

**ALLENSTOWN PLAN NEW HAMPSHIRE
CHARRETTE APPLICATION NARRATIVE
2016**

- 1. How would you describe the community project for which your group or town is asking Plan NH to provide planning assistance? Please provide any appropriate information about the site's or area's geographical location, limits, and historic significance, current uses or unique features. How would the project enhance the health and vitality of your community?**

The project seeks to conduct a charrette for Allenstown portion of Suncook Village to identify strategies for revitalization and economic growth that will support and enhance the community character of Allenstown. It is anticipated that the charrette will explore existing and prospective uses through the lenses of zoning, infrastructure, social forces, community vision, the Master Plan and other perspectives an attempt to understand how the area can realize its highest and best use within the context of Allenstown's community character. It is anticipated that the final charrette document will become part of the Town's official planning framework as it is implemented.

Suncook Village incorporates portions of both Pembroke and Allenstown. This project is to be done in the Allenstown portion of Suncook. The area in question stretches from the Merrimack River in the west, to (approximately) Route 3 in the east. It also stretches from Suncook River in the north, to the area just beyond the Allenstown Elementary School in the south. It encompasses the most densely populated portion of the community, it includes undeveloped land, and surface water/recreational resources. It also contains the majority of the town's infrastructure (sewer, water, natural gas, hydro power). Zoning is primarily high-density residential with a mixed-used, higher-density infill overlay district situated over most of the core. It also includes many community institutions such as a Boys and Girls club, the Town Hall, a church, the Fire Department, both of Allenstown's elementary schools, the waste water treatment plant, recreation fields, and a few businesses. One major aspect of the downtown is that it contains a mill located along the southern shore of the Suncook River. This mill, known as the China Mill, as recently as five years ago employed three shifts as part of 24-hour operations. Today, it is down to one shift, has recently been sold to an out of state holding company, and is expected to cease operations sometime in the near future. China Mill was the impetus for this Plan New Hampshire grant and is a major priority for the charrette process.



There currently are no specific plans or vision for this portion of Allenstown and it is anticipated that this project will help to create such a vision. There are some tools in place (the overlay district, infrastructure, Town Master Plan, etc.) but a better understanding of how development, specifically revitalization, could unfold here is needed. Specific questions that the Town would like to see explored or answered could include:

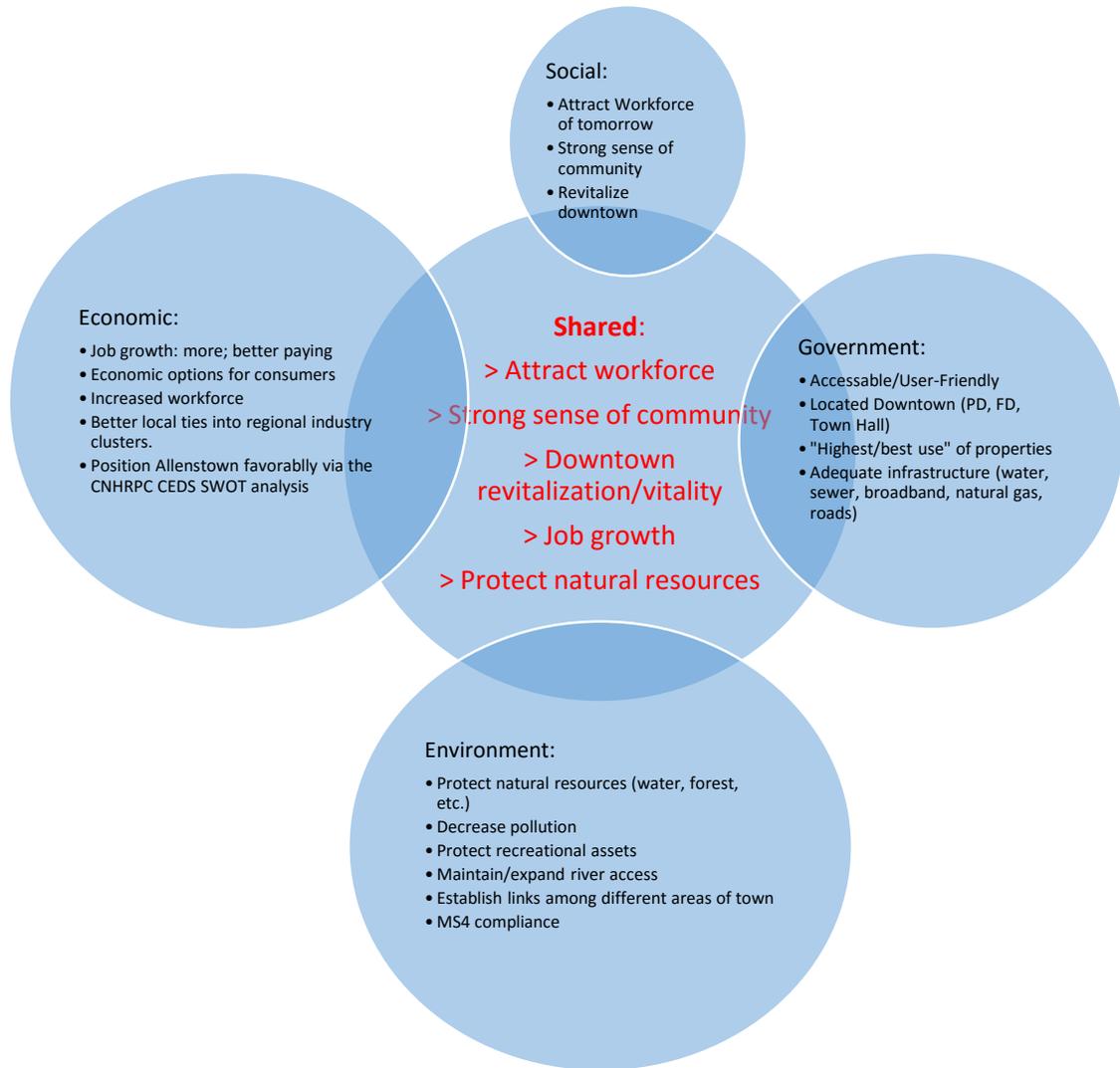
- What is a future reuse of the China Mill?
- Would it be beneficial to expand the boundaries of the Suncook Village Infill Overlay District?
- What are some strategies for balancing competing uses such as the sewer treatment plant, residential uses, institutional uses, schools, commercial, and churches?
- How can Allenstown protect its historic character in Suncook?
- What strategies can improve access to the Merrimack River?
- Are there more infrastructure needs?
- **Overall:** what is the best way to shape redevelopment in the future by taking advantage of today's opportunity?

Following the charrette, the final document could lay the foundation for a village master plan for Allenstown. Marrying the findings of the charrette with the newly minted master plan (adopted March of 2016) could drive the creation of a Suncook Village Chapter for the plan. Taking advantage of opportunities that have currently presented themselves, through a clear planning process, will lead to a reuse plan for China Mill, strategies to balance conflicting uses, and ideas to maximize revitalization efforts in Suncook in such a way that its history is preserved and Allenstown's community character is enhanced.

2. Your town has four distinct, yet inextricably-linked sectors: Social, economic, environmental and governance. What vision does your community have for each of these and what kinds of recommendations (for the target area or project) coming from the charrette process could support these visions?

Allenstown recognizes that these four sectors are inextricably linked. While each sector may have its own vision components, many of them overlap and are shared. In an effort to

understand this better, some of the vision components of each sector are tracked below. Each of the four circles captures the high-level components from each sector. The circle in the middle, in red, tracks a summary of those factors that are shared by each sector.



3. What forces of change are occurring in your community that will need to be taken into consideration during the process?

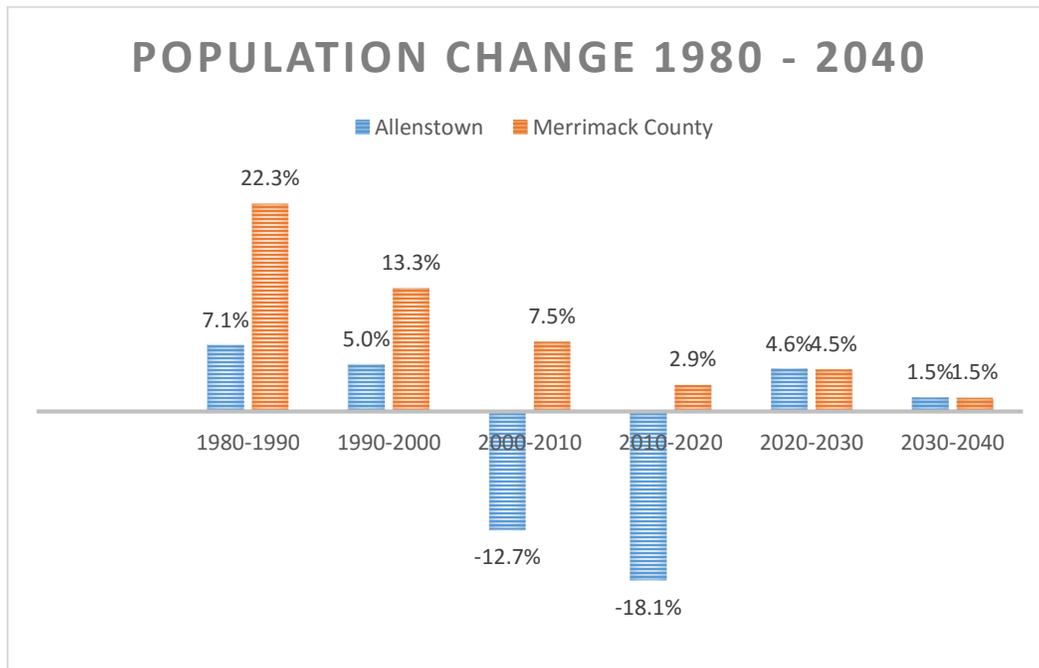
Several forces are impact Allenstown’s socio-economic makeup. These forces, captured in US Census and US Census ACS data between 1980 and 2014, as well as the CNHRPC/SNHRPC CEDS and State of New Hampshire data and depicted in figures below present two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, they can be seen as challenges to contend with, while on the other hand they present opportunity. Allenstown recognizes the need to see these forces as both challenges and opportunities. As challenges, Allenstown seems to be a community with an aging population in decline and struggling economically. But, in terms of opportunity, Allenstown is a community with room to grow that is actually younger than the County that has weathered the Great Recession and has less poverty than the County. Further, its geographic location and economic assets lend itself to growth and development. Allenstown, in short, has

been impacted by the economic struggles of the past and is now positioned to grow in the future.

Population

Allenstown, like much of central and southern New Hampshire, saw a population expansion in the 1970's, 1980's, and the 1990's. Between 2000 and 2010, the population had declined. This can be attributed, among other things, the Great Recession as well as storm events that destroyed homes and drove people out of Allenstown. Further, New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning population projections show Allenstown continuing to decline until about 2020 where modest growth can be expected similar to that of the County. This suggests that Allenstown is a community in decline. Population has, in fact declined historically and is projected to do so into the future.

While population decline - both as a past trend and as a future projection - suggests significant challenges for a community, it is also representative of opportunity. The New Hampshire Department of Education data suggests that Allenstown now has a classroom size of approximately eight or nine students to every teacher. Further, Allenstown has, according to 2014 US Census ACS data, a 1% vacancy rate in its housing stock over all. A more accurate description of Allenstown might be that there is balance - maybe even a need - between population and housing. It also suggests that the school system can absorb many more students. To that end Allenstown seems more like a destination for future residents which will make up the workforce of the future.

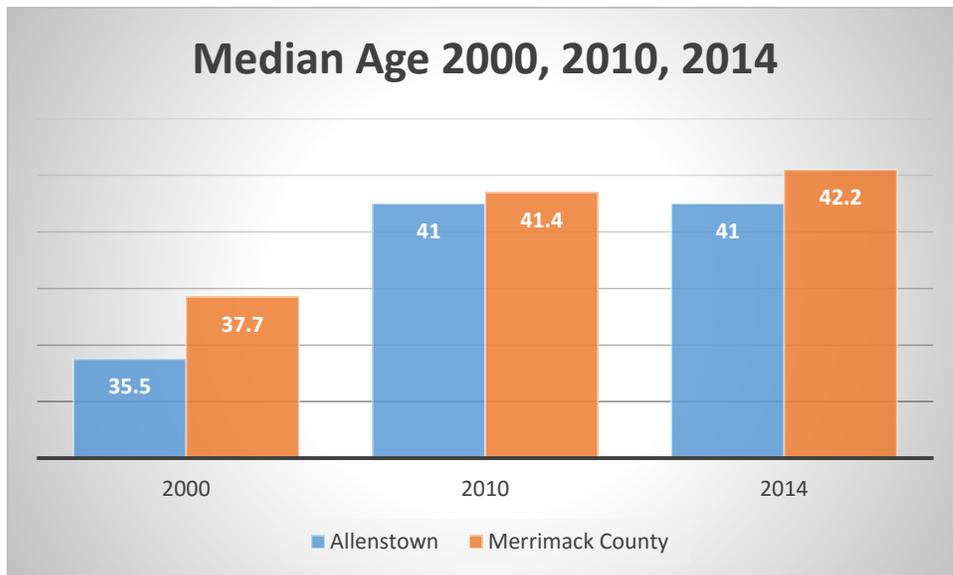


Median Age

Allenstown, like the County, Region, and the State, has seen its median age increase over the years. Allenstown saw its median age increase by nearly six years between 2000 and 2014. The significance of this is that this, coupled with a decrease in population, suggests that there could be a workforce shortage in the near future. This becomes a significant problem from an

economic development standpoint as not only does a business have difficulty finding employees, but there is also a decline in innovation and people willing to start businesses.

Looking at median age as an opportunity for Allenstown and a couple things come to mind. First, Allenstown, continues to be about a year younger than the County. Additionally, the median age of 41 is consistent with those in the prime of their working years. These are members of the workforce that are experienced and highly trained. Opportunity then stems from attempts to keep a strong workforce in town now and into the future. Given that as time moves on, a skilled workforce will be more in more demand, Allenstown should position itself to take advantage of this opportunity. Policies that support education and bring in more families will be key to this.



Per Capita Income

In terms of Per Capita Income (PCI), Allenstown lags behind that of the County. Allenstown has traditionally seen a PCI between 76% and 82% of that of the County. This suggests that Allenstown is less well off than the County as a whole and there may be less capital and disposable income available. It also speaks to a need for more well-paying jobs.

It is important to note that opportunity exists here as well. Allenstown, though traditionally experiencing a PCI less than that of the County, has seemed to weather the storm of the Great Recession better than the County. In each year from 2010 to 2013, the PCI of Allenstown has increased at a greater percentage than that of the County. In 2014 the County grew slightly more than the Town. A growing PCI suggests that although people may not be as well off as the County, their incomes may be more stable. While it may not suggest capital for investment, it may suggest disposable income that could be used locally. Buying locally can help reinforce local incomes and build local wealth.

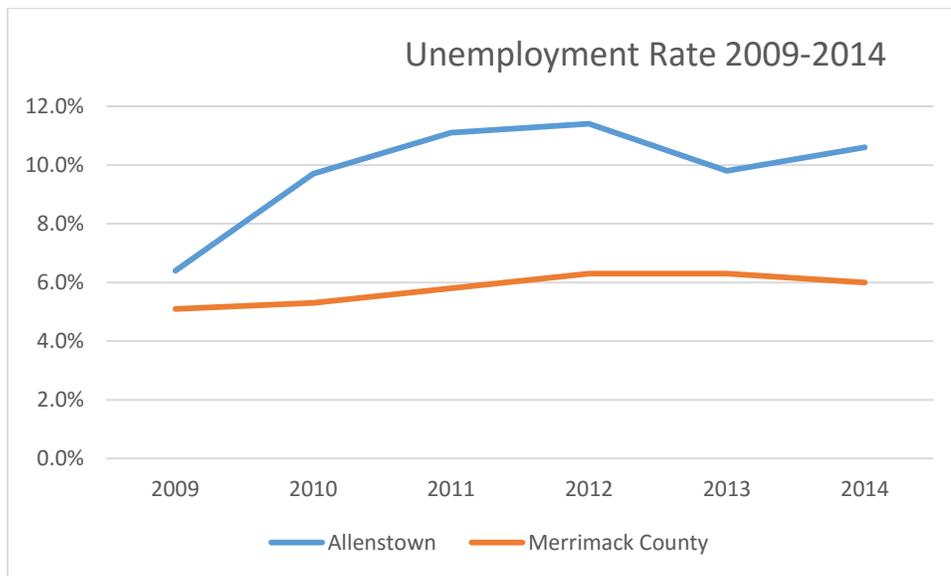
Allenstown as % of County	2000	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Allenstown	\$18,851	\$22,649	\$23,606	\$25,057	\$25,092	\$25,544	\$25,719
Merrimack County	\$23,208	\$29,699	\$30,544	\$31,403	\$31,355	\$31,310	\$31,579
Allenstown PCI as % of County PCI	81.2%	76.3%	77.3%	79.8%	80.0%	81.6%	81.4%

% Change in PCI	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Allenstown	4.2%	6.1%	0.1%	1.8%	0.7%
Merrimack County	2.8%	2.8%	-0.2%	-0.1%	0.9%

Unemployment

The unemployment rate is a key indicator of economic distress. In Allenstown, the unemployment rate has been high since the Recession. It is also significantly higher than that of the County. This challenge suggests that jobs are needed.

The unemployment rate becomes an opportunity in that, when coupled with the median age, it suggests that there is a ready, willing and able workforce in Allenstown right now. This can lend itself to business development. Targeting and attracting the appropriate industries (“growth industries,” regional industry clusters, and businesses that “fit” Allenstown’s character) becomes a short-term way to capitalize on Allenstown’s workforce.

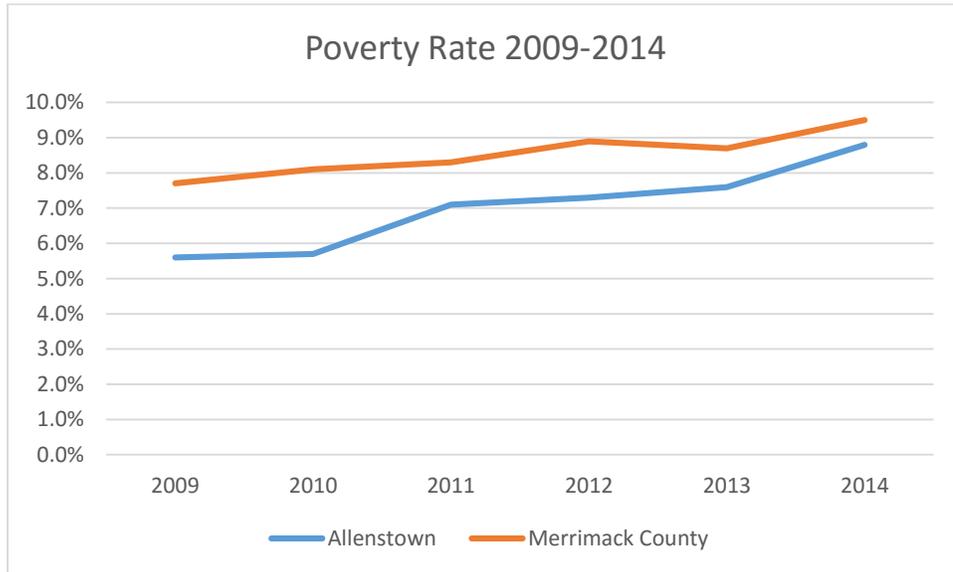


Poverty Rate

Like the County, Allenstown has seen a steady increase in the poverty rate since 2009. This suggests the presence of incomes that do not support the cost of living and that more and better paying jobs are needed. One possible cause for the increase in poverty could be an

increase in the overall cost of living despite an increase in the Per Capita Income over the past few years.

A positive in looking at the poverty rates of both Allenstown and the County will show that Allenstown's poverty rate is less than that of the County. More and better paying jobs in Allenstown would not only help the community, but the County as well.



Industry Clusters

Industry clusters represent those industries which a community should target due to their regional importance. When a community can tie into, or enhance connections with regional industry clusters, its economy becomes more stable and more prosperous. According to the 2012 Industry Cluster Analysis done by Camoin Associates for Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission, there are several four clusters that have been identified (excluding the Government industry cluster) for the Central NH Region. Those clusters are:

- Business & Financial
- Medical Services
- Arts & Entertainment
- Information Technology

For Allenstown, six of the fifty largest employers are part of these clusters. The six businesses are part of the Medical Services cluster, the Information Technology cluster, the Business and Financial cluster, and the Arts and Entertainment cluster (Bear Brook State Park). More businesses in Town should be tied to these clusters and this represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Capitalizing on Allenstown's location could be part of such a strategy (Bear Brook as well as being close to 1-93 and at the intersection of Routs 3 and 28 for instance) as well as understanding where best to site these businesses within Allenstown. Also, understanding how to scale these clusters to Allenstown's community character is important as well.

Regional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

The Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission, along with Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission, created a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Central NH Region as well as 5 towns located in SNHPC's region. Part of this process was to conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The SWOT was done from the regional perspective and it is most effectively used locally by a community that understands how to position itself regionally in relation to the SWOT findings. A community that can capitalize on regional opportunities and present local solutions to regional weaknesses or threats can be well positioned for growth. Conversely, a community that does not exhibit local strengths, could experience barriers to growth that other communities do not. The findings of the SWOT suggested the following:

- Major Strengths included: Labor availability/educated workforce, highway access, natural environment.
- Major Weaknesses/Threats included: Broadband/communication, few amenities, infrastructure limitations, no research university.
- Major Opportunities included: Local school and business involvement, cross marketing, available sites, website improvement/access to development information.

One thing to note: the aging population was not identified in the analysis as the SWOT was completed in 2012. Median age has increased since then and much regional demographic analysis has identified this as a major issue. As such CNHRPC/SNHPC will soon update the CEDS and the SWOT to explore this in more detail.

For Allenstown, there are ties to many of these findings. In terms of strength, Allenstown meets all of the criteria listed above: the workforce is available and experienced; it is located at Rts 3 and 28, between Manchester and Concord, and close to I-93; and, Bear Brook State Park provides a recreational asset that few towns can match. Coupled with access to the Merrimack and Allenstown seems to capitalize on all of the region's strengths.

With regard to Weaknesses and Threats, Allenstown offers solutions to some: Suncook readily has available infrastructure for development including sewer, water, hydro-power and natural gas. Broadband internet access exists, though its extent needs further exploration.

In terms of opportunity, Allenstown can capitalize on all of these assets and is already pushing forward on one: internet presence. Allenstown is in the process of converting all of its application processes online, and, coupled with the presence of its development information, approvals are efficient in the community.

Lastly, Allenstown is well positioned to capitalize on the region's declining and aging workforce now and into the future. The ability to attract working families via the school system, geographic location, and recreational opportunities is unmatched. This will provide the foundation for the development of tomorrow's workforce and a prosperous Allenstown, and is also a prominent goal in the 2016 Master Plan.

Summary of Forces of Change

In summary, the forces of change in Allenstown place the community at a cross roads. Many challenges exist, both demographic (an aging population that is in decline) and economic (weak

industry cluster ties, lower incomes, increasing poverty and unemployment that is higher than the County average), but so too are many positives (a workforce younger than the county, a skilled workforce, increasing incomes and the presence of many of the SWOT's strengths). The collective impact of all of these forces of change is that Allenstown is positioned to strengthen its ties to the regional industry clusters, and, to attract the workforce of tomorrow. Further still, both of these approaches are detailed in the Town's newly drafted Master Plan.

- 4. Just as the four sectors (above) are interwoven, different sections of your community are also inter-related. Looking at your target area/project, what influence might it have on other parts of town, and how do other parts of town affect this area? Further, does this target area have any influence or impact on your bordering towns, or do they have any influence or impact on this target area/project or your town in general?**

Suncook Village plays an integral role in both Allenstown as well as neighboring Pembroke. It vitally influences both communities. Further still, there is potential for greater influence. The charrette will help to not only reinforce current influences with the rest of Allenstown as well as Pembroke, but to increase them as well.

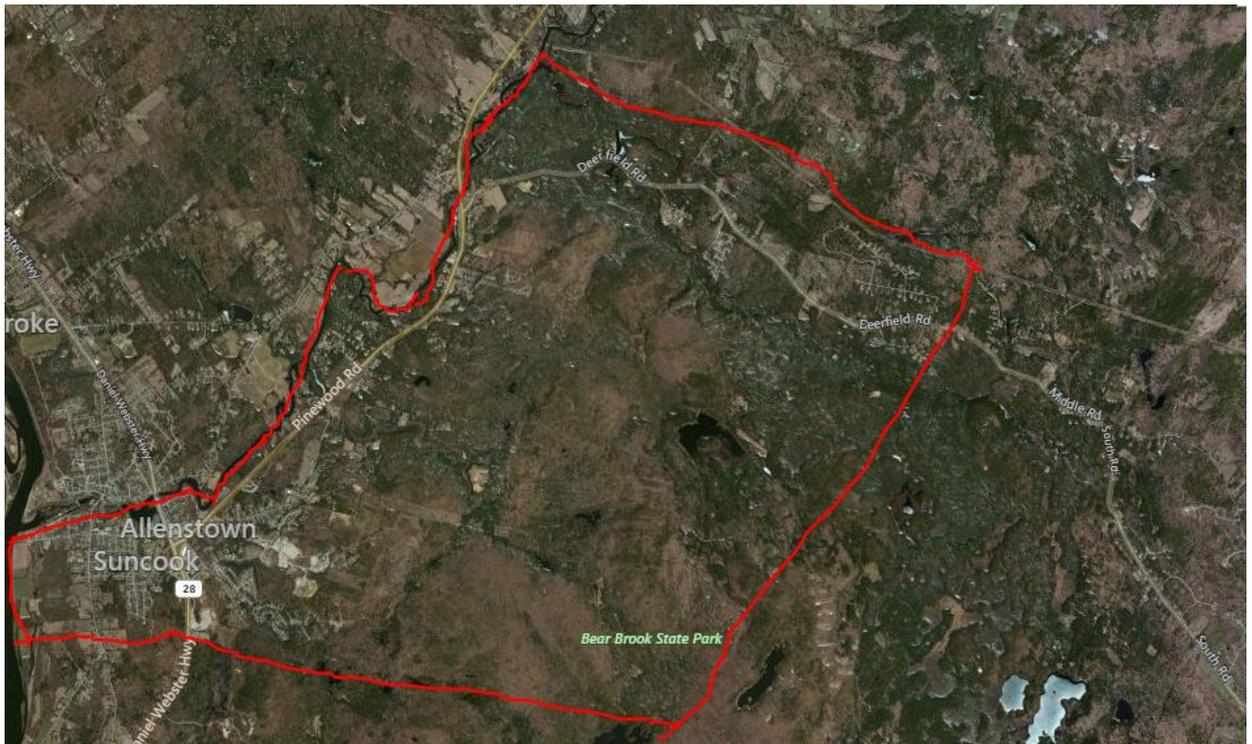
The downtown villages of both Allenstown and Pembroke share the name "Suncook." Further still, the United States Census estimates the population for "Suncook" in its population estimates. In 2014, US Census ACS estimated that 5,017 people lived in Suncook. During the same period ACS estimated that 4,303 people lived in Allenstown and 7,121 in Pembroke - a total of 11,424. Looking at Suncook's population as a percentage of both towns and about 43% of both communities live in Suncook. Although ACS doesn't break down the population share of Suncook per town, taking Allenstown's percentage of the combined population of both towns - 38% - and applying that to the Suncook population and possibly 1,890 people in Suncook live in Allenstown. This represents 38% of the population of Suncook, and 44% of Allenstown.

Relationship With the Rest of Allenstown

Allenstown's community character has always been defined by two things: Suncook Village and an abundance of natural resources (Bear Brook State Park and farming). Suncook has always been the urban heart of a very rural community. The physical and social ties run deep. The village contains much of the community's municipal and social infrastructure and resources. Town Hall, Police and Fire Departments, Churches, Schools, and community organizations like the Boys and Girls Club are just some of the social resources that are physically located in the village. Much of the physical infrastructure in town such as sewer lines, water lines, the waste water treatment plant, and natural gas service are all located in Suncook. Housing stock is another major feature the village provides Allenstown as a significant portion of the community's residents live in and around Suncook. Lastly, the village has historically served as Allenstown's commercial hub. The mill and surrounding industries have provided employment opportunities and commercial options to Allenstown throughout its history, though today, the economic base has declined. In short, as the more urban area Suncook has historically provided jobs, homes, and physical infrastructure for the community while vast natural resources provided recreation opportunities and places for farming. Allenstown is the interrelationship between its village and its more rural areas.

Despite these strong historic relationships in the past, there has been some transition away from the village in the last 25 years or so. Commercial opportunity has moved slightly to the

east, more along Routes 3 and 28. Newer residential areas have been in the rural and undeveloped areas in the north east corner of Town. The village itself has seen decline - physical, economic, and social. In the face of this there exists excellent opportunity to strengthen connections more along the lines of Allenstown's past. First, the fact that much of the municipal and social infrastructure remains in Suncook is significant. Described in the preceding paragraph above, these assets bind the community together and create *destinations* in the village. The charrette then, could build upon this by identifying other strategies to make the village more of a local destination. One way is to explore the potential for better recreational access to the Merrimack River. This would not only strengthen the interconnectedness of the community, but would also help Allenstown tie into the Recreation industry cluster. Another opportunity is to identify commercial and/or residential reuse options for the mill. Lastly, exploring other appropriate commercial opportunities in the village (restaurant, coffee shop, etc.) may further this connection as well. In short, the charrette represents an opportunity to identify other village destinations that can further strengthen the sense of community as it once was while taking advantage current opportunities and meeting the community's needs.



Relationship With Pembroke

Suncook was settled on both sides of the river in an attempt to harness the hydro power of the Suncook Falls as well as the Merrimack River. Mills sprung up on both sides and industry took off, anchored by the textile industry. Both Allenstown and Pembroke grew as Suncook prospered. It was the center of both Towns, and as it was a major population and commercial center between Manchester and Concord. Suncook even developed its own railway, the Suncook Valley Railroad. Today, Suncook retains its residential base and some industry but it has seen decline over the years. Much of the commercial base is located on the Pembroke side of the river and the effect of this is that it seems that the Pembroke side retains more vitality than

does the Allenstown side. Additionally, Suncook shares infrastructure as well. Most notably the natural gas line and the Allenstown Waste Water Treatment Plant and its associated sewer system. Though the plant is located solely in Allenstown, its functionality impacts all of Suncook and both towns. Lastly, transportation systems link the two. Main Street is the main thoroughfare through Suncook, and it links both sides via a bridge. Cumulatively, Suncook links both communities, and though decline has been felt on both sides, Pembroke has fared better than Allenstown.

Just as there exists opportunities to strengthen connections between Suncook and the rest of Allenstown, so too are there opportunities to strengthen the relationship between the Allenstown side of Suncook with the Pembroke side - and beyond. By increasing the number and type of destinations on the Allenstown side, and by identifying potential uses for China Mill, and by identifying appropriate commercial uses elsewhere in Allenstown's share of Suncook, all of Suncook becomes more of a destination. Businesses on both sides benefit. Activity increases in "Suncook" as a whole, and the Allenstown side of Suncook is able to "catch up" to the Pembroke side. This reinforces Suncook's identity, revives its more historic setup, and draws both communities together. In short, revitalization on the Allenstown side improves Suncook as a whole, which provides benefits and stronger connections between both towns.

