

Nature Supports a Vibrant Downtown Economy

Nature Economy Info Brief - June 2022

New Hampshire downtowns, village centers and town squares are filled with components of a vibrant economy. This includes historic buildings, local businesses and organizations, schools, sidewalks, bustling traffic and transportation options, and theaters to name a few. Nature and natural assets are another feature of a downtown economy.

There are many definitions of nature, and they can vary based on the user or situation. To some, it can mean the entire living world, to others can it be natural scenery and ecosystems or habitats that benefit humans

and other species. To many, they may not be able to specifically define it but know it when they see it.

In this brief we share some examples of where nature can be found or added to a downtown and then how it can enhance a community's economy. To visualize this, we created an example of a downtown or town center that could be found or enhanced in a typical community in New Hampshire. Starting in the upper left corner, we see how a potential business can integrate with a downtown and natural assets such as a river and trees and also be close to housing.



Folks are recreating in the river and as we move to the bottom left corner we see an amphitheater that is built into the river bank, ideally with natural materials such as wood and/or stone. That area also includes space to picnic and a public dock for accessing the river. This natural space blends into another mixed use area to right with retail, potentially town buildings such as town hall and library and office spaces. Crossing the road to the lower right quadrant we see a brewery (which are becoming key components to many communities that benefit from nature). The river floodplain can be a natural flood retention opportunity and in the upper right hand corner we see a continued river walk and wildlife viewing opportunities. Nature can provide great opportunities to keep people in the community when visiting, which can then lead to more spending in the town. This also improves quality of life for locals and potential entrepreneurs.

Expanding upon the river as a focal point of the downtown, here is a bit more on the potential for rivers supporting economic development:

Rivers: Many communities have a river running through it and have formally been a mill town that relied on the river for power and for waste dispersion. As communities move from former mill towns to, potentially a river town, focusing on river related economic opportunities can be a path to prosperity. This can be a resource for adding recreation and also business opportunities and spaces for health, well being and even art (via a river front amphitheater or park).

In Town Trails: In Town Trails, such as community trails, river walks, historic paths, and accessible paths in local community forests are all opportunities to provide access to nature in a more developed setting. They are also important focal points for visitors and residents and can keep people in town longer with more opportunity for supporting local businesses.

Steps communities can take to foster more access to nature

Actions can range from small to large and don't always have to take a lot of planning and funding.

- Adding plantings or window boxes to downtown businesses or public spaces
- Encouraging economic development committees and conservation commissions to regularly meet and connect
- Highlight access to an in-town trail system or work to make connections between existing trails and downtown housing or local neighborhoods
- Build a riverwalk or riverside park
- Encourage businesses and organizations to work in partnership with town officials to utilize the outdoors through seating, trails and events



References

[Downtowns and Trails Info Brief](#)

[Rivers and Economic Development Research Brief](#)

[The Nature Economy Collaborative](#)

[Craft Breweries and Community](#)

Learn More

[Nature Economy - Downtowns and Trails](#)

[10 Minute Walk](#)

[Natural Capital Project](#)

[Collaborative Research Excellence - CoRE Initiative](#)

About the Author

Shannon Rogers, Ph.D., serves as the State Specialist of Nature Based Economic Development on the Community and Economic Development Team.

Dr. Rogers is also an Associate Extension Professor in the Natural Resources & Environment Department at UNH. She is on the Board of Granite Outdoor Alliance. Along with Drs. Cat Ashcraft and Jayson Seaman, she is leading the Nature Economy Collaborative. Members of the Collaborative are working on ideas related to this info brief and include Molly Donovan, Cody Crytzer Scott Crowder, Alex Drew, Tyler Ray and Drs. Charlie French, Scott Lemos, Rob Roberston, & Mike Ferguson.

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