that have differing seasonal labor demands.

**Recommendation 2:** Employers should consider creative employment programs to attract new employees such as "Try Us for a Day", where potential employees can be paid for a day of work and see if they would be a good fit for employment.

**Recommendation 3:** Employers should consider offering part-time and age-accommodating positions to attract early retirees back into the workforce.

**Recommendation 4:** Social service providers and employers should collaborate to expand reentry programs and work oppor-

tunities for formerly incarcerated people, people recovering from substance misuse, people transitioning out of homelessness and other challenged populations to expand the potential labor force.

**Recommendation 5:** Social service providers, employers and other community partners should collaborate to welcome recent immigrants to settle and work in the region, including coordinating with refugee resettlement agencies.

#### **Action 4-4: Improve childcare resources to meet unmet childcare needs**

If not for a lack of affordable good-quality childcare, many parents in the Greater Nashua Region would be able to work or work longer hours. As these potential workers are already living in the region, improving childcare resources is both low-hanging fruit and an effective solution for addressing the labor shortage. Nevertheless, creative solutions will be needed to reduce the cost and improve the quality of childcare in the region.

**Recommendation 1:** NRPC will explore grant opportunities to fund a plan for expanding regional childcare resources, including creating an inventory of existing resources, developing a mechanism to share this information, identifying gaps, and identifying future action steps.

**Recommendation 2:** Employers should consider childcare incentives such as allowing infants at work, extended leave time, flexible schedules, and a childcare stipend. (NRPC survey findings and Stay, Work, Play NH recommendation)

#### **Action 4-5: Guide the regional education system toward regional workforce needs**

Matching educational curriculum and training programs with the regional workforce needs is another way to maximize labor availability in the region, as well as provide job opportunities and security to new graduates and young workers. The region should facilitate more partnerships between the business and educational communities.

**Recommendation 1:** Employers, Community Colleges, area high schools and other community partners should enhance and expand existing collaborations to create more partnerships between private businesses and high schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions, including expanding existing apprentice programs such as the program between Hitchiner and Milford High School/Southern NH University and UNH.



Goal 1, Objective 1

**Recommendation 2:** NRPC will explore grant opportunities to fund a plan for regional workforce needs, including identifying the employment and skill needs of the growing industry sectors and innovative clusters in the region.



Goal 1, Objective 1

**Recommendation 3:** Employers, Chambers of Commerce and other community partners should consider providing resources to school counselors on regional workforce needs and available job opportunities and facilitate forums, events, and job fairs that help employers connect with potential employees, including students and parents.



Workforce Attraction & Retention



**Recommendation 4:** Employers, Community Colleges, high schools, and other community partners should collaborate to provide more training opportunities for CNC Machining, Soldering Training and other needed skills to meet the needs of the local manufacturing industry.

### **Action 4-6: Increase the competitiveness and resiliency of the regional economy**

Even with an expanded workforce, the region will have to compete with surrounding regions for qualified workers. The Region should make investments toward a sustainable and resilient infrastructure (of all relevant aspects including transportation, utilities, educational, supply-chain, and human capital) to remain competitive and adaptable to future challenges.

**Recommendation 1:** NRPC will work with community partners to establish a sustainable pipeline of workers among the triangle of business, government, and academia to grow industries.



Goal 1, Objective 1



Workforce Attraction & Retention

**Recommendation 2:** NRPC will work with the Nashua Transit System (NTS), area employers and community partners to seek opportunities for expanding NTS service to large employment centers in communities such as Milford, Merrimack and Hudson to connect more potential workers to jobs.



Infrastructure Development

**Recommendation 3:** NRPC will work with community partners to promote opportunities to diversify the supply chain for businesses in the region.



Goal 1, Objective 3

### **Goal 5: Strengthen the regional retail, service, and hospitality industries that have been particularly impacted by the Pandemic**

While the region's retail, service, and hospitality industries took a significant hit during the pandemic, these industries are recovering but many challenges remain. In addition to the importance of retail and hospitality businesses to the economy, retail and restaurant establishments are essential elements of a vibrant community. The Region should help businesses adapt to the new normal and become more resilient to face future challenges.

### **Action 5-1: Promote flexibility in adapting to new measures**

Sometimes all the businesses need is more flexibility in conducting their business, including fewer restrictions on business operations and greater predictability in regulations and permitting processes.

**Recommendation 1:** Though public health is paramount; municipalities should use restraint in imposing restrictions on business operations such as shut-downs, reduced capacity limits and other similar restrictions. (NHRLA recommendation)

**Recommendation 2:** Local municipalities should pursue ways to streamline permitting and licensure approvals.

**Recommendation 3:** Municipalities should continue to promote, expand, and make permanent allowances and accommodations for outdoor dining, food, and alcohol take-out, curbside pick-up and other accommodations to provide greater flexibility to businesses to respond to changing conditions. (NHRLA recommendation)

### **Action 5-2: Promote innovation and mitigation technologies**

Public health safety is the foremost concern for the retail, service, and hospitality industry under the pandemic. However, mitigation technologies can be expensive even if they are available. With help, quicker adoption of these technologies will strengthen the industry across the region.

**Recommendation 1:** Chambers of Commerce, Community and Economic Development professions and businesses associations such as the *NH Restaurant & Lodging Association (NHRLA)*, should provide access to information on emerging technologies and industry trends and explore opportunities to provide grants and other resources to businesses adopt new technology, such as mobile device ordering, HVAC upgrades, building configurations, and seating changes. (NHRLA recommendation)

**Recommendation 2:** Local municipalities should continue partnering with the hospitality industry and businesses to implement current safety measures and the latest public health guidelines. These efforts should be marketed to patrons. (NHRLA recommendation)

### **Action 5-3: Expand entrepreneurship resources for the retail, service, and hospitality industry in the region**

With several notable exceptions, most of the retail, service, and hospitality industry consists of small and medium-sized businesses which face ongoing struggles to survive the pandemic. Expanding industry-specific entrepreneurship resources will provide critical help to these businesses.

**Recommendation 1:** NRPC will work with community partners to explore the feasibility for shared commercial kitchen space in the region and, if feasible, promote it.

**Recommendation 2:** NRPC will work with community partners to promote solutions to alleviate the supply chain challenges (e.g., buy local).

**Recommendation 3:** NRPC will work with community-based lenders and other partners to explore funding options, beyond banks, with low-interest rates for restaurants.

### **Action 5-4: Improve accessibility to businesses and restaurants in downtown and town center areas**

For many businesses located in downtown and town center areas, access to parking for patrons and employees is a challenge and the cost of parking for lower-wage workers in particular; is a barrier to employee recruitment and retention. Further, many businesses located in neighborhoods outside of downtown areas and major commercial corridors also experience parking challenges. Addressing access to parking would not only help these businesses to flourish but also improve otherwise underserved streets and neighborhoods.

**Recommendation 1:** Municipalities should continually review the supply and distribution of public parking in downtown and town center areas and strive to improve access to parking for patrons through well-defined signage and circulation plans.

**Recommendation 2:** The Region’s Economic Development professionals, Downtown/Main Street organizations and local economic development committees should explore opportunities to establish innovative parking programs to share/lease private parking spaces amongst businesses utilizing spaces at various times of the day in downtown and other density areas where public parking is limited.

**Recommendation 3:** Local municipalities should evaluate the need for, and if necessary, identify opportunities for designated employee parking areas for lower-wage workers at no cost.

**Recommendation 4:** The region’s more urbanized municipalities should consider expanding public on-street and off-street parking for businesses located in denser neighborhoods outside of downtown areas.

### **Action 5-5: Assist Restaurants in Adapting to Changing Dynamics**

Due to a reduced workforce, enhanced safety measures, social distancing, and supply chain issues, restaurants are adapting with the use of technology, menu streamlining, and seating changes. Assisting restaurants with these processes will strengthen their viability in our communities.

**Recommendation 1:** Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development professionals and other stakeholders should work with groups such as the NHRLA to develop educational programs and materials on “best practices” to assist businesses in adapting to changing conditions through increased automation, menu diets, mobile and online ordering, electronic menus and other innovations that can help to reduce staffing demands and respond to supply chain disruptions.

**Recommendation 2:** The City of Nashua Economic Development Office, Regional Economic Development Center (REDC), Capital Region Economic Development Council (CRDC), Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA) and other community and nonprofit lenders should consider developing targeted lending and grant programs to assist restaurants and retail businesses in adopting new technologies.

### **Action 5-6: Promote the Region as a Shopping & Dining destination**

Although the region has long been a destination for shoppers and enjoys a wealth of dining alternatives, there is no common branding or comprehensive marketing strategy designed to attract potential patrons to the region. A coordinated marketing strategy that includes major destinations such as South Nashua and the Merrimack Outlets, the region’s downtowns, and iconic restaurant and retail attractions located throughout the area would help support existing businesses and attract new investment.

**Recommendation 1:** NRPC should work with community partners to obtain funding to develop a comprehensive shopping and dining marketing strategy for the region as part of the overall marketing initiative described in Goal 1.

**Recommendation 2:** NRPC should collaborate with local municipalities, chambers, and local, regional, and state organizations to market the NRPC region as a shopping and dining destination through a variety of media including the Spark website.