



# SPARK

IGNITING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A stylized orange lightbulb icon with short lines radiating from the top, symbolizing an idea or spark.

A Plan for Igniting Economic Recovery in  
the Greater Nashua Region

FEBRUARY  
2022

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction .....	5
High Level Overview of Activities.....	5
Specific Regional Need.....	6
Expected and Actual Economic Benefits from the Project .....	6
Lessons Learned.....	7
Public Input .....	8
UNH Small Business Survey.....	8
Survey Results .....	8
Focus Groups.....	11
Woman-Owned Businesses .....	11
Minority Business Owners .....	12
Entrepreneurs .....	12
Restaurants .....	12
Retail .....	13
Manufacturing and Trades.....	13
Workforce .....	13
Demographic and Economic Snapshot .....	14
Summary, Trends and Recommendations from Industry Experts.....	15
StayWorkPlaceNH .....	15
NHLRA .....	15
Colliers.....	16
New Hampshire Housing .....	17
Opportunity Sites.....	18
Future of the Economy in the Region .....	19
Regional Workforce Needs .....	19
Childcare .....	19
Entrepreneurship Culture .....	19

Retail and Restaurant Businesses .....20

Commercial and Industrial Space.....20

One-stop Website and Marketing Strategy for the Region .....20

Recommendations .....21

Acknowledgements.....31

    Survey Respondents .....31

    Focus Group / Business Owner Interviews.....32

    Steering Committee.....33

    NRPC Staff.....33



Aerial photography by Seth J. Dewey

## Introduction

The COVID-19 Pandemic has had far-reaching impacts to the economy including business losses and closures, job losses, supply chain disruptions and labor shortages. While some of these impacts will be of relatively short duration such as public health related restrictions on business activity, the pandemic may well result in long-term changes in how people work, shop, and interact with one another. Addressing the economic impacts of COVID-19 will require that businesses and communities act strategically to respond to the immediate impacts of the pandemic while adapting to the long-term impacts that will inevitably result. In 2021, NRPC received a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) to undertake a comprehensive economic recovery plan for the 13-community Greater Nashua Region. The plan addresses the impacts of COVID-19 on the region's economy with a particular focus on the heavily impacted retail and restaurant sectors, workforce, entrepreneurship, commercial real estate, and traditionally disadvantaged and underserved businesses. Key components of the project include:

- Data collection and mapping of vacant parcels in targeted areas and key commercial corridors.
- Identification of key development sites in the region.
- Public outreach including surveys and focus groups.
- Strategies to leverage Nashua's two Opportunity Zones, New Markets Tax Credit Eligible Census Tracts, Economic Revitalization Zones, Brownfields, and other target redevelopment areas.
- Strategies to foster and increase support for entrepreneurship.
- Targeted revitalization strategies for key restaurant and retail corridors.
- Workforce development, attraction and recruitment.
- Developing a marketing strategy for the region.

In addition to the plan, this effort has led to the branding of a regional economic development initiative under the new name and logo SPARK. All associated information, resources, and maps will reside on the newly created Spark website. The intent is to build the Spark website as a resource hub for local businesses and entrepreneurs and as an outward facing economic development portal into the region.

## High Level Overview of Activities

NRPC worked with municipal staff and Steering Committee members to identify Opportunity Sites for the most developed communities in the region. These sites include parcels or areas in a community with the highest potential for development, redevelopment and reinvestment. These areas are displayed in a map set showing natural constraints and infrastructure. The Natural Constraints map includes steep slopes, surface water, wetlands, floodplains, and conservation lands. The Infrastructure map shows transportation improvements as well as available sewer and water lines. These maps will serve as a resource for communities, developers and realtors to assist with future development.

This planning effort also included a robust public outreach effort including input from a Steering Committee, focus groups and individual meetings with specific industries, as well as a series of three surveys. This multi-pronged approach provided insights on challenges facing each industry and provided the basis for a detailed set of recommendations, which can be

reviewed in the recommendations section of this plan.

This strong public outreach effort, specifically including input from a Steering Committee, focus groups and individual meetings with specific industries has significantly increased social capital related to economic development within the region. There is a higher awareness of key issues facing entrepreneurs, women and minority owned businesses, as well as the retail, restaurant, trades and manufacturing industries, which are highlighted in the final plan. Additionally, various organizations including chambers of commerce, and local, regional and state government agencies, have a greater awareness of each other's resources, clients, and needs creating more opportunities for joint collaborations.

Lastly, this project included a consultant budget which was used to hire two companies to create a logo, marketing materials and a newly branded website Spark: Igniting Economic Development. The marketing brochure, website and unified branding aims to attract entrepreneurs and economic development to the Greater Nashua Region. As part of this planning effort, we noted the lack of a centralized repository for small business assistance specific to the Greater Nashua Region. The new Spark website will address this with a dedicated page of extensive business resources, as well as testimonials from a handful of local businesses.

## Specific Regional Need

This planning effort aimed to identify key issues facing small businesses in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic. A special emphasis was placed on entrepreneurs, women and minority owned businesses, as well as the retail, restaurant, trades and manufacturing industries, in the region. Early on in the project, workforce was identified as a significant barrier to business recovery and future expansion. Business owners, across industries, noted the lack of available workers was leading to increased wages, reduced hours of operation, and slowed production times. All of which is negatively impacting potential profits. NRPC used this information and developed a robust set of recommendations for future implementation, through a combination of agency collaboration and future grants opportunities.

Although NRPC has affiliations with numerous chambers of commerce and state level business associations, this effort provided opportunities to connect with business owners and leaders at a deeper level and truly understand the challenges they are facing and their goals for business growth. These efforts culminated in a significant increase of social capital amongst the business community in the Greater Nashua Region.

Entrepreneurs and small business needed a central location to find business assistance in the Greater Nashua Region. The Spark website will meet this need and serve as a central repository for resources and connections to other regional, state and federal agencies. The new branding and modern look of the Spark website will also serve as a marketing tool to put the region on the map and attract future businesses to establish operations here.

## Expected and Actual Economic Benefits of the Project

### *Social Capital*

This planning effort was expected to build social capital amongst entrepreneurs, women and minority owned businesses, as well as the retail and restaurant industries in the region. In execution, this aspect of the project was very successful. Our efforts have increased regional collaboration and engagement with groups that NRPC historically hasn't reached. The development and marketing of a series of robust surveys has enabled NRPC to foster and create new relationships with economic development staff, chambers of commerce, downtown groups, rotaries, and local businesses throughout the region. Our widespread marketing efforts have also increased awareness of our agency and planning efforts throughout the region. These efforts

are collectively building social capital within the region as well as strengthening our position within the state. An example of this is a mutually beneficial relationship between the REDC and NRPC to share stories and successes about local businesses and resources between both agencies' social media platforms.

#### *Fostering Entrepreneurship*

The Spark initiative is designed to foster entrepreneurship by providing an online portal for existing businesses owners and entrepreneurs to help them access the information and resources they need to thrive. These include links to the Small Business Development Center, Small Business Administration, SCORE, the NH Department of Business and Economic Development, area chambers of commerce, and other resources as well as access to economic indicators, potential development sites and other important information. Further, the Spark website will be enhanced over time to include additional resources like an on-line "tool kit" for entrepreneurs.

#### *Attracting Investment to Priority Sites*

As previously noted, NRPC worked with local communities and stakeholders to identify and map key development and redevelopment sites in the region. These include sites located within designated Opportunity Zones, New Markets Tax Credit eligible areas, New Hampshire designated Economic Revitalization Zones, Brownfields, and other target sites. Target sites will be featured on the new Spark website together with key information including available financial incentives, utility availability, links to traffic count data and other relevant information to inform investment decisions.

#### *Marketing the Region*

The Nashua area currently lacks a vehicle for marketing and promoting the region to prospective businesses, investors, visitors or residents seeking to relocate. With workforce attraction as one of the area's most pressing needs, promoting the region's employment opportunities, high quality of life and low-tax environment is particularly important. The new Spark website will serve as an enduring tool for marketing the Nashua region to a diverse set of stakeholders to meet our overall economic development goals.

## Lessons Learned

*Stakeholder Input* - The initial plan was to organize a series of focus groups to obtain input from key business owners representing the retail, restaurant, manufacturing and trade industries as well as woman and minority business leaders. However as many industry groups were not holding regularly scheduled events due to the pandemic, it quickly became clear that individual meetings would be a more successful route to have meaningful conversations. After one focus group event via Zoom, we shifted to a one-on-one format with business owners. The input was tabulated collectively for each sector, and the results are reported under focus group input in the plan.

*Flexibility* - Small business owners are extremely busy, so providing an array of options to participate was key. Staff conducted interviews via Zoom, phone, text and in-person meetings.

*Survey Distribution* - NRPC did not have a database of business contacts to distribute the survey to. Instead, we relied upon our partner organizations, Steering Committee members and social media channels to distribute the survey. Of particular value was posting on individual town pages on Facebook. The New Hampshire Department of State maintains a list of businesses and their established date. The data was analyzed and refined to include new businesses established in the last 3 years, retail and restaurant establishments. We then used this list to send a postcard promoting the survey to local businesses and worked with a marketing company to do direct e-mails to a list of 2000 + businesses.

## Public Input

Input from the business community has been a key component of this planning process. This was accomplished through a variety of means including the UNH Small Business Survey, a series of three surveys, one-on-one interviews with business owners and focus groups. The results from these outreach techniques are summarized below.

### UNH Small Business Survey

The Small Business Development Center partnered with the University of New Hampshire Survey Center to develop and implement a three part survey. The survey was conducted in June 2020, February 2021 and October 2022. NRPC partnered with the UNH survey center to obtain region specific results for the second survey. The results are summarized below.

- The goal of the survey was to assess the impact of Covid-19 on small businesses
- UNH Partnered with 56 business organizations to distribute the survey.
- Statewide - 1,611 responses from 174 communities
- Nashua Region - 131 responses from our communities
- Region: Amherst, Brookline, Hollis, Hudson, Litchfield, Lyndeborough, Mason, Merrimack, Milford, Mont Vernon, Nashua, Pelham, Wilton.
- Number of Employees in February 2020 versus February 2021; 13% of businesses have more employees; 43% have the same number; and 43% have less.
- 75% of businesses applied for aid in the Greater Nashua Region vs. 61% outside of Nashua,.
- More businesses expressed a revenue decrease in the Nashua region compared with outside the region. This could be largely due to the strong retail component in Nashua and surrounding commercial corridors, as shown on following page.

For more information: [UNH Business Resiliency Survey - Phase 2 for Greater Nashua Area.pdf \(nashuarpc.org\)](#)

### Survey Results

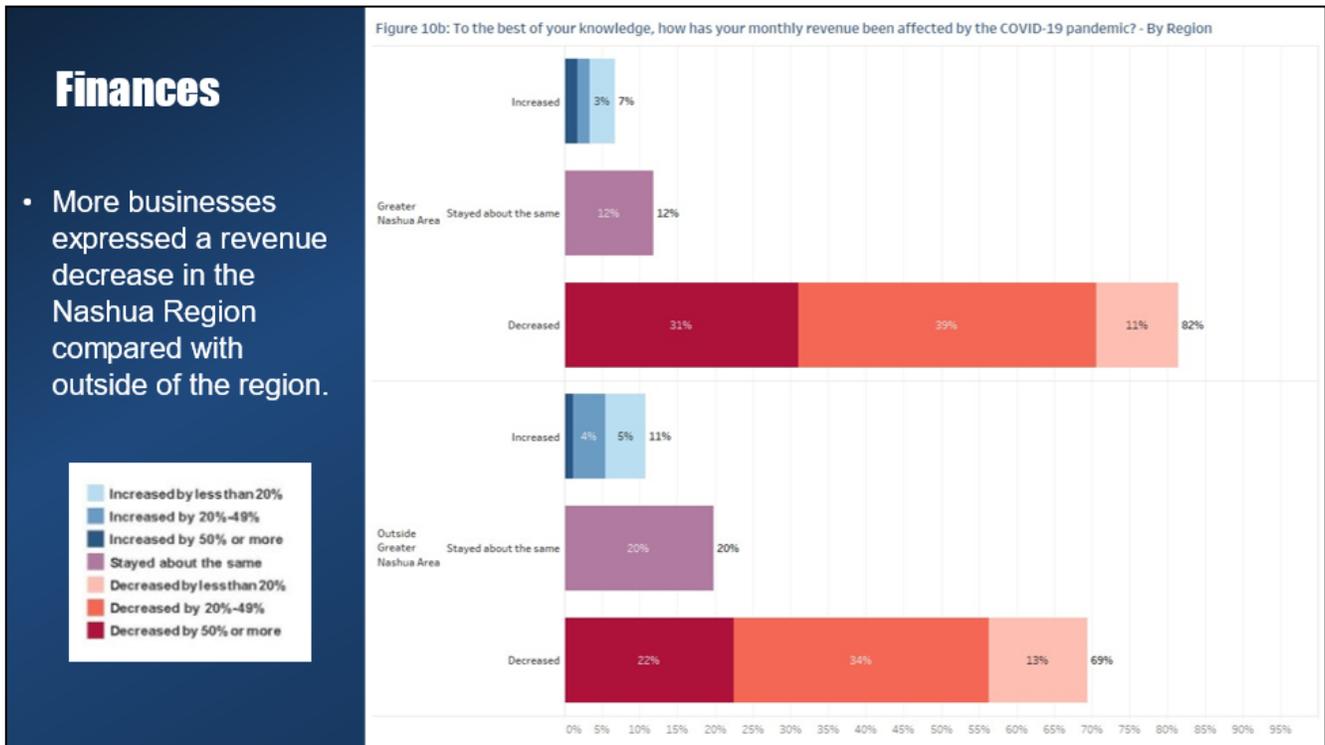
NRPC used the MetroQuest Survey platform to develop and launch the following three surveys: Workforce; Restaurant and Retail; and Entrepreneurship. A total of 100 responses, fairly evenly split between the three, were tabulated and key results are highlighted below. Detailed survey results can be found here: [Survey Results \(nashuarpc.org\)](#)

Regarding workforce, respondents indicated the most effective means of attracting employees is providing on-the-job training, offering higher wages and benefits, and creating part-time opportunities. Businesses were asked to what extent the following items impacted them: transportation, childcare, housing, compensation, and marketability. Parking and proximity to the employee base were more important than alternative transportation. Businesses strongly preferred attracting employees to their location rather than relocating their business closer to where employees reside. Businesses are facing higher wages, to be competitive with industry standards as well as a limited workforce. Higher wages have proven to be more effective than bonuses, in attracting and retaining employees. Additionally, employers are open to offering new incentives to attract employees. Child-care impacts were low to average across the board. Housing impacts were average with location, cost, and stock all roughly equal.

Retail and restaurant establishments indicated that the rising cost of goods, supply chain issues, and employee shortages were the top issues they were facing. Restaurants indicated they have implemented or would consider future implementation of the following: touchless technology; seasonal outdoor dining; seating changes; and new or enhanced takeout. Retail establishments have implemented or would consider future implementation of the following: curbside pickup; direct home delivery; and a mobile app for e-commerce. Both retail and restaurant establishments noted enhanced marketing of the region, employee retention and workplace experience, and enhanced job training would have the most significant impact on their business. Outdoor dining infrastructure has not yet been widely accepted in the region, despite the efforts of the NH Restaurant and Lodging Association to promote this option in the industry.

Entrepreneurs identified the top barriers to growth as financing and funding, workforce competition, and business support services (human resources, IT, taxes, legal, etc.). Most respondents had little or no familiarity with business accelerators, incubators, makerspace and food makerspace. More than half of respondents need assistance with taxes and accounting or insurance matters. Just over half of the respondents have developed a business plan and approximately 75% did not have a business resiliency plan. When asked how respondents would spend money on resources, they overwhelmingly indicated marketing and communications, and to a lesser extent networking, as shown on the following page.

### REVENUE DECREASE IN THE NASHUA REGION COMPARED WITH OUTSIDE THE REGION



## ENTREPRENEUR'S ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

4

### Allocating Resources

i
🗨
➤

Please distribute the budget into the desired services

STRENGTHENING YOUR BUSINESS

You have been given \$100,000 to enhance your business. How would you allocate the money into the following services?

"10" coins = \$10,000  
"1" coins = \$1,000

Click on an "i" button for more information about each item. Not every item requires coins.

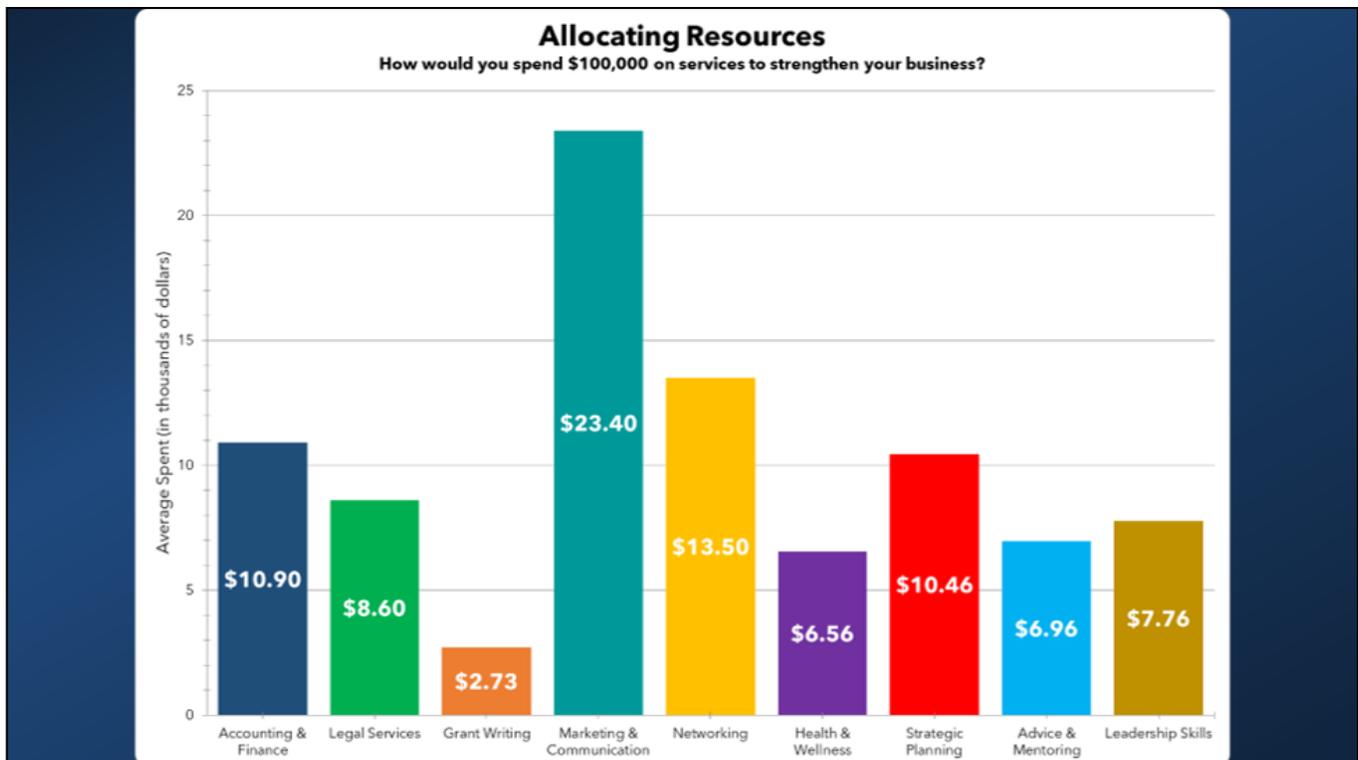


10



90

<span style="font-size: 12px;">i</span> Accounting & Finance   <input type="text" value="0"/>	<span style="font-size: 12px;">i</span> Legal Services   <input type="text" value="0"/>	<span style="font-size: 12px;">i</span> Grant Writing   <input type="text" value="0"/>
<span style="font-size: 12px;">i</span> Marketing & Communication   <input type="text" value="0"/>	<span style="font-size: 12px;">i</span> Networking   <input type="text" value="0"/>	<span style="font-size: 12px;">i</span> Health & Wellness   <input type="text" value="0"/>
<span style="font-size: 12px;">i</span> Strategic Planning   <input type="text" value="0"/>	<span style="font-size: 12px;">i</span> Advice & Mentoring   <input type="text" value="0"/>	<span style="font-size: 12px;">i</span> Leadership Skills   <input type="text" value="0"/>



Excerpted from [NRPC Survey](#)

## Phase 3 Survey

The third survey was conducted in September of 2022, and overall improvements were noted.

- Just over half of respondents reported revenue losses, compared with more than 4 in 5 in June 2020.
- 1 in 4 owners is working without a salary.
- 1 in 5 owners says revenue has increased.
- Two-thirds of the respondents report being affected a lot or some by supply chain issues in 2021.
- 3 out of 4 businesses applied for COVID relief in 2020; just under half applied in 2021 and would apply in the future; 9 out of 10 applicants received PPP.
- Key challenges include maintaining sales or revenue, a resurgence in COVID-19 cases, maintaining customers, supply chain disruptions, and public acceptance of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Employee recruitment and retention remain key issues.
- Businesses are reducing hours, offering remote work, increasing efficiency or automation, offering increased compensation and one-time bonuses.



## Focus Groups

To gain perspective on how Covid-19 has impacted business and anticipated future challenges, NRPC held numerous one on one interviews and a group meeting with business owners. Input was collected from women and minority owned businesses, entrepreneurs, and business owners representing retail, restaurant, manufacturing, and the trades. The consistent message from these business owners is the need for resiliency, hustle, and flexibility to successfully navigate the changing dynamics resulting from the pandemic, while moving their businesses forward.

## Woman-Owned Businesses

Women business owners face unique challenges, as women have been disproportionately impacted by unreliable childcare. Frequent closures due to Covid-19 cases, amongst both staff and children, have led to sudden closures at childcare facilities and repeat quarantine and testing cycles. The lack of rapid testing, unreliable childcare, and continued quarantining for employees and family members have negatively impacted revenue. Women have found it more difficult to obtain funding compared with similarly qualified male counterparts. Women business owners also feel it can be difficult to be respected and taken seriously in the professional world, especially when securing funding, signing leases, and obtaining government approvals and/or permits.

## Minority Business Owners

A number of business owners indicated that the momentum of the Black Lives Matter Movement had actually attracted a larger customer base. They felt this was in large part due to an increased awareness in the larger community and a desire to support Black-owned businesses. However Black business owners still face challenges. One owner noted it can be challenging to “find the space in the room and have access to capital.” Being a Black woman in a primarily white community continues to be a real challenge. One Black business owner noted it was challenging to move past biases. She has more success when white people refer customers to her, than when she does, as an African woman business owner. In fact, part of her business model is breaking down barriers and educating the community about global flavors and her native country. There is interest amongst the minority business community, for the City of Nashua and the greater region to highlight minority-owned businesses, and the diversity they bring to the community. This would provide an extra level of support helping them to succeed. One business, who hires many minority employees, noted the need to better integrate minority groups into the greater community.



## Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs know their area of expertise well, but they expressed a need for assistance learning how to successfully manage a business. Specifically, ensuring compliance with state and local laws and regulations, as well as taxes, human resources, finances, insurance, commercial rental agreements, and legal advice. Many resources exist for entrepreneurs, but it is not always clear where to find or how to access these resources. Business owners noted a need for individualized support from professionals who can provide legal, financials marketing, insurance, and human resource expertise. This region does not have commercial kitchen space or a business center dedicated to entrepreneurs, such as think tanks, business incubators and accelerators, as some neighboring regions do. Many entrepreneurs experienced challenges when trying to secure adequate space, such as not being taken seriously by or having the right connections, or capital to secure the location. Increased financing options to assist with cash flow are needed. Entrepreneurs stressed the importance of spending money and investing in your business to realize a future profit.



## Restaurants

Restaurant owners stated the need for an easily accessible online list of restaurants in the Nashua area. This would both increase the awareness of new and existing restaurants, and facilitate residents supporting local businesses. Parking accessibility can be a barrier for both employees and potential patrons visiting restaurants. This issue disproportionately affects urban and downtown locations where parking is at a premium, or not as visible. Another issue facing urban areas is the increasing homeless population which can deter customers. There are very limited commercial funding options for new restaurants, which often results in high-interest rates or private funding. Restaurants need expanded funding options and access to low-interest loans. The pandemic has led to supply chain issues, increased food prices, and higher wages, all of

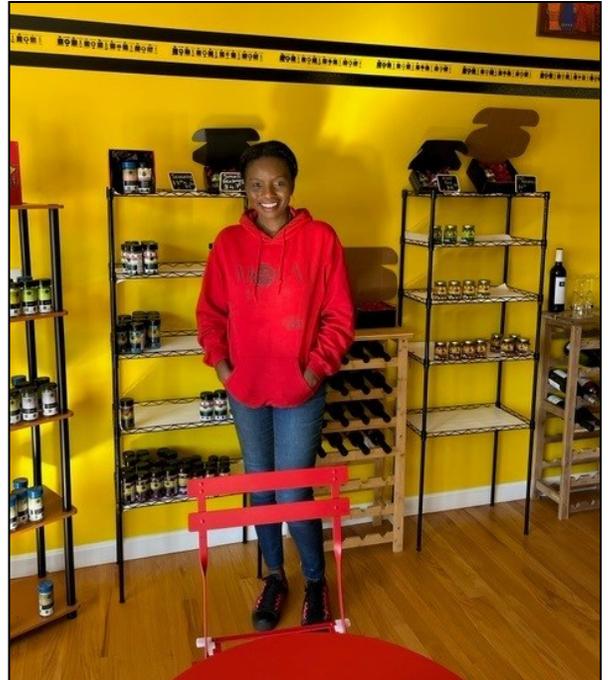
which are reducing revenue. Employee wages have been increased to stay competitive and retain or hire new staff. Limited staff has often led to reduced hours of operation resulting in reduced revenue.

## Retail

Retail establishments are looking for increased exposure to generate a continuous customer base. Reduced foot traffic, especially to in-person tasting events, has led to a lack of cash flow, which in turn has impacted inventory. Many new retail owners start a business as a side hustle in addition to their main income stream. The pandemic has made this a difficult situation to maintain for extended periods of time. Business owners are utilizing Facebook, as it has proven to be an effective and inexpensive marketing tool.

## Manufacturing and Trades

The Greater Nashua Region has a significant manufacturing industry, with a focus on CNC machining. These facilities are facing the same workforce limitations felt throughout the state, with the additional burden of competition with other job sites for workers skilled in CNC machining, soldering, and mold rooms. Lack of skilled manufacturing workers has delayed production schedules. Some manufacturing facilities have seen a reduction in product demand and slowed their hiring in response, while others have experienced an increase in product demand that they cannot currently meet due to staffing shortages. Many manufacturing sites have relationships with local high schools and Nashua Community College. These programs could be expanded to foster a new generation of workers.



## Workforce

Employees are resigning or moving to part-time positions, retiring early, and shifting to new industries. Reductions in the available workforce are having negative impacts across all industries. For instance, restaurants are reducing their hours of operation resulting in a loss of revenue. The lack of workforce housing is a major barrier to hiring retail, restaurant, and hourly positions and is disproportionately impacting small businesses. Whereas workforce housing is much less of a barrier to higher-paying, salaried positions generally found with larger employers in the region. Businesses are getting creative in trying to attract potential employees. One trade business is even offering a “try us out for a day” and get paid, as a way for both the employee and employer to determine if the job is a good fit for both sides

## Demographic and Economic Snapshot

The Nashua Region, like the City of Nashua, is a gateway between the greater Boston metro area and the rest of New Hampshire. The region offers urban, suburban and rural living with convenient access to good-paying jobs, educational opportunities and cultural offerings of the Boston area and while benefiting from a lower cost of living and proximity to the New Hampshire's wealth of outdoor recreational offerings. As can be seen in the chart below, the region's economic and demographic measures such as population density, diversity, and median home value tend to fall in between overall indicators for New Hampshire and metro, median household income in the region is on par with metro Boston due to the large number of commuters to Massachusetts. It is also noteworthy that the region's poverty and vacancy rates are significantly lower than those of both states.

Both employment and business survey data suggest the New Hampshire economy is returning to the pre-pandemic level. However, the data also show the ongoing labor shortage as an obstacle towards a economic expansion.

For more information: [Demographic and Economic Snapshot.pdf \(nashuarpc.org\)](https://www.nashuarpc.org/Demographic_and_Economic_Snapshot.pdf)

 Nashua NH-MA NECTA	Total Population	296,913	 Median HH Income	Nashua NH-MA NECTA	\$94,041
	Total Households	113,968		Boston-Worcester-Providence CSA	\$94,430
	Total Housing Units	118,730		New Hampshire	\$77,933
 Person per square feet	Nashua NH-MA NECTA	617.7	 Annual wages per employee for all industries	Manchester-Nashua, NH MSA	\$71,064
	Boston-Worcester-Providence CSA	854.2		Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH MSA	\$93,087
	New Hampshire	151.9		New Hampshire Statewide	\$66,012
 Percent minorities, excludes Hispanics who identify as white	Nashua NH-MA NECTA	14%	 Poverty Rate	Nashua NH-MA NECTA	4.9%
	Boston-Worcester-Providence CSA	21%		Boston-Worcester-Providence CSA	8.6%
	New Hampshire	10%		New Hampshire	7.3%
 Foreign-Born	Nashua NH-MA NECTA	8.0%	 Median Value of Owner-occupied Housing	Nashua NH-MA NECTA	\$320,800
	Boston-Worcester-Providence CSA	19.2%		Boston-Worcester-Providence CSA	\$482,700
	New Hampshire	6.4%		New Hampshire	\$281,400
 Education (bachelor's or higher)	Nashua NH-MA NECTA	40.4%	 Vacancy Rate, Both owner- and renter-occupied housing	Nashua NH-MA NECTA	4%
	Boston-Worcester-Providence CSA	49.3%		Boston-Worcester-Providence CSA	7%
	New Hampshire	37.6%		New Hampshire	16%

# Summary, Trends and Recommendations from Industry Experts

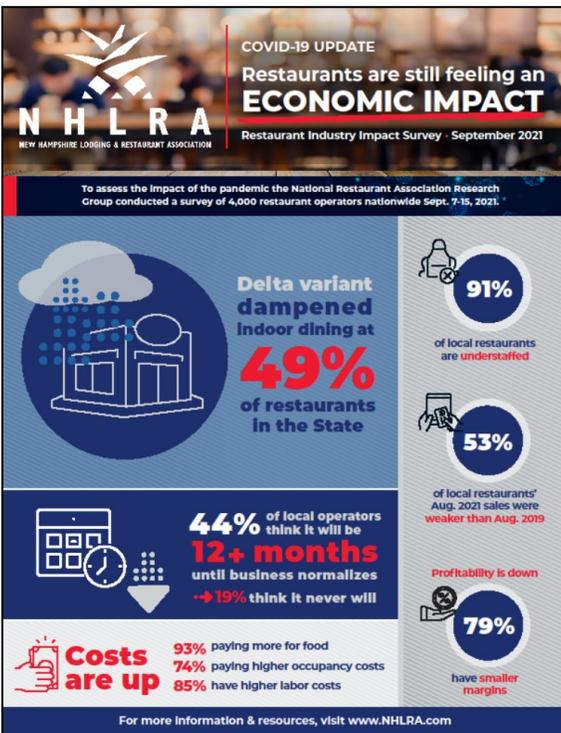
## StayWorkPlayNH

According to StayWorkPlayNH, Young people are either leaving or not moving to New Hampshire, which exacerbates population aging and the shrinking workforce in the state. Various factors are deterring young people in New Hampshire, including limited career and housing opportunities, weak social networks among peers, a high level of student loan debt among graduates, and a lack of childcare, entertainment, and public transportation resources appealing to the younger generation. For the economic and civic future of New Hampshire, government agencies and employers in New Hampshire must tackle these issues, including understanding the interests and challenges of young workers, advocating for them, and helping them to connect with each other.

## NHLRA

The New Hampshire Lodging and Restaurant Association noted that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted the hospitality industry. Fine dining, independent and small lodging, and larger event venues dependent on business events have been hit hardest but quick-service restaurants, wedding and leisure event venues, breweries, and campgrounds have been doing well. While leisure demand has returned and businesses that have survived have

good fundamentals, government and municipal support will continue to be a critical factor in their survival. This is especially true in light of the ongoing labor shortage, supply chain disruption, slow recovery in business travel, and shift in business models, all of which diminish profit margins. Aside from offering greater flexibility to businesses in adopting their business operations, government and municipalities should continue to partner with the hospitality industry to communicate and implement the latest safety measures, provide grants for businesses to adopt technologies and mitigative measures, and adopt affordable housing policies, a major factor in the labor shortage.



Source: Stay, Work, Play New Hampshire, "To stay or to go: Attracting and retaining younger workers in New Hampshire," September 14, 2021



Source: NHLRA Presentation, "The NH Hospitality Industry," November 2021.

## Colliers

Over the past three years, real estate demand for office spaces in the Nashua submarket has generally declined as there was a great jump in vacancy across all office classes. However, demand for Class B office spaces outpaced the other two classes –vacancy rate for Class B office spaces reached 17.1% in 2021 Q3, the highest over the past 3 years, and its asking rates (MG) had steadily increased from \$16 to just over \$19, even rising above the asking rates for Class A spaces since Q1 of 2021. While its sales price PSF is still lower than Class A's, Class B Office spaces saw the most real estate transactions among the three office classes over the past 3 years in the Nashua Submarket. More recent 2021 Q4 data suggests similar trends but with Class A office spaces catching up to Class B office spaces after the loss of a major Class B office tenant in Nashua.

As reflected by a moderate decline in vacancy rates, the demand for industrial spaces had generally increased over the past three years, especially for Warehouse/Distribution spaces. The vacancy rate for Warehouse/Distribution spaces fell from 8%-9% in 2021 to 4.5% in 2021 Q3. Moreover, the asking rates (NNN) for both Warehouse/Distribution spaces and Manufacturing spaces jumped significantly from \$4-5 in 2019 to around \$7.8. On the other hand, Flex/R&D spaces had vacancy rates similar to the 2019 level but saw its asking rates dropping from \$6.8 in 2019 to \$6.52 in 2021 Q3. Nevertheless, all types of industrial spaces saw robust real estate activities over the past three years in the Nashua Submarket. More recent 2021 Q4 data reports an even stronger demand for industrial spaces, with the vacancy rates falling to under 3% in the Nashua submarket.

Note: Nashua Submarket consists of Amherst, Hollis, Hudson, Litchfield, Merrimack, Milford, Nashua; and broken into 6 submarkets:

- Office: Class A, Class B, Class C
- Industrial: Manufacturing, Flex/R&D, Warehouse/Distribution



Source: Colliers, "Nashua Submarket Insight, 2021 Q3" & "NH Office/Industrial Insight, 2021 Q4"

## 21Q4 New Hampshire Snapshot

### Office Market



Vacancy Rate  
**11.2%**



YTD Absorption  
**-381K SF**



Asking Rents (MG)  
**\$19.27/SF**

### Industrial Market

Vacancy Rate  
**2.9%**



YTD Absorption  
**1.1M SF**



Asking Rents (NNN)  
**\$9.14/SF**





Source - New Hampshire Housing, "Housing Dynamics in New Hampshire," November 9, 2021

## New Hampshire Housing

According to New Hampshire Housing, the availability and affordability, of both rental and owner housing, has decreased across the state. The lack of supply remains a big obstacle in relieving the situation, likely caused by a combination of factors including rising material costs, labor shortages, and regulatory barriers to housing development. With renter incomes not keeping pace with rent increases and employers having a hard time in workforce recruitment and retention, the housing crisis has impacted and will continue to impact the state's economic growth and stability.

There is strong demand for housing with upward pressure on price and rents with a large factor in lack of supply. Renter incomes have not kept pace with increases in rents (10% increase in income vs. 22% increase in rental costs between 2015-2019). Potential impact on economic growth and stability due to challenges in recruitment and retention of the workforce, which would ultimately force some employers to look elsewhere.

Median Gross Rental Costs for housing continue to rise. The two-bedroom median gross rent reached \$1,498 in 2021 with a 6% increase from 2020 and 24% over the past 5 years. The median gross rent of all units reached \$1,373 in 2021 with a 7% increase from 2020 and 23% over the past 5 years.

Vacancy rates of residential rental units were almost at their all time lowest. The 2-bedroom vacancy rate is 0.6% in 2021, down from around 3.6% in 2011 and at its lowest in the past 5 years. While the all-units vacancy rate is 0.9% in 2021, down from 3.9% in 2011, and is just slightly above its lowest point in 2019. The rising rental costs and low vacancy rates are observed statewide.

In the NRPC service area, 2-bedroom median gross rent was at \$1,655 and all-units median gross rent was \$1,544 in 2020, both of which grew steadily from 2000 to around 2014, after which the growth accelerated. Vacancy rates for both 2-bedroom and all-units were just under 2% in 2020.

MLS Median Sales Price (for homes) is trending toward \$350,000, a steady increase since bottoming in 2012 at around \$200,000. The price increase between September 2020 and September 2021 was 15%. MLS Housing Inventory dropped to a new low of 2.8 months in 2021, significantly less than the 6 months threshold for a seller's market.

However, the numbers of NH Building Permits were lagging for both single-family and multi-family units. Some impediments to housing development include development costs such as the costs of building materials, workforce availability, land availability and land use regulatory practices and availability of financing.

# Opportunity Sites

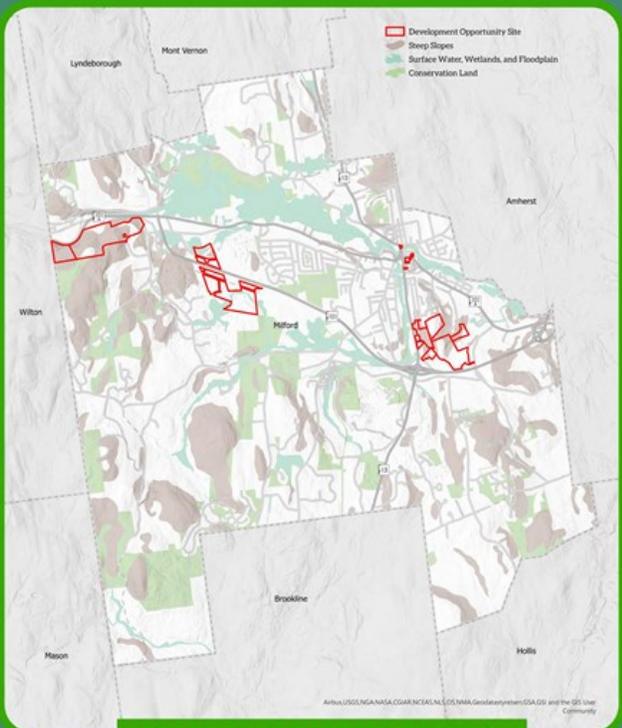
NRPC worked with community staff and Steering Committee members to identify Opportunity Sites for the most developed communities in the region. These sites include parcels, a collection of parcels, or areas in a community with the highest potential for development, redevelopment and reinvestment. Each map set includes a Natural Constraints map and an Infrastructure map. The Natural Constraints map includes steep slopes, surface water, wetlands, floodplains, and conservation lands. The Infrastructure map shows transportation improvements as well as available sewer and water lines. The map set for the Town of Milford is shown below, while the other maps can be found on the Spark website [Nashua Regional Planning Commission: Economic Recovery \(nashuarpc.org\)](http://NashuaRegionalPlanningCommission:EconomicRecovery(nashuarpc.org)). These maps will serve as a resource for communities, developers and realtors to assist with future development.

## TOWN OF MILFORD OPPORTUNITY SITES

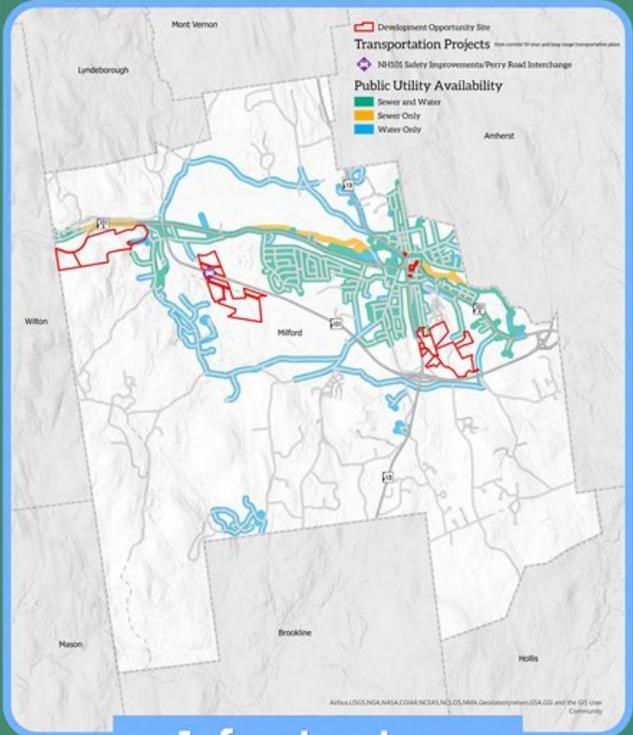
### OPPORTUNITY SITES MILFORD

These sites were selected by community staff and steering committee members as those with the highest current potential for development, redevelopment, and reinvestment.





**Natural Constraints**



**Infrastructure**

Several commercial-zoned parcels in Downtown Milford, including three parcels near the Oval and two former gas stations, offer opportunities for commercial development. The industrial-zoned 31 Savage Road (site off Elm St/Hwy 101) offer a large but hilly development site. Like the downtown parcels, this site is serviced by both town water and sewer. Further east, on both sides of Highway 101 (bypass portion) are several large parcels in the Integrated Commercial-Industrial 2 District. They are relatively flat but not serviced by town water or sewer. While this section of Highway 101 is access-restricted, the Town is planning to add a highway interchange on Perry Road, which will provide convenient access to all of these parcels.

Path: J:\GIS\Projects\2021\EDA Grant\CommunityOpportunitySites.aprx

---

## Future of the Economy in the Region

New Hampshire is a fortunate state that has successfully retained a strong economy during the COVID 19 Pandemic. However, NH is currently feeling the limitations of an extremely low unemployment rate, a shrinking labor force and rising housing prices. These issues are complex and require time for markets to adjust to new conditions in order for steady improvements to occur. This leaves many asking what does the future of the economy look like in NH and is there a new norm?

The Greater Nashua Region is a transitional mix between the Boston Metro area and the State of NH. This region offers salaries that are more commensurate with the Boston Metro area, while housing prices, although still very high, are often significantly less than in Massachusetts. This combination will continue to make the region a desirable place to live. These factors are also placing extreme challenges on employers who are struggling to compete for skilled employees while offering increasing wages and benefits packages. The lack of available and affordable housing is yet another limiting factor that will continue to affect the region for years to come.

### Regional Workforce Needs

Surveys and focus groups results identified that there are various unmet regional workforce needs, especially amid the labor shortage. There are existing workforce training programs and partnerships but they are insufficient, particularly for the trades. While each industry is aware of its workforce need, and there is a statewide workforce planning effort, New Hampshire does not require workforce planning at the regional level, which could inform policy, practice, and funding decisions for regional workforce investment. This is especially important given the limited number of educational institutions within the region.

### Childcare

The lack of affordable and high-quality childcare resources has been a great impediment to parents across the entire country and, by keeping them from work or full employment, is also a contributing factor to the ongoing labor shortage.

According to data from NH-Connections.org, in the State of New Hampshire where the labor shortage is severe, childcare services are particularly lacking in urban areas, which include Nashua, Hudson, Merrimack, and Milford in the NRPC region. Even though there are a good number of childcare providers, both licensed and accredited in these communities, the overall childcare capacity is still significantly below the number of young children needing childcare services. The supply and demand gaps, which reach hundreds of seats in each of these communities, not only leave many parents from accessing childcare services, but also drive up the cost of childcare.

Most interestingly, the childcare service industry faces its own labor shortage, which is causing a downward spiral placing even greater stress on both parents and the overall economy. There is an urgent need for creative solutions to reduce the cost and improve the quality of childcare in the region.

### Entrepreneurship Culture

There is a long history of innovation in the region and many people have taken the initiative to start new businesses in recent years, despite 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.

While the limited number of higher education institutions within the region may be a factor, survey and focus groups in this planning effort have found a high level of independence and self-reliance among the region's entrepreneurs, who learned, tackled challenges, and forged ahead on their own.

Upon further inquiry, most entrepreneurs indicate that they could use assistance in improving and expanding their businesses including marketing, networking opportunities, regulations, taxes, human resources, finances, insurance, commercial rental agreements, and legal advice. Consequently, while many local businesses appear to cope on their own, the lack of such supporting resources limits business expansion, new business formation, and job creation that would have otherwise taken place in the region. Exploration of entrepreneurship assistance models in other regions should be evaluated for our region and include commercial kitchen space, business incubator, and accelerator programs.

### Retail & Restaurant Businesses

The retail and restaurant industry has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. Although some businesses closed during the early days of the pandemic, many more have adapted and evolved to the new climate, strengthening their businesses. Both the State and many municipalities provided various assistance to help their local businesses, including creative dining solutions such as outdoor dining, and more permissive regulations such as allowing take-outs of alcoholic beverages, as well as funneling federal assistance directly to them. With the economy now in recovery mode, this assistance is more important than ever, especially when businesses adjust to the new normal. Moreover, grants and other monetary assistance will be essential as businesses seek to adopt adaptive technologies to become more resilient.



### Commercial and Industrial Space

As noted by Colliers, in the Nashua submarket, real estate demand for office space has declined, as the demand for industrial spaces has increased, especially regarding Manufacturing and Warehouse/ Distribution spaces. With many employees facing long-term remote work, the demand for office space will likely continue to decline. The demands of the existing manufacturing industry combined with online shopping and the need for warehousing, distribution, and fulfillment centers will increase demand for industrial space. Redevelopment of outdated office and retail space will create opportunities for localized warehousing and distribution centers.



### One-stop Website and Marketing Strategy for the Region

The NRPC region does not currently have a one-stop website for economic development, where business opportunities are marketed and resources are shared. Moreover, few people can tell where the region ends and the next one begins, be it toward the Sea Coast, Manchester, Monadnock Region, or even Massachusetts, which are supported by other regional agencies and organizations.

To both attract new businesses and support existing ones in the NRPC region, there needs to be a one-stop website and marketing strategy for region-specific needs and opportunities. In addition to the website, 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. The new website Spark: Igniting Economic Development will serve as a starting point for this effort.

## 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)



HOUSING NEEDS  
ASSESSMENT

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.



HOUSING NEEDS  
ASSESSMENT

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.

## Acknowledgments

Spark: A Plan for Igniting Economic Recovery in the Greater Nashua Region highlights the ideas, experiences and input from a dedicated Steering Committee and business owners throughout the region. Thank you to the staff members, committee members, focus group attendees and business owners who dedicated their time to assessing the impacts of the pandemic and identifying measures for recovery to improve the regional economy.

## Survey Respondents

- Mark Archambault, Convenience Store
- Murray Beaulieu, Boosted Profits
- Candace Brickey, A 1 Professional Cleaners
- Mary A. Brundage, Brundage Home Team
- Margaret Conneely, The Peddler's Daughter
- J Cargil, CGI Corp
- Christopher E Conway, CEJ Computer Business Systems, LLC
- Paul Dell, SportStop.com
- Peter Der Sarkisian, American Railroad, LLC
- Rick Dieterle, Online Retailer
- Jon Eriquezzo, Meals on Wheels of Hillsborough County
- Brigitte Fontaine, GloboComm Consulting
- Dj Garcia, Restaurant
- Jon Garruba, Incubator
- Eric Gibbons, Jolt Electric & HVAC Svc LLC
- Josh Gorveatt, Restaurant
- Kristin Hardwick, Coworking House, LLC
- Scott Harley, Pickers' Paradise
- Nicole Horan, Temporary and Permanent staffing firm
- Ken Koehler, K'sone's Thai Dining & Lounge
- Janette Lopez, Hair salon
- Nicholas Loy, NE Acoustic Sound
- Erika Cross MacDonald, Nashua Soup Kitchen & Shelter Inc
- Sarah Marchant, Remodeling
- Sarah Marchant, Souhegan Valley Tree
- Colleen Island Mateo, Tropical Point Restaurant and Bar
- Adrienne Miller, Gateways Community Services
- Nanci Miller, BodyWorx Therapy
- Jamie Morse, Altitude
- Ryan Pratt, 603 Chiropractic
- Tiffany Remy, kin:pathic
- Rick Roy, Stryx Biotech
- Craig Sarno, Arcus Vapors, LLC
- Brad Siskavich, BluGlass Inc
- Brad Siskavich, xVI Technologies, Inc.
- Karen Steuer, Tangled Roots Herbal
- Zach Touba, Xeutron IT Services
- Bob Waite, Averill House Vineyard
- Cynthia L Whitaker, Greater Nashua Mental Health
- Gregory White, Lamprey Health Care
- Kelli Wholey, Lumina Nashua
- Wilkins Lumber Company

## Focus Group / Business Owner Interviews

- Jeff Babel, Babel Sugar Shack
- Adria Bagshaw, WH Bagshaw Companies
- Michael Buckley, Michael Timothy Group
- Mary Brundage, Brundage Realty Group.
- Rick Carvalho, OakCraft Pizza
- Jennifer Dinovo, Design Works Landscaping and Snow
- LaFortune Djabea, Mola Foods
- Sarah Gallo, Bright Ideas Preschool and Learning Center
- Megan Giokas, Granite Commercial Real Estate
- Kristin Hardwick, Hardwick Photography / Milford Coworking House
- Colleen Island, Tropical Flavors Restaurant
- Shoshanna Kelly, Kelly Creative
- Christiana Lehman, Brookline's Finest, Gracie's Table
- Laura Madison, Realtor
- Jen Matsis, Airmar
- Joe Murray, Fidelity
- Tiffany Remy, Kin:Pathic
- Judy Shenk, Gymnastics Village
- Kendra Smith, Soel Sistas
- Tim Sullivan, Hitchiner Manufacturing Company
- Tim Tenhave, BAE
- Kelli Wholey, Lumina Portraits

## Steering Committee

- Liz Calabria, President & CEO, Greater Merrimack Souhegan Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Tim Cummings, Director of Economic Development, City of Nashua
- Lincoln Daley, Director of Community Development, Town of Milford
- Brian Groth, Town Planner, Town of Hudson
- David Hennessy, Chair of Zoning Board of Adjustment, Town of Pelham
- Wendy Hunt, President & CEO, Greater Nashua Chamber of Commerce
- Jennifer Kimball, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CDES) Planner, Regional Econ. Development Ctr.
- Allison McLean, Community Relations & Economic Development Manager, Eversource Energy
- Steve Michon, Working Cities Manager, Regional and Community Outreach, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
- Andrea O'Brien, Director, Business Sustainability Program, NH Small Business Development Center
- Theresa Pinto, Business Resource Specialist, NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs (BEA)
- Mike Reid, Area Sales Manager, Milford UPS
- Dean Shankle, Town Administer, Town of Amherst
- Paul Shea, Executive Director, Great American Downtown
- Alan Smith, Mall Manager, Pheasant Lane Mall
- Tim Sullivan, VP Corporate Affairs, Hitchiner Manufacturing Company
- Tim Thompson, Community Development Director, Town of Merrimack
- Karon Walker, Vice-Chair of Planning Board, Town of Wilton
- Theresa Walker, Disaster Recovery Coordinator, Rockingham Planning Commission/Regional Econ. Development Ctr.

For a complete list of contributors from the business community, please see page 32.

## NRPC Staff

- Jay Minkarah, Executive Director
- Sara Siskavich, Assistant Director
- Camille Pattison, Special Projects Manager
- Ryan Friedman, Senior GIS Planner
- Caleb Cheng, Regional Planner III
- Kristin Wardner, Administrative Assistant

