

Ashby Sustainable Economic Development Plan



Prepared by: Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
(MRPC)

In collaboration with the Town of Ashby Economic Development Committee and
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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	7
Structure of the Plan	7
Introduction and Historical Background.....	7
Citizen and Stakeholder Participation	7
Current Conditions	7
Conclusion and Recommendations.....	8
Goals, Objectives, and Policies.....	8
Implementation Plan and Matrix.....	8
Funding	8
Relationship to Other Local Planning and Policy Initiatives	9
Mission, Vision, Goals, Objectives and Policies	9
Mission Statement.....	9
Vision Statement.....	9
Goals, Objectives and Policies.....	10
General Principles Guiding Sustainable Economic Development in Ashby	11
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	11
Kick-off Meeting	12
SWOT/Visioning Meeting.....	12
Economic Development Survey.....	17
Results from Online Survey	17
Regional Small Town Rural Economic Development Workshop.....	21
DEMOGRAPHICS	21

Population 21

Age 23

Household Makeup..... 24

Education 24

Income 26

Labor Force 27

Work Travel..... 30

Business Inventory..... 30

 Farming..... 30

 Construction.....31

 Manufacturing.....31

 Retail Sales.....31

 Transportation 31

 Services..... 31

 Analysis of Existing Businesses 31

Tax Base 32

Market Population..... 33

 Market Segmentation.....33

 Green Acres..... 33

 Sophisticated Squires 34

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... 36

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 44

Appendices 54

A.Kick-Off Meeting Agenda and Minutes.....54

B. Ashby Sustainable Rural Economic Development Plan Public Visioning Session Report 55

C. Ashby Economic Development Survey Report 56

D. Regional Small Town Rural Economic Development Workshop Agenda 57

E. List of Businesses in Ashby with NAICS Code..... 58

F. List of Parcels in Ashby with Valuation 59

G. ESRI Retail Goods and Services Expenditures 60

H. List of Past and Upcoming Festivals in the Surrounding 50 Mile Radius around Ashby..... 61

I. The Ashby Assistance Opportunities Report..... 62

J. Ashby’s Existing Zoning Map63

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List of Tables

	<u>Page</u>
Table 1: Ashby's Population over Time	22
Table 2: Population over Time in Ashby and in Comparable Towns	22
Table 3: Population Projections for Ashby and its Comparable Towns	22
Table 4: Median Age in Ashby and its Comparable Towns	23
Table 5: Ashby Age Range Compared to the State	23
Table 6: Ashby Age Children and Senior Citizens Compared to the State	24
Table 7: Household Make-Up in Ashby, its Comparable Towns and the State	24
Table 8: Education in Ashby, its Comparable Towns and the State	25
Table 9: Enrollment at Montachusett Regional Vocation Technical School	26
Table 10: Income for Ashby, Comparable Towns, and the State	27
Table 11: Household Income Range in Ashby, Comparable Towns, and the State	27
Table 12: Ashby Labor Force, Employment Numbers and Unemployment Rate over Time versus the Unemployment Rate for the State	28
Table 13: Ashby Business Establishments and Average Monthly Workers from 2001 to 2009	29
Table 14: Number of Establishments, Average Monthly Workers and Salaries by Industry in Ashby and Comparable Towns – 2009	30
Table 15: Work Travel Data for Ashby, its Comparable Towns and the State	31
Table 16: Tax Rate Ashby and Comparable Towns by Dollars/1000	31
Table 17: Taxes Levied By Class in Ashby and Comparable Towns 2010	34

INTRODUCTION

Ashby's Sustainable Economic Development Plan identifies Ashby's vision, future goals and objectives for the economic development of the Town. It proactively focuses on the supporting local economy's ability to adapt to changing conditions. The Plan links goals for physical development of the Town with economic policies to ensure prosperity within the capabilities of the local government to shape its fiscal destiny. Ashby is affected by the larger regional, national and international forces beyond its control. Economic Development policies in this document have been considered within the context of Ashby's place in the region and nation.

The plan provides a framework to coordinate efforts to ease the effects of the larger economy and its cyclical upswings and downturns on the residents and businesses in Ashby. For Ashby to be more sustainable and self-reliant to buffer these effects, it also seeks to create a local economy that is more resilient and self-sufficient by building on existing strengths and developing economic sectors that fit in with the local culture and goals for how the community should develop and prosper. Such an economy must also provide a living wage for citizens and tread lightly on the natural environment so its bounty can sustain the community for the long term. The plan must establish a set of proactive policies that will directly address all of these objectives.

Structure of the Plan

Introduction and Historical Background

This plan is structured similarly to traditional comprehensive plans with a brief historical sketch of the community noting its development from founding to the present day. This describes how the economy has progressed from an agricultural outpost far from the colonies through the present day as an agricultural community that also serves as a bedroom community to Fitchburg and Leominster.

Citizen and Stakeholder Participation

Citizen and stakeholder participation is important to any successful plan. In this case, it was critical to learn the needs, desires, and thoughts of citizens of Ashby plus other stakeholders such as business owners and property owners regarding the local economy. Throughout the process, both before and after data collection, we engaged the public by conducting a workshop and SWOT analysis and held several public meetings designed to elicit feedback to include in the development of goals, objectives and policies. We also conducted a paper and online survey designed to acquire even more detailed information about what participants thought was important for the plan to include.

Current Conditions

Description of current conditions assesses the economic and demographic information of the Town of Ashby including demographic data such as population, age structure, household composition, education, income, the labor force and travel to work. It also includes economic data such as an inventory of current businesses, a description of the tax base, and an analysis of market segmentation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This plan is structured similarly to traditional comprehensive plans with a brief historical sketch of the community noting its development from founding to the present day. This describes how the economy has progressed from an agricultural outpost far from the colonies through the present day as an agricultural community that also serves as a bedroom community to Fitchburg and Leominster.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Current economic conditions, public participation and input, and the analysis and conclusions based upon these data led finally to the development of specific goals, objectives, and policies that are designed to implement the economic vision of the citizens of Ashby based on their needs and desires shaped by the current and predicted future market. The goals were based on the EO 418 economic development goals but updated and amended for current conditions as well as shaped by a filter of sustainable development.

Implementation Plan and Matrix

The key to successful planning is the ability to implement a well-developed planning program. Implementation requires specificity in timing, assigning responsibility, and sources of funding. This plan therefore provides each of these criteria for each policy. Policies are assigned one of four time frames with a three-year short-term planning horizon and an additional long-term category. Policies that are most pressing or that have immediate resources available were assigned to Year 1 with other policies being assigned to years 2, 3 and long-term based on subsequent prioritization and availability of resources.

Funding

Funding for this plan was made possible through the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program which is a grant program administered by regional planning agencies and funded by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). The DLTA program was established by Chapter 205 of the Acts of 2006, which enables staff of Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) such as MRPC to provide technical assistance to communities for "any subject within regional planning expertise." The DLTA program provides this technical assistance at no cost to the Town of Ashby.

On December 8, 2010, The Town of Ashby submitted a request for District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) service to the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC). The MRPC awarded a DLTA grant to the Town of Ashby on December 30, 2010 to develop an economic development plan termed the Ashby Sustainable Economic Development Plan. The Town of Ashby contributed a significant amount of resources in the form of matching time from the consulting land use agent along with the time and efforts of the Economic Development Committee. The Economic Development Committee was formed by the Board of Selectmen to help guide the creation of an economic development plan with a sustainability foundation to create and implement a vision for the future economy of the town of Ashby that is in harmony with social and natural systems and establishes a steady state in which to enjoy the fruits of the vision in perpetuity.

Relationship to Other Local Planning and Policy Initiatives

The Economic Development Plan is intended as an independent set of local policies to advance local economic development goals. But the plan will also be coordinated with existing and future planning efforts to assure consistency of vision and avoid duplication or contradiction of effort and resources. Currently, Ashby doesn't have a master plan for its Town, but does have a Community Development Plan completed in 2004. The plan covers Housing, Economic Development and Open Space, but doesn't cover the full range of elements usually found in a complete master plan. (A comprehensive master plan usually includes vision, goals and objectives, public participation, land use, housing, economic development, natural and culture resources, communities facilities and services, transportation and circulation and implementation.)

The Economic Development Element from the Ashby's Community Development Plan was reviewed in the development of this plan. This element included inventory and recommendations for economic development in Ashby. Town officials believed that the EO 418 recommendations were a good starting point for economic development planning—and many of these recommendations served as a foundation for goal development in this plan—but that a more robust, comprehensive, and structured program be developed that charted a clear and comprehensive course for Ashby to navigate.

Finally, this plan necessarily developed goals, objectives, and policies that included other local criteria, (i.e. transportation, open space, etc.) that are inextricably linked to economic development which allows the plan to function as an independent set of policies. However, the Town anticipates that this plan can also effectively function as the economic development element of a complete master plan, which can further develop local policy toward a sustainable future.

Mission, Vision, Goals, Objectives and Policies

Mission Statement

The mission of the Ashby Economic Development Commission in the development of this plan is the timely completion of a viable economic development plan that is relevant to the characteristics of the Town of Ashby and develops an implementable set of policies that are designed to create and maintain a sound and healthy local economy, resilient to external economic cyclicity; drawing upon local strengths and resources; and maintaining a democratic and civil society, clean and healthy environment, and an educated workforce earning a decent living.

Vision Statement

The vision of the Economic Development Plan Committee is to create a comprehensive and sustainable economic development strategy to assist and support existing businesses, to encourage new businesses that contribute the community character that Ashby seeks to uphold, to promote and develop Ashby's agricultural and recreational attractions as well as the historic and cultural amenities that Ashby offers to its residents and visitors alike, and to develop and align a diversified and supportive business climate with the Town's community development goals.

The Committee will facilitate a planning program that will:

- Ensure that Ashby possesses a flourishing cultural community with events and destinations that attract a consistent draw of visitors that contribute to the tax base but do not detract from the local flavor of a small New England town;
- develop a diverse and comprehensive core of local businesses that will serve the needs of the local community and also capture dollars externally as the opportunity may present itself;
- develop a sustainable economy that is designed to provide for the needs of the current generation without compromising the future of our descendants;
- develop a partnership between business and the local educational school system to ensure a steady flow of skilled workers required by local businesses; and foremost
- develop a thriving local economy in Ashby that is largely self-sufficient and able to insulate itself from external economic conditions by building resilience.

Goals, Objectives and Policies

Definition of Goals, Objectives, and Policies

Goals are the general aims of the community, in this case goals regarding how the community wishes to pursue local economic development. For example, a goal might be to support existing businesses in the community and encourage the expansion and relocation of desirable commercial and industrial uses. Objectives are more concrete, specific sub-elements of goals, usually providing measurable, mid-range strategies. An example might be to increase the number of farms or agricultural acreage in the community. Finally, policies, tasks, or actions are specific operational actions, usually with the purpose of relatively short-term implementation. An example could be to charge the Agricultural Committee with the task of conducting outreach to local farms to determine what their needs are and how the Committee and Town can assist. Policies are the elements of the plan that are tied to implementation with each policy associated with parties responsible for carrying it out, sources of funding identified so that it can be accomplished, and a specific timing determined to assure that it can fit into a policy framework and be carried out successfully.

Sustainability

In order to develop an economic development plan for the Town of Ashby that had a foundation of sustainability, it was important to define what is meant by the term. A good working definition of sustainability was developed by Viederman¹ and “is a community’s control and prudent use of all forms of capital—nature’s capital, human capital, human-created capital, social capital, and cultural capital—to ensure, to the degree possible, that present and future generations can attain a high degree of economic security and achieve democracy while maintaining the integrity of the ecological systems upon which all life and all production depends.”

¹In “Building sustainable societies: a blueprint for a post industrial world”; By Dennis Pirages

The purpose behind developing an economic development plan that has a sustainability component is to create a plan that is much more than merely a set of tools to seek growth, development, and economic activity that has no relationship to the history and culture of the community and its own vision for the future. This plan is designed to take a rational, pragmatic, and enlightened vision for the future and pair it with the desire to build in resiliency for the community so that Ashby can be more self-sufficient and weather risks generated by the global economy, rising energy prices and availability, and other economic variables over which Ashby does not have any control.

What Ashby does have control over is its own purchasing power and the ability to produce and buy local, the ability to grow food, generate local energy, and attract tourist dollars to buffer cyclical economic downturns. While many policies adopted as part of this plan have a sustainable component, the plan itself is a dynamic document that will adapt and change as circumstances dictate. This flexibility will allow it to be a dynamic tool to continually pursue the best policies that will help develop and sustain a clean, reliable, and culturally relevant economy in perpetuity.

General Principles Guiding Sustainable Economic Development in Ashby

The following principles were established by the Committee to provide a connection between the vision and the goals, objectives and policies of the plan:

PRINCIPLE 1: To ensure that existing and future businesses in Ashby make a positive contribution to the community, tax base, and vision for the future.

PRINCIPLE 2: To ensure that the local economy provides jobs that pay a living wage and makes employment available for those who seek it.

PRINCIPLE 3: That the Town work toward the development of a local economy that is sustainable socially, economically, and ecologically.

PRINCIPLE 4: That the Town of Ashby develop an economic base that is more resilient, self-sufficient, and local so that it can more effectively weather the cyclicity of the global economy including the cost and availability of energy, the cost and availability of financial capital, and the fluctuation in demand for non-essential consumer goods.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

An essential element to any plan including this Economic Development Plan for Ashby is soliciting public input. Since the plan is designed for the benefit of current and future residents and businesses owners in Ashby, it is essential to understand their needs, hopes, and concerns regarding the local economy. To gather citizen and stakeholder input the MRPC, in collaboration with the Economic Development Committee, hosted a kick-off meeting for the plan, a visioning workshop, a paper and online survey and a Regional Small Town Rural Economic Development Workshop. For detailed information on these activities, read below.

Kick-off Meeting

The Kick-off or initial public meeting was held at Ashby Town Hall on March 1, 2011. Alan Pease from the Ashby Planning Board and Christopher Ryan, the Ashby Land Use Agent, gave an introduction and spoke about the impetus for the plan. John Hume from MRPC discussed funding for the plan and Jennifer Siciliano presented the scope of services and some preliminary demographic data. See Appendix A for the meeting agenda and meeting notes.

SWOT/Visioning Meeting

A SWOT²/Community Forum was held on Saturday, May 21, 2011 at 9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. on the lower level of the Ashby Free Public Library. The Forum was designed to gain public input, insight, and ideas concerning any possible future economic development activities in the Town of Ashby. It was open to all community residents and businesses interested in providing input and bringing ideas into this document to make it more comprehensive and complete. The forum started off with introductory remarks, an outline of the process of the day, and then broke out into three smaller discussion groups. This was followed by the reconvening into the initial large group with presentations by group reporters, and a discussion of the "Next Steps".

Each of the smaller breakout groups answered eight (8) questions. The questions for each group were identical. The answers were recorded on large sticker pads of lined newsprint paper supplied at the event. Each group was instructed to select a reporter to present the group's work and results to the other groups when they reconvened. The participants gathered back into a larger group and discussed the answers together. After the presentations, a prioritization exercise was conducted; participants placed preference dots on the newsprint to express their preference for each of the news-printed lists presented by the reporters.

The following summarizes the public's input at the forum. Each of the eight (8) questions posed are listed with answers discussed in the breakout sessions and large group session. Only issues prioritized by a minimum of at least one sticker dot are documented below. Numbers in parentheses represent relative importance assigned to each issue by participants using sticker dots during the prioritization exercise. In line with the purpose of a SWOT analysis, questions and responses were designed to elicit feedback on what citizens and stakeholders thought about strengths and weaknesses of the community as well as opportunities and threats that emanated externally. For complete documentation of the SWOT/Visioning meeting, see Appendix B.

QUESTION #1: What are Ashby's Strengths? What characteristics of the Town of Ashby do you think are strong points, attractants, and features that bring people to town as visitors, attract people to move here or establish businesses here, or keep people here long term.

² SWOT refers to the component of a strategic planning process that seeks to identify local strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the community. In this case, they would be those impacting the local economy.

Priorities Concerning Ashby's greatest strengths:

- Rural Aspects (21)
- Mount Watatic – Pearl Hill State Park – Blood Hill State Park (7)
- Natural Resources (5)
- Horses and Livestock (3)
- Schools (i.e. class size/music program) (3)
- Town Center (3)
- Open Space (3)
- Scenic Rte. 119 Traffic Flow (1)
- Hiking, Snowmobiles, Recreational Opportunities (1)
- Band Concert at the Common (1)

Answers to this question clearly indicates residents overwhelming belief that the natural resources and rural character of Ashby is its greatest strength and that a local economic development plan should take this key aspect of community sentiment into consideration.

QUESTION #2: What are Ashby's challenges and how should they be addressed? What do you think, if any, are Ashby's key issues and challenges and how should they be addressed. What do you think the problems are, anything that makes work and life more difficult or demanding? This could be the lack of retail choices, municipal services, high (or low) taxes, excessive or loose regulations.

Priorities Concerning Ashby's Challenges:

- Tied to Nashoba Board of Health (38)
- Utilities – limited power for manufacturers – second highest utility cost in the country (9)
- Zoning restrictions – the town is not very encouraging (9)
- Not business friendly – difficult to establish businesses (8)
- Water/well issues (7)
- Help with the business process (3)
- Marketing – no communication with business, lack of information available (2)
- Regulations – more cooperation (2)

This question is designed to elicit opinions regarding what citizens believe are Ashby's greatest weaknesses or challenges. Many residents and businesses believe that the policies and practices of the Nashoba Board of Health in dealing with sanitary sewerage issues and other issues that the Board controls are a significant hindrance to economic activity. Other challenges relate to utility costs and land use restrictions.

QUESTION #3: How do you feel about growth and change in Ashby and what would you like to preserve or change? How do you feel about growth and change in Ashby and what would you like to preserve or

change. This could be growth in size/population, growth in commercial activity, growth in government, traffic or any way you want to define growth.

Priorities Concerning Growth, Change, and Preservation:

- Keep the rural Ashby flavor (20)
- Sprawl (17)
- Areas to display and sell residence goods (11)
- Zoning issues regarding growth (9)
- Need business growth to generate revenue to help with the tax base (8)
- Population should remain the same but encourage business so we don't have to drive so far (4)

The answer to this question confirms the strong desire on the part of local residents to retain the rural character and flavor of Ashby but that they would also like to remain closer or in town for work. This reduces the cost in money and time of commuting and creates additional opportunities for patronizing local businesses or establishing new businesses based on more residents remaining in town and needing products and services.

QUESTION #4: What kinds of municipal assets are missing that you would like to see in Ashby? What kinds of municipal or public assets are missing that you would like to see in Ashby? (e.g. sewers, second elementary school, more parks, town forest or farm, nature center, etc.).

Priorities Concerning Missing Municipal Assets:

- Open public meeting place for more regular events (17)
- Eateries – no place to stop and eat (15)
- Public water/utilities (12)
- Activities for kids/teens, in the summer particularly (11)
- Banking (9)
- Pubs – family friendly (7)
- Food and crafts (5)
- Green business (Ashburnham Country Store) (5)
- Newspaper or newsletter (3)
- Public transit (3)
- Promoting existing businesses (2)

This question also gets to the heart of what residents believe they lack—weaknesses in a sense. But it also hints at opportunities by identifying those activities, products, and services that are currently in short supply but in demand. Often these products and services are acquired elsewhere as the web-based survey below indicates.

QUESTION #5: Why is Ashby a good place to do business? What are the characteristics of the town that make establishing and/or running a business here in Ashby easy? What else makes the town a good place for business?

Priorities Concerning Why Ashby is a Good Place to do Business:

- Weekend tourists (10)
- Route 119 Accessibility, we don't take advantage of it (8)
- Home based business with low overhead (5)
- Farming, horses, sale of produce (4)
- Good network of people that communicate with someone (3)
- Little regulation of home based business, easy to get started (1)

This is another question that elicits citizen opinions regarding local strengths. In this case, residents identify the SR 119 corridor and the tourists that it brings through as a strength that the town is not taking full advantage of. Other business strengths include home-based businesses, agricultural and equestrian facilities, and the people in the area.

QUESTION #6: What makes it difficult to run a business in Ashby and how can the Town help? What could businesses do together to help? What makes it difficult to run a business in Ashby and how can the Town help? What could businesses do together to help? What kind of programs could help business? What kind of group or organization could businesses collaborate on to advance their needs and interests?

Priorities Concerning What Makes it Difficult to Run a Business in Ashby:

- Resistance in town (zoning) (17)
- Roads need work (11)
- No Banking (9)
- Few transportation options (9)
- More regular activities (fairs etc.) to bring people to Ashby (4)
- Parking issues (3)

Challenges to running a business in Ashby are a weakness in an economic development sense and residents identified local land use control as one significant impediment to conducting business. The Town should evaluate the zoning bylaw and other regulatory tools to see if there are opportunities to reduce unnecessary impediments to pursuing sustainable business opportunities.

QUESTION #7: Where do residents and businesses do their business? Where do people in the Town purchase everyday necessities (food, gas, etc.) and services (dry cleaning, etc). What kinds of businesses would you like to see in Ashby that aren't here and what is stopping these businesses from coming to Ashby?

Priorities Concerning where Residents and Businesses do their Business:

- No Group Responses to this question were prioritized by Sticker Dots.

Responses to this question identify both challenges and opportunities since residents purchasing goods and services out of Ashby are currently a challenge, resulting in leakage of local dollars. It is also an opportunity since those businesses being patronized by Ashby residents clearly indicate opportunities for entrepreneurs to establish those same businesses in Ashby.

QUESTION #8: Would you like to see festivals and events to increase tourism in town? Why? Would you like to see festivals and events to increase tourism in town? Why? What kind of events would be successful here?

Priorities Concerning Festivals and Events to Increase Tourism:

- Farmer's Market (16)
- Proper advertising is needed (10)
- Advertise and share locally through many communities (5)
- Networking and bringing community goods out (4)
- Great current festivals (3)
- Great current activities (3)

Festivals and other events that draw tourists and residents are an economic opportunity for the Town to attract external dollars and keep local dollars in town.

Conclusions: Based on public input prioritization during the Visioning Session documented above, Ashby's greatest strengths are its rural character and natural resources including Mount Watatic, Pearl Hill State Park, and Blood Hill State Park. In accordance with this, participants prioritized the need to retain this rural flavor and keep sprawl in check. But it was also indicated that Ashby needs some business growth to generate tax revenue.

Some participants stated that local challenges include both a strained relationship with the Nashoba Boards of Health resulting in adverse septic system permit procedures, board of health permit fees, and board of health regulations. Many residents are also upset by the inadequate/expensive services provided by Unitil which is an added obstacle for economic development. Zoning restrictions, difficulty establishing a business, and water/well issues were also prioritized relatively high. It was indicated that the town could improve upon its municipal assets if it had an open public meeting place for more regular events, a restaurant(s), better public water and utilities, activities for youths, and banking facilities.

Most participants thought that Ashby is good for businesses because of the weekend tourists, Route 119 accessibility (even in the winter months), and home based businesses can operate with little overhead. Some participants indicated ways to improve/facilitate business in Ashby such as more business friendly

zoning, road improvements, more transportation options, and even areas to display and sell residence goods. Overall, a farmers market was viewed as a good idea – a farmers market along with current festivals and activities should be widely advertised throughout the community and beyond town borders. With the acreage available for large events and farmers markets, Ashby could really benefit with proper, targeted marketing techniques.

Economic Development Survey

Both an electronic and paper economic development survey were developed and executed to solicit additional input from Ashby residents and businesses owners. This survey was handed out after the visioning meeting, distributed at the library, posted online on Survey monkey™ and advertised on Ashby’s official Town Website. The survey had a total of 29 questions with 6 questions designed specifically to elicit responses from business owners. There were a total of 50 respondents. The survey was closed in August to tally results.

Results from Online Survey

The first question asked: what do you think Ashby’s strengths are? Please choose all that apply. (There were 21 choices plus an “other” category with a place to comment. For complete results, comments included, see the Appendix C. The most prevalent response was that residents want to retain a small-town feeling followed closely by a classic New England town center and the presence of farms and orchards. The presence of natural assets was also a popular response with 28 respondents choosing plentiful open space, natural environment (27), nature-based recreation (26) and scenic roads and vistas (19). Other common responses included a low cost of living (23), historic homes and buildings (20) and independent, self-sufficient spirit of residents.

Question number 2 asked: what are Ashby’s challenges? Please choose all that apply. (There were 12 choices plus an “other” category with a place to comment.) Clearly, deteriorating roads and infrastructure was cited as the primary challenge. Other notable responses include employment opportunity for young residents and the sanitary facility situation.

Question number 3 was an open-ended question: How should Ashby’s challenges/problems be addressed? There were 26 different comments which can be read in the Ashby Economic Development Survey Report in the appendix.

Question number 4 asked: How do you feel about growth and change in Ashby? This could be growth in size/population, growth in commercial activity, growth in government, traffic or any way you want to define growth. The respondents could pick “very positive”, “somewhat positive”, “neutral”, “somewhat negative” or “very negative”. When asked about general feeling about growth most of the respondents put “somewhat positive” at 32.5% answering this way. When asked about commercial growth, the largest response was “somewhat negative” with 28.6%. Residential growth had slightly more “somewhat negative” with 29.3%. “Neutral” was the highest percentage (26.8%) in the question about Industrial growth. (All percentages can be found in appendix.)

Question number 5 was another an open-ended question: What would you like to preserve in the town? This could be the general feel of a rural New England village or more specific such as the building on the common or the Country Store. There were 29 different comments which can be read in the Ashby Economic Development Survey Report in the appendix.

Question number 7 was asked: What kinds of assets are missing now that you would like to have here? This could be anything from sewers and another elementary school to specific types of businesses, populations, buildings, services, etc. Provide as many choices as you which up to eight and if more, please note in comments section at the end of the survey. (See list of full responses in the survey report in the appendix.) Responses that related directly to economic development were clear in advocating for a local restaurant or eating place. Nine people wanted to see a restaurant generally while other are looking for take-out food, a coffee shop, ice cream shop or donut shop. The response by one who indicated a need for gathering places fit into this category also. Eight respondents directly noted the need for water and sewer facilities while another noted the underground infrastructure needed to be addressed. These responses directly or indirectly connect to the desire for new businesses like restaurants that would need such utilities in order to be sited and begin operations. Other businesses seen as needed other than eating places included a plant nursery, drug store, gift shop, physician's office, artist studios or galleries, a tack shop, commercial kitchen, a general store and agriculture. A number of respondents specifically noted the need for small business, low-impact business, industry and more commercial uses in general. Some other responses were somewhat and not at all applicable to economic development, but are discussed in the survey report in the appendix.

Question number 8 asked: What makes Ashby a good place to do business? 22 open-ended comments are written in the survey report. Most of the responses stated that Ashby is not a good place to do business at all, however if there were some more small businesses around, residents would support it. This idea is attractive to many people in Ashby who want to keep the small New England charm. Some responses offered that access to route 119 and 31, being well traveled, give Ashby the potential to rebuild their Main Street in the future. Some residents identified that the problem with reconstruction on Main Street and other parts of town are a result of unproductive permitting processes.

Question number 9 was another open-ended question with 24 comments, which are in the appendix. The question asked was what makes Ashby a difficult place for business? What makes it difficult to run a business in Ashby and how can the Town help? What could businesses do together to help? What kind of programs could help business? What kind of group or organization could businesses collaborate on to advance their needs and interests? Residents had a variety of different ideas to offer on this topic. First, many believe that larger businesses would help the tax base but the current environment is hostile to business in general. There is partial consensus that the town needs to open up zoning in locations that are comfortable for the look and the feel of the town. The fact that there is no place to eat or gather in town makes organizing people in support new business growth difficult. Of course, many people feel that the electrical utility *Unitil* is a huge problem, and it is very difficult to manage utility costs and find a location to balance small town

preservation and new business growth. A few people believe that the town government is trying to micro-manage every business coming to town and the permitting processes are too extreme. Lastly, as mentioned in the first section, the water and sewer challenges present a huge obstacle to business.

Question number 10 asked: Where do you shop or get services? Key response highlights include Fitchburg/Leominster “metroplex” and that for automobile repair, Ashby residents stay in Ashby. The Town may wish to consider some way of supporting this industry. Data results indicate that 71.4% of Ashby residents surveyed do their banking in Fitchburg and Leominster, 45% visit the doctor in Fitchburg and Leominster, 38.5% go to the dentist and 56.4 % go the pharmacy in Fitchburg and Leominster. 63.4% of residents however, utilize automobile repair services in Ashby, the strongest business sector for the town. (See full list of answers in appendix.)

Question 11 asked: What kinds of businesses would you like to see in Ashby that aren’t here or what business would you like to see more of? (There were 27 choices plus an “other” category with a place to comment.) The highest response was restaurant (80%), followed by breakfast (72.5%) and then coffee shop (70%). Other highly picked businesses were farm stand (65%), lunch counter (60%) and banking (57.5%). (See full list in appendix.) The businesses requested as favorable from the data would help to keep residents from traveling to Fitchburg and Leominster. These businesses, with proper placement and zoning could have a significant effect on the town. To summarize, most Ashby residents want a bank and greater food options.

Question number 12, 13 and 14 were all open-ended questions with comments listed in the survey report. Question number 12 was: Are there other businesses or industries that you would like to see in Ashby? There were 18 comments answering this question. Question number 13 asked: Are there types of businesses that you would like to keep out of Ashby? For example, an industrial scale chicken farm or a tar production plant. There were 27 comments for that question. Question number 14 asked: What do you see are the roadblocks or obstacles that stop the types of businesses that you want from coming to Ashby? Twenty eight people commented on this question.

Question number 15 asked: How do you feel about having festivals and event in the Town to increase tourism? The respondents could choose pick “very positive”, “somewhat positive”, “neutral”, “somewhat negative” or “very negative”. Most respondents answered “very positive” at 48.8%, second most answered with “somewhat positive” at 26.8%, 14.6% were “neutral” and only 7.3% were “somewhat negative” and 2.4% were “very negative”.

Question 16 asked about employment status. Forty two point nine (42.9%) responded that they were full-time wage or salary employees. A large percentage were self-employed (28.6%); 19% are retired, 7.1% are part-time wage or salary employees; 2.4% are unemployed not drawing unemployment; and none of the respondents are unemployed and drawing unemployment or students.

Question 17 asked if they were employed where they worked. They were given a choice of Ashby, Ashburnham, Winchendon, Townsend, Gardner, Westminster, Lunenburg, Fitchburg/Leominster, New Hampshire or other. Most of respondents answered "other" (34.4%). A considerable amount said they worked in Ashby (31.3%) and 18.8% said they worked in Fitchburg/Leominster (the closest cities to Ashby), 9.4% worked in New Hampshire and 6.3% worked in Townsend. All other places received zero responses.

Question 18 asked what mode of transportation to you use to get to work. Most people answered private car without carpooling (82.8%), 10.3 said they walked and 6.9% said they worked from home. Four people said other and these comments are in the survey report in the appendix.

Question 19 asked how long is your commute to work. The most common answer was tied between less than 5 minutes and between 45 to 59 minutes at 14.7%. The second highest answer was also tied between 25 to 29 minutes and 60 to 89 minutes. About a third (32.4%) of the respondents drives over 45 minutes to work.

Question 20 asked how many years have you lived in Ashby. The mean length of residence was 21.61 years; there was a good mix of long-time residents and newcomers in the survey. The highest was 75 years and all answers can be found in appendix.

Question 21 asked where do you live. All respondents answered that they own their own home. None of the respondents answered rent a private home, rent an apartment or live in a mobile home.

Question number 22 asked how many people are in your household and how many children. The average response was 2.38 people in their household and 0.84 children in their residence.

Question number 23 asked if the respondent is a business owner. Seventeen or 37.8% said yes and 28 (62.2%) said no.

The 24th question or the first question of the business owners asked what type of business do they have. Twelve people responded and the answers ranged from dance studio to construction. (All responses in appendix.)

Question 2 of business owners asked them to rate the business climate in Ashby. They were given a choice of "excellent", "very good", "good", "moderate", "poor", "very poor" and "extremely bad". Overall business climate was rated evenly between "good" and "moderate" (30.8%). Regulatory environment rated "moderate" (46.2%). Mix of businesses was rated "poor" (33.3%). Market for products and services rated "poor" (41.7%). (Other percentages are in appendix.)

Business-owner question number 3 asked: is there anything in Ashby that you need to run your business that is missing in town? There are 8 comments answering this question in the appendix. Three people answered "no".

Business-owner question number 4 asked another open-ended question: are there any barriers or obstacles to expanding your business (i.e. tax, regulatory, utilities, etc.)? Please be as detailed as you wish. Nine people commented and of these four said “no”.

Business-owner question 5 asks: Is there anything that would help you run, expand or make your business more viable? (There were 12 choices plus an “other” category with a place to comment.) Seventy two point seven (72.7%) responded with marketing/advertising, 45.5% said a local business association and 36.4% said expedited or simpler permitting.

The last question of the survey and the last business-owner asked: Where do your customers come from? The list included Ashby, Ashburnham, Winchendon, Townsend, Gardner, Lunenburg, Fitchburg/Leominster, New Hampshire or other. Most of respondents answered “other” (49.83%). The next highest response was New Hampshire (21.38%), Ashby (14.5%) and Townsend (12.63%).

Regional Small Town Rural Economic Development Workshop

Along with the SWOT/Visioning session and the survey, Ashby town residents were invited to a Region Wide Workshop on Small Town Rural Economic Development where they could ask questions, get information to enhance this study and provide information about ideas for economic development in small towns like Ashby. The Workshop was held at MRPC offices in Fitchburg as part of a Montachusett Region Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee meeting. Kathleen McCabe from McCabe Enterprises spoke; she specializes in economic development. (See Appendix D for agenda.)

DEMOGRAPHICS

To understand the current conditions of Ashby, where it’s going and its relationship to the town’s surrounding it and in its region, various demographic statics were gathered and analyzed. The surrounding Town’s (Ashburnham, Hubbardston, Royalston and Townsend) were chosen for comparison at the plan’s kick-off meeting. ***All current data are from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey Estimates unless otherwise noted in a footnote.***

Population

Ashby’s population growth has gone through some fluctuations in the past (1960 to 1970 and 1980 to 1990), but since the 1990s growth has been relatively steady. Comparable Towns’ growth rate (see Table 2) in the Montachusett Region is greatly varied from a high of 12.1% (Hubbardston) to a low of -3.0% (Townsend). Ashby is one of the towns that continues to grow and is projected to continue to grow. See Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1: Ashby's Population over Time³

Year	Population	% Change
1960	1,883	N/A
1970	2,274	20.8%
1980	2,311	1.6%
1990	2,717	17.6%
2000	2,845	4.7%
2010	3,074	8.0%

Table 2: Population over Time in the Five Towns⁴

Community	Population				Change			Percent Change		
	1980	1990	2000	2010	80-90	90-00	00-10	80 - 90	90 - 00	00 - 10
Ashby	2,311	2,717	2,845	3,074	406	128	229	17.6%	4.7%	8.0%
Ashburnham	4,075	5,433	5,546	6,081	1,358	113	535	33.3%	2.1%	9.6%
Hubbardston	1,797	2,797	3,909	4,382	1,000	1,112	473	55.6%	39.8%	12.1%
Royalston	955	1,147	1,254	1,258	192	107	4	20.1%	9.3%	0.3%

Table 3: Population Projections for Ashby and its Comparable Towns

Community	Population				
	2000	2020	2025	2030	2035
Ashby	2,845	3160	3210	3260	3310
Ashburnham	5,546	6250	6350	6450	6560
Hubbardston	3,909	4500	4580	4650	4730
Royalston	1,254	1300	1320	1350	1370
Townsend	9,198	9170	9320	9470	9630

Townsend	7,201	8,496	9,198	8,926	1,295	702	-272	18.0%	8.3%	-3.0%
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³ U.S. Department of Commerce Census Bureau

⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce Census Bureau

Age

Over time Ashby's median age has risen like the rest of the state and nation. This may be explained at least in part by advances in health care, as residents are now living longer lives. It is currently at 39.3 years, which is slightly higher than the state as a whole (38.5 years). Yet, it is lower than some comparable towns in the region: Hubbardston (42.3) and Royalston (47.9). See table 4.

Table 4: Median Age in Ashby and its Comparable Towns⁵

Median Age						
	Ashby	Ashburnham	Hubbardston	Royalston	Townsend	State
1980	29.7	30.4	28.5	*	27.7	31.1
1990	33.4	32.9	32	33.7	31.3	33.5
2000	38.2	37.3	35.9	38	35.4	36.5
2009⁶	39.3	38.8	42.3	47.9	39.3	38.5

Comparing Ashby to the rest of the State, there is a higher percentage of children in Ashby and a lower percentage of 20 to 45 year-olds. There are fewer 20 and 30-somethings in Ashby. At the same time, the percentage of 45 to 54 is very significant making up 21.2% of the population. See table 5.

Table 5: Ashby Age Range Compared to the State

Age Range	Ashby		Massachusetts	
	Amount	% of Population	Amount	% of Population
Under 5 years	198	6.50%	385,553	5.90%
5 to 9 years	212	6.90%	388,565	6.00%
10 to 14 years	282	9.20%	412,096	6.30%
15 to 19 years	295	9.60%	467,542	7.20%
20 to 24 years	128	4.20%	441,285	6.80%
25 to 34 years	296	9.70%	839,719	12.90%
35 to 44 years	384	12.60%	975,711	15.00%
45 to 54 years	650	21.20%	997,328	15.30%
55 to 59 years	189	6.20%	408,077	6.30%
60 to 64 years	147	4.80%	325,590	5.00%
65 to 74 years	156	5.10%	425,377	6.50%
75 to 84 years	112	3.70%	307,100	4.70%
85 and over	10	0.30%	137,233	2.10%

⁵ U.S. Department of Commerce Census Bureau

⁶ Source: 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. The estimates are based on data collected over a 5-year time period from 2005 to 2009.

Ashby has a higher percentage of children (29.6%) than the rest of the state (22.3%). It also has a higher percentage of preschool age children (6.5%) compared to the state (5.9%). In contrast, Ashby has a lower percentage of senior citizens over 65 (9.1%) than the state rate of 13.4%. See table 6.

Table 6: Ashby Age Children and Senior Citizens Compared to the State

Age	Ashby	Massachusetts
Under 5	6.5%	5.9%
Under 18	29.6%	22.3%
65 and over	9.1%	13.4%

Household Makeup

Ashby has an estimated total of 980 households. The average household size (3.12) is significantly larger than the state's (2.54) and the comparable towns. The percentage of households with children in Ashby (41.5%) is significantly higher than the state (29.8%) and comparable towns indicating that Ashby is a desirable place to raise a family. See table 7.

Table 7: Household Make-Up in Ashby, its Comparable Towns and the State

Household Make - Up 2009						
	Ashby	Ashburnham	Hubbardston	Royalston	Townsend	State
Total	980	2,157	1,557	560	3,266	2,465,654
w/ Children	41.5%	36.8%	31.5%	22.0%	36.2%	29.8%
Size of Household	3.12	2.78	2.79	2.4	2.91	2.54

Education

Ashby's over-25-year-old population has a greater percentage of high school graduates (34.7%) and associates degrees (8.35%) than the state (27.2%, 7.6%, respectively). Ashby has a lower percentage of persons that have a bachelor's (18.7%) or graduate (15.2%) degree than the state (21.7%, 16.1%, respectively) and a lower percentage of people with bachelor's degrees in all comparable towns except Royalston. More people in Ashby have a Graduate Degree than comparable towns but it is still less than the state rate. Higher education and vocational training in Ashby should continue to be a priority. See table 8.

Table 8: Education in Ashby, its Comparable Towns and the State

Amount of School	Ashby	Ashburnham	Hubbardston	Royalston	Townsend	State
High School	34.7%	31.7%	34.3%	35.1%	34.9%	27.2%
Associates	8.3%	10.5%	11.8%	8.2%	8.5%	7.6%
Bachelor	18.7%	20.3%	21.5%	17.1%	21.5%	21.7%
Graduate	15.2%	14.3%	7.9%	10.2%	7.7%	16.1%

At the Economic Development Plan Kick-off meeting, the public expressed interest in enrollment of Ashby students at Montachusett Regional Vocation Technical School (Monty Tech) . Ashby has 13.6% of 15 to 19 year-old residents attending Monty Tech (see table below). A larger percentage of the 15-19 year olds from Hubbardston and Royalston attend Monty Tech. In Ashburnham, a lower percentage attend this trade school. There is no enrollment from Townsend.

Table 9: Enrollment at Montachusett Regional Vocation Technical School⁷

CITY/TOWN ENROLLMENT BY GRADE AS OF 03/07/11							
US Census 2005-2009 estimates							
CITY/TOWN	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	TOTAL	Age 15 -19	% of Age Group
Hubbardston	17	12	10	14	53	259	20.5%
Royalston	7	6	6	0	19	113	16.8%
Gardner	57	50	50	33	190	1205	15.8%
Templeton	36	31	19	17	103	673	15.3%
Athol	26	34	20	35	115	772	14.9%
Winchendon	29	27	25	33	114	777	14.7%
Ashby	11	9	12	8	40	295	13.6%
Lunenburg	18	15	13	14	60	470	12.8%
Phillipston	5	3	4	7	19	168	11.3%
Ashburnham	14	14	8	9	45	417	10.8%
Fitchburg	83	106	111	79	379	3584	10.6%
Sterling	15	18	11	6	50	580	8.6%
Petersham	0	3	1	2	6	74	8.1%
Westminster	19	12	14	12	57	782	7.3%
Barre	12	7	9	7	35	566	6.2%
Princeton	2	2	3	7	14	251	5.6%
Holden	14	11	13	8	46	1292	3.6%
Hardwick	0	1	1	0	2	229	0.9%
Orange	0	1	1	2	4	578	0.7%
Leominster	0	4	4	4	12	2272	0.5%
Harvard	0	2	1	0	3	583	0.5%
Lancaster	0	0	1	0	1	698	0.1%
Townsend	0	0	1	0	1	761	0.1%
Total	365	368	338	297	1368		

⁷ MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Income

Per capita income is the total income divided by the total population. Ashby's per capita income (\$28,787) is lower than the state's (\$33,460). This deficit could be explained by the higher percentage of children in Ashby households than the state. Supporting this is Ashby's median household (\$78,750) and family (\$83,008) income both of which are higher than the state rates of \$64,496 and \$80,822, respectively. Ashby also has a lower percentage of people below poverty (5%) than the state as a whole (10.1%). See table 10.

Table 10: Income for Ashby, Comparable Towns, and the State

Community	Per Capita	Median Household	Median Family	Below Poverty
Ashby	\$28,787	\$78,750	\$83,008	5.0%
Ashburnham	\$30,665	\$82,654	\$95,542	4.4%
Hubbardston	\$30,329	\$76,440	\$90,514	9.8%
Royalston	\$29,955	\$60,000	\$77,778	4.2%
Townsend	\$29,140	\$75,174	\$86,218	5.1%
State	\$33,460	\$64,496	\$80,822	10.1%

Table 11: Household Income for Ashby, Comparable Towns, and the State

	Ashby		Ashburnham		Hubbardston		Royalston		Townsend		State	
Less than \$10,000	7	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	1.3%	33	1.3%	55,272	3.5%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	3	0.4%	41	2.5%	18	1.5%	6	1.5%	50	2.0%	41,170	2.6%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	14	1.8%	0	0.0%	88	7.1%	28	7.1%	21	0.8%	89,765	5.7%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	77	10.1%	40	2.5%	53	4.3%	19	4.8%	108	4.3%	104,090	6.6%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	42	5.5%	174	10.8%	53	4.3%	68	17.2%	239	9.4%	159,320	10.1%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	197	25.8%	267	16.5%	255	20.6%	67	16.9%	612	24.1%	274,786	17.5%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	130	17.0%	367	22.7%	288	23.3%	80	20.2%	489	19.3%	250,243	15.9%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	211	27.7%	612	37.8%	319	25.8%	95	24.0%	679	26.8%	323,641	20.6%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	56	7.3%	102	6.3%	117	9.5%	20	5.1%	244	9.6%	139,042	8.8%
\$200,000 or more	26	3.4%	14	0.9%	47	3.8%	8	2.0%	60	2.4%	137,201	8.7%
Total	763		1,617		1,238		396		2,535		1,574,530	

According to Table 11, the highest percentage of household income range is \$100,000 to \$149,999 in Ashby at 27.7%. This is very similar to the comparable towns and the state.

Labor Force

Ashby's unemployment rate in 2010 was 9.7% which is slightly up from last year's rate of 9.5% . Ashby's unemployment rate is consistently higher than the state's overall rate. This has been a trend since 2002 . See table 12. While the economy continues to be in recession, as indicated earlier, higher education and vocational training in Ashby should continue to be a priority.

Table 12: Ashby Labor Force, Employment Numbers and Unemployment Rate over Time versus the Unemployment Rate for the State⁸

	Labor Force	Ashby Employed	Ashby Unemployed	Ashby Unemployment Rate	State Unemployment Rate
2010	1,655	1,495	160	9.7%	8.5%
2009	1,661	1,503	158	9.5%	8.2%
2008	1,588	1,495	93	5.9%	5.3%
2007	1,605	1,524	81	5.0%	4.5%
2006	1,602	1,514	88	5.5%	4.8%
2005	1,579	1,494	85	5.4%	4.8%
2004	1,605	1,509	96	6.0%	5.2%
2003	1,612	1,513	99	6.1%	5.8%
2002	1,609	1,521	88	5.5%	5.3%
2001	1,593	1,537	56	3.5%	3.7%
2000	1,593	1,552	41	2.6%	2.7%

As shown on Table 13 (see following page) there are a total of 77 public and private business establishments in Ashby. Between the years 2001 and 2006 business establishments steadily increased, and has leveled off since then. On average, they employ 285 people, weekly, providing an average weekly salary of \$638, which has steadily risen since 2001. Construction companies employ the most people in Ashby (62 people on average). The wholesale trade in Ashby provides, on average, only 7 jobs, but pays the highest wages (\$1388 weekly) according to the MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

⁸ MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Table 13: Ashby Business Establishments and Average Monthly Workers from 2001 to 2009⁹

Year	All - Private and Public Total Annual Payroll	Average Annual Weekly Wage	# of Establishments	Average Monthly Workers								
				All Industries	Construction	Manufacturing	Wholesale Trade	Retail Trade	Transportation and Warehousing	Professional and Technical Services	Administrative and Waste Services	Other Services, Ex. Public Admin
2009	\$9,450,207	\$638	77	285	62	12	7	10	11	14	11	19
2008	\$9,282,774	\$640	76	279	60	16	7	12	13	17	10	17
2007	\$9,432,599	\$589	78	308	75	17	4	14	14	14	8	19
2006	\$9,190,697	\$589	77	300	66	17	3	20	8	23	6	20
2005	\$7,947,730	\$570	71	268	56	18	5	20	7	18	6	14
2004	\$8,017,757	\$572	70	270	49	18	6	18	11	18	NA	18
2003	\$7,486,807	\$574	64	251	50	16	9	23	11	13	NA	9
2002	\$7,484,496	\$556	59	259	47	15	10	30	6	13	NA	10
2001	\$6,728,816	\$544	57	238	41	14	14	22	6	NA	NA	6

According to Table 14 on the following page, Ashby's average weekly salary is within the same range as comparable towns except for Royalston, which is much lower. Even though Ashby has a similar amount of establishments as Hubbardston, it doesn't employ as many people. Hubbardston employs 501 workers versus Ashby's 285. Ashby employs the smallest number of workers per establishment compared to other towns.

⁹ MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Table 14: Number of Establishments, Average Monthly Workers and Salaries by Industry in Ashby and Comparable Towns - 2009¹⁰

All - Private and Public		Average Monthly Workers															
Community	Total Annual Payroll	Average Annual Weekly Wage	# of Establishments	All Industries	Construction	Manufacturing	Wholesale Trade	Retail Trade	Transportation and Warehousing	Finance and Insurance	Professional and Technical Services	Administrative and Waste Services	Educational Services	Health Care and Social Assistance	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	Accommodation and Food Services	Other Services, Ex. Public Admin
Ashby	\$9,450,207	\$638	77	285	62	12	7	10	11	NA	14	11	NA	NA	NA	NA	19
Ashburnham	\$40,201,384	\$764	121	1012	42	53	16	127	NA	13	12	9	NA	68	NA	NA	38
Hubbardston	\$15,932,062	\$612	68	501	44	52	NA	42	NA	NA	18	8	NA	63	NA	NA	23
Royalston	\$2,459,180	\$397	19	119	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Townsend	\$78,034,243	\$706	189	2127	76	576	37	283	107	22	25	42	67	58	30	206	76

¹⁰ MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Work Travel

A higher percentage of people from Ashby drive alone to work (85.1%) than the rest of the state (72.7%). Fewer people in Ashby carpool (5.2%), use public transportation (.9%) or walk (1.3%) to work than the rest of the state (8.4%, 9.0%, 4.5%, respectively). There is little incentive to carpool where busy schedules and scattered destination points prevail. It takes longer for residents of Ashby to get to work (31.6 minutes) than the state (27.1 minutes). This is attributable to Ashby's rural surroundings and distance from commercial and industrial centers. However, it is interesting to note that a higher percentage of people work at home (7.2%) than people do in the state (3.9%). Ashby could expand on home businesses by keeping up with technical advances (high-speed data systems/cellular telephone services, etc.) for telecommuters and home businesses.

Ashby modes of travel are similar to comparable towns. See table 15.

Table 15: Work Travel Data for Ashby, its Comparable Towns and the State

Community	Drove Alone	Carpooled	Public Transportation	Walked	Other Means	Worked at Home	Mean Travel Time (minutes)
Ashby	85.1%	5.2%	0.9%	1.3%	0.4%	7.2%	31.6
Ashburnham	92.0%	4.6%	0.0%	1.4%	0.0%	2.0%	33.0
Hubbardston	86.6%	7.0%	0.6%	1.6%	0.0%	4.2%	32.6
Royalston	83.5%	8.7%	0.0%	1.1%	1.7%	5.0%	32.5
Townsend	86.1%	5.6%	0.7%	1.3%	1.1%	5.2%	34.5
State	72.7%	8.4%	9.0%	4.5%	1.5%	3.9%	27.1

Business Inventory

Ashby has 205 locally owned independent businesses listed in the town's business certificate program and/or its commercial tax program. Below is a description of the prominent business categories that establishes a business profile of the community. Please see Appendix E for a list of businesses by specific NAICS code.

Farming

Twelve (12) businesses are explicitly farming operations with three where it cannot be established what their specialization is. Nine (9) specialize in one or more commodity such as maple syrup, apples, cut

flowers, trees, and livestock. Two (2) additional businesses note a primary business other than agriculture with agriculture secondary. This includes a trucking business and a farm stand.

Construction

A total of 31 businesses in Ashby are in construction, contracting, carpentry, or building as they variously are referred to while an additional eight businesses are involved in a specialty such as plastering, painting or foundations. In addition, eight (8) businesses are involved in excavation, land clearing, and demolition; six (6) businesses are electricians or similar businesses; six (6) businesses are in plumbing, heating, or ventilation. This means that 59 of 205 businesses in Ashby or 29% are involved in some phase of the construction process.

Manufacturing

Twelve Ashby businesses are involved in manufacturing including four (4) involved in some textile activity and the remaining eight (8) manufacture products ranging from paint and monuments to furniture, cabinets, and audio speakers.

Retail Sales

There are 19 retailing establishments in Ashby with four (4) explicitly engaged in internet sales while the remaining 15 include two (2) farm stands, two (2) used car sales businesses, two (2) convenience stores plus one (1) general store, and a variety of other miscellaneous businesses such as antique tool sales, truck part sales, and gifts.

Transportation

There are five (5) trucking operations in Ashby plus an additional trucking concern that also operates a farm. One trucking firm also conducts landscaping services while another transports construction materials.

Services

Over ninety businesses (44%) in Ashby offer some form of service. The most prolific of these businesses include recreation (12) which includes equestrian training, day camps, softball clubs, and a firing range; automobile repair (8); landscaping or lawn care (7); web or graphic design (6); health services (5); kennel or dog grooming (5); and hairdressers (4).

Other services include day care, education, dance training, furniture repair, and many others.

Analysis of Existing Businesses

Ashby is a community of multiple-business households and addresses. A number of businesses show as being located at the same address. Ashby also has a number of in-home occupations, which require lower overhead and few demands in local services and infrastructure. On the other hand, they pay a business tax but their property tax remains residential and they do not lease from local building and property owners.

In-home occupations are often largely trades such as construction and related businesses such as electricians, plumbers, roofers, and so on. They are also small manufacturers such as furniture makers. Finally, they are a variety of service businesses such as web design, dog grooming, hairdressers, and internet sales. Businesses that reside on commercially zoned property include automobile repair shops, trucking firms, and agricultural operations including equestrian facilities.

Many of these businesses align with the rural type of community that Ashby is and suggest the type of business activity that should be encouraged going forward.

Tax Base

The tax rate for Ashby is \$14.90. Comparable towns range from a low of \$9.28 in Royalston to \$17.15 in Ashburnham. In each of the towns, there is no difference in tax rates for residential, commercial, industrial or personal property. See table 16.

Table 16: Tax Rate Ashby and Comparable Towns by Dollars/1000¹¹

Municipality	Residential	Open Space	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property
ASHBY	\$14.90	0.00	\$14.90	\$14.90	\$14.90
ASHBURNHAM	\$17.15	0.00	\$17.15	\$17.15	\$17.15
HUBBARDSTON	\$11.33	0.00	\$11.33	\$11.33	\$11.33
ROYALSTON	\$9.28	0.00	\$9.28	\$9.28	\$9.28
TOWNSEND	\$15.74	0.00	\$15.74	\$15.74	\$15.74

Ashby received \$4,353,805 last year in all tax categories. This is less than all comparable towns with the exception of Royalston. See table 17. For a list of all parcels in Ashby and their assessed value, see appendix F.

Table 17: Taxes Levied By Class in Ashby and Comparable Towns 2010¹²

Municipality	Residential	Open Space	Commercial	Industrial	Personal Property	Total
ASHBY	\$4,133,547	\$0	\$122,014	\$13,745	\$84,499	\$4,353,805
ASHBURNHAM	\$9,699,773	\$0	\$234,085	\$79,905	\$120,997	\$10,134,760
HUBBARDSTON	\$4,801,444	\$0	\$179,593	\$165,389	\$107,780	\$5,254,206
ROYALSTON	\$1,238,281	\$0	\$13,142	\$1,441	\$46,499	\$1,299,363
TOWNSEND	\$12,074,589	\$0	\$559,799	\$290,518	\$294,366	\$13,219,272

¹¹ Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, Municipal Databank/Local Aid Section, Fiscal Year 2011 Tax Rates by Class

¹² Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, Municipal Databank/Local Aid Section, Fiscal Year 2010 Levies by Class

Market Population

Market Segmentation

Market segmentation is defined as the classification of consumers according to demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, lifestyles, and product preferences. It is based on the concept that “birds of a feather flock together”; that is, people with similar taste, lifestyles, and behaviors naturally gravitate toward each other and into the communities in which they live. Segmentation analytical systems allow companies to better understand their customers or prospects, develop effective strategies that attract customers to their stores, and select products suited to customer preferences and lifestyles.

Developed by ESRI Business Information Systems, Community Tapestry categorize U.S. neighborhoods into 65 market segments, each reflecting a range of opportunities and influences. Neighborhoods are analyzed and sorted by a variety of demographic and socioeconomic attributes as well as other determinants of consumer behavior.¹³

Households in the Town of Ashby have been grouped into Tapestry market segments as summarized below. The descriptions reflect the propensity of households within that segment to exhibit certain characteristics and preferences relative to the general population. Each segment tends to paint a slightly different “picture” of the trade market area, but there can be common features. According to ESRI, Ashby’s segments fits into 2 categories: Green Acres and Sophisticated Squires which are described below.

Green Acres

Demographic

Seventy-one percent of the households in Green Acres neighborhoods are married couples with and without children. Many families are blue-collar Baby Boomers, many with children aged 6-17 years. With more than 10 million people, green Acres represents Tapestry Segmentation’s third largest segment, currently more than 3 percent of the US population and growing by 1.92 percent annually. The median age is 41 years. This segment is not ethnically diverse; 92 percent of the residents are white.

Socioeconomic

Education and hard-working, more than one-fourth of Green Acres residents hold a bachelor’s or graduate degree; more than half have attended college. Labor force participation is 67.5 percent, with higher employment concentration in the manufacturing, construction, health care and retail trade industry sectors. Occupation distributions are similar to those of the United States. Seventeen percent

¹³ Excerpt from ESRI Business Systems

of the households earn income from self-employment ventures. The median household income is \$63,430; the median net worth is \$174,417.

Residential

Although Green Acres neighborhoods are located throughout the country, they are found primarily in the Midwest and South, with the highest concentrations in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania. A “little bit country,” these residents live in pastoral settings of developing suburban fringe areas. Home ownership is at 86 percent, and median home value is \$179,073. Typical of rural residents, Green Acres households own multiple vehicles; 78 percent own two or more vehicles.

Preferences

Country living describes the lifestyle of Green Acres residents. Pet dogs or cats are considered part of the family. These do-it-yourselfers maintain and remodel their homes; projects include roofing and installing carpet or insulation. They own all the necessary power tools, including routers, welders, sanders, and various saws, to finish their projects. Residents also have the right tools to maintain their lawns, flowers garden, and vegetable gardens. They own riding lawn mowers, garden tillers, tractors, and even separate home freezers for the harvest. Continuing the do-it-yourself mode, it is not surprising that Green Acres is the top market for owning a sewing machine. A favorite pastime is using their ice cream maker to produce homemade ice cream. They prefer motorcycles and full-size pickup trucks.

For exercise, Green Acres residents ride their mountain bikes and go fishing, canoeing and kayaking. They also ride horseback and go power boating, bird watching, target shooting, hunting, motorcycling, and bowling. They listen to auto racing and country music on the radio and read fishing and hunting magazines. Many own satellite dishes so they can watch news programs, the Speed Channel, and auto racing on TV. A favorite channel is Country Music Television.

Sophisticated Squires Demographic

Residents of Sophisticated Squires neighborhoods enjoy cultured country life on the urban fringe. These city escapees accept longer commutes to live near fewer neighbors. Mostly married couple families; more than 40 percent of the households are married couples with children that range from toddlers to young adults. The median age is 38.4 years. Most are Baby Boomers and are aged between 35 and 54 years. This segment is not ethnically diverse; most residents are white.

Socioeconomic

These residents are education; more than one third of the population aged 25 years or older holds a bachelor's or graduate degree; another third has attended college. Labor force participation rates are high; occupations range from management to unskilled labor positions. Most work in white-collar jobs. The median household income is \$85,144. Nearly 90 percent of the households earn wage or salary

income; nearly half supplement their wages and salaries with interest, dividends or rental income. The median net worth is \$287,727.

Residential

Sophisticated Squires live in less densely populated areas concentrated along the Atlantic coast and around the Great Lakes. Approximately 90 percent of the housing is single-family homes; the median home value is \$230,333. Seventy-four percent of the housing was built before 1990; 55 percent was built between 1970 and 1989. More than 80 percent of the households own at least two vehicles. They prefer compact SUVs; however, many drive minivans or full-size SUVs.

Preferences

Do-it-yourselfers, Sophisticated Squires residents take care of their lawns and landscaping; home improvements; and remodeling projects such as bathroom remodeling, installing new light fixtures, painting home interiors, staining decks, and cleaning carpets with their steam cleaners. They like to barbecue on their gas grills and make bread with their bread-making machines. Many households own a motorcycle. A typical household will own three or more cell phones. Looking toward the future, many residents own stocks, bonds, and large life insurance policies. When dieting, they go on Weight Watchers; many own a treadmill or stationary bike to stay fit.

They go power boating, play board and word games, do woodworking projects, and attend football and baseball games. Adults also take photos, play golf and ride their motorcycles. Children play games on the home personal computer and typically own a video game system. Residents listen to soft adult contemporary music; classic hits; news; all-talk; and sports radio, including broadcasts of professional games. Although many households have four or more TVs, residents watch as much television as typical US households. Favorite programs include news, comedies, dramas, and programs on Home & Garden Television.

While the Town of Ashby is far more diverse and complex than these two categorizations, describing these two groups helps us in developing the plan to assess how policies might appeal to specific demographic sectors in developing greater local economic resiliency. For example, “green acres” residents typically are among the most-self-sufficient people with their ownership of tools and their use of them for home repair and improvement, furniture building, and other mechanical and building activities. This sector may be ideal to provide local leadership in practical skill building, establishing apprenticeship programs, and creating networks of trades and similar economic activities. This demographic could be considered a local “strength” to be built upon.

See the Appendix G for full breakdown of retail goods and services expenditures in Ashby.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ashby's history and growth as a community has always kept it anchored as a hard working agricultural and rural activity center that has been more vibrant in the past but is now significantly dependent on the businesses in other surrounding towns for groceries, hardware, personal and business services, and other everyday needs. Locally, residents can engage Ashby businesses for automotive repair and used cars, construction, landscape architectural services, farm products, and a few other non-essentials. The Ashby Market does serve the area with a moderate range of grocery and convenience goods, hardware, and a delicatessen. There are two other convenience stores in town as well.

However, a significant portion of Ashby's dollars "leak" to other communities and one key to developing greater local resilience is to encourage more essential products and services to be sold in the community. Yet due to the inherently small size of the community, this would have to be developed carefully and strategically and also connect with tourism opportunities as well to insure success. This is shown where data indicates that commercial tax receipts for Ashby are low, even compared to other towns in the region; even while tax rates are neither high nor low for the region. This leaves the residential tax base largely supporting the municipal budget and local services. It would serve Ashby to facilitate the establishment of additional commercial properties where possible to increase commercial tax receipts, relieve the burden on residences, and allow for additional public service provision.

Public comment from citizens and other stakeholders overwhelmingly want Ashby to remain rural and natural as they see the agricultural lands, forests, and other characteristics of a traditional rural New England community as their heritage and culture and policies should be established to develop the economy and leave this character in place. This will require innovative policies to attract business and industry to Ashby on a very selective basis while necessarily excluding a wide range of other businesses. In line with these preferences, residents and business owners also seek relief from what they see as onerous land use regulations and how these regulations are applied. While these two elements may seem contradictory at first glance—desiring to remain undeveloped and rural while seeking regulatory relief—they can be accommodated by conducting an analysis and audit of local regulations and other land use control mechanisms such as the Board of Health regulations to insure that they fit the character and resources of the community. Many land use regulations and processes are borrowed from other communities and may not necessarily fit the circumstances of the borrowing community. Ashby may also wish to create specialized zoning tools and techniques to allow for additional opportunities to establish commercial enterprises in the town center and other strategic locations.

Of course, establishing new commercial businesses is also dependent on the infrastructure required to adequately serve these businesses. This is most clearly evidenced by the lack of sanitary sewage facilities in the town center, which not only limits new businesses but has also driven existing businesses out of the community. While challenging, Ashby must work closely with regional agencies and other parties to develop innovative and cost effective strategies for sewage treatment or necessary commercial growth will not occur. Other infrastructure and related challenges relate to the high local cost of electricity, the aging road system, the zone 2 package delivery penalty, lack of sufficient high-speed internet for the area, and poor cellular telephone service in the area generally. Each of these challenges must be addressed in order to enhance the local business climate in Ashby.

Ashby residents also supported bringing more events and festivals to Ashby. To help plan for these events and possibly capture tourist traveling through Ashby on Route 119, there is a list of past and upcoming events in a 50 mile radius around Ashby. See Appendix H.

As previously stated, the Town of Ashby needs a place for residents to meet casually to discuss future development. Results from the SWOT survey indicated many people feel that the lack of a meeting place is acting as a barrier toward progress and collaboration between residents. This should be one of the first issues addressed. Without a proper shared space for town meetings, residents may feel un-involved and un-important in the planning process. These feelings may lead to apathy in regards to the future of Ashby, resulting in an atmosphere that is against any and all forms of evolution for the town.

For Ashby to gain revenue through their local economy, the town must be innovative and decide from a regional perspective what it is that makes Ashby unique. Ashby has a great opportunity to plan interesting events and festivals that can be promoted and marketed through regional publications. As the historic New England character of Ashby is very appealing to residents and guests, the town may want to consider small tourism approaches like a bed and breakfast, which will not change the atmosphere of the small town. For the short term, Ashby may want to spend some money to revitalize the general store downtown to provide more options for residents and travelers. A list of funding opportunities and assistance to build support for business can be found in Appendix I (Ashby Assistance Opportunities Report). Moreover, the following goals, objectives, and policies address Ashby's challenges and are designed to take advantage of opportunities that Ashby should seek.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

GOAL 1: To provide the necessary infrastructure for a successful sustainable economy.

Objective 1.1: To maintain and improve local transportation infrastructure to serve local mobility needs.

Policy 1.1.1: Develop a local transportation plan to serve the Town's needs over the next 20 years and to serve as a policy and programming document for the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). Such a plan should be cognizant of increasing scarcity and cost of energy, changing patterns of mobility, and focus on alternative modes locally to supplement the private car.

Policy 1.1.2: Support the development of a pedestrian and bicycle plan to establish non-motorized routes to serve bicycles and pedestrians as an alternative mode of travel for residents and visitors.

Policy 1.1.3: Consider the establishment of a Public Infrastructure Committee to oversee the prioritization of recommendations for transportation, waste management,

storm water and wastewater/sewage, telecommunications, and other local public infrastructure (include parks).

Policy 1.1.4: Continue to apply for Community Development Block Grants and other grants such as the Mass Works Infrastructure Program for road reclamation and other infrastructure projects.

Policy 1.1.5: Work with Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) to develop opportunities for additional public transportation. Routes could connect to high demand locations such as Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) and Fitchburg State University (FSU).

Objective 1.2: To establish facilities and infrastructure to better serve existing and potential future businesses.

Policy 1.2.1: Rehabilitate the Grange Building to build a community center for the Town residents to use and hold continuing education classes and showcase local artists and businesses.

Policy 1.2.2: To establish a commercial kitchen in Ashby (or a shared facility in an adjoining community) to process and package local fruits and vegetables as well as prepared meals.

Policy 1.2.3: To site an information kiosk or stand that could include a local map, list of points of interest, and brochures for local businesses and other attractions.

Policy 1.2.4: Develop a Public Water Feasibility Study to provide alternatives for water service in the Town Center. The availability of public water supply will provide the opportunity to bring in desired businesses such as restaurants to the center of Town.

Policy 1.2.5: Consider funding a Project Engineering Report (PER) to develop a decentralized wastewater treatment system in the Town Center following the first recommendation from Ashby Village Public Sewer Feasibility Study. This is the first step needed to apply for the Massachusetts Clean Water State Revolving Fund to create a Town Center Public Sewer System.

Objective 1.3: To encourage all forms of alternative energy for residential, commercial, and public purposes to move toward greater energy self-sufficiency and resilience.

Policy 1.3.1: Continue to work with the MRPC energy task force to identify regional opportunities for alternative energy. Such opportunities should consider municipal facilities as well as individual installations for businesses and residents.

Policy 1.3.2: Consider partnership with Ashburnham Power and Light as a potential alternative to UNITIL.

Policy 1.3.3 Consider becoming a Green Community. There are potential grants for municipal governments to install renewable energy systems that could save the Town money to power their buildings.

Policy 1.3.4: Develop and implement as needed targeted educational resource materials regarding energy conservation, efficiency and the installation of small-scale and large-scale renewable energy systems for both residents and local businesses and other organizations.

Policy 1.3.5: Consider encouraging small-scale local wind turbines to save on future costs of energy, increase energy independence, and lower carbon footprint.

GOAL 2: To proactively meet local labor and training needs for current and future businesses.

Objective 2.1: Develop a local educational and labor training network to supply the Town with sufficient well-trained labor for a sustainable economy.

Policy 2.1.1: To include in a survey of local businesses what type of labor and training they need for their specific business so that educational and training programs can be calibrated to current and future projected local needs.

Policy 2.1.2: To promote the establishment of a formal apprenticeship program in both the North Middlesex Regional High School and the Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School matched to the current and anticipated needs of local businesses. Such a program should include a formal relationship between the schools and a local business liaison.

Objective 2.2: To develop formal and informal mechanisms to match workers and businesses.

Policy 2.2.1: To establish a local labor registry to match local businesses with people seeking work.

Objective 2.3: Local economic development policy should encourage businesses that meet local economic development goals.

Policy 2.3.1: To encourage the creation of local living-wage jobs with benefits.

Policy 2.3.2: To seek new businesses and support existing businesses that meet local sustainable economic development criteria and avoid businesses that clearly do not fit local goals.

GOAL 3: To develop a sustainable local economic base that provides essential products and services to local residents and captures external dollars as a supplement to local revenue but not establish a fiscal dependency.

Objective 3.1: To develop a local artisanal industrial, trade, and service sector that serves both export and local markets.

Policy 3.1.1: Identify existing artisanal industries, trades, and services, determine their needs, and establish policies and programs to support them, and identify additional business types that will complement and extend this economic sector locally.

Policy 3.1.2: Develop a Cultural/Creative Plan for Ashby to strategize for nurturing and expanding the Town's creative assets.

Objective 3.2: To facilitate the establishment and growth of local businesses that meets the stated principles of this plan.

Policy 3.2.1: Investigate the potential of establishing a small business incubator facility in Ashby proper (or a shared regional facility) in order to cultivate the types of small businesses desired in the community. The incubator should encourage innovation, practical problem-solving, and local needs. Refer to Project Brief 1 after the implementation matrix.

Policy 3.2.2: Consider the Grange Building or Maya Hall for a potential low-impact small business incubator facility.

Policy 3.2.3: Investigate needs of equine and farm businesses to support their continued existence to encourage more of these types of businesses. Encourage development of businesses to support their needs. These types of business help maintain Ashby's rural feel.

Objective 3.3: To establish a plan for growing a tourism sector of the local economy that brings in external dollars but does not become a dependency nor disruptive of the local small-town feel.

Policy 3.3.1: Develop connections to tour busses and other organized tourism programs that visit or pass through Ashby.

Policy 3.3.2: Create an arts/food festival that showcases local artists.

Policy 3.3.3: Develop a unique one-of-a-kind festival to bring people from all parts of the region to increase tourism and bring in external dollars.

GOAL 4: To strategically use public policy to improve the economic development climate and foster a sustainable economy.

Objective 4.1: Develop and improve local land use regulations that encourage the sustainable land uses and patterns of development desired by local residents.

Policy 4.1.1: To establish a village center zoning district that creates a village center that is the focus of community activity, commerce, entertainment, and residential living. See Appendix J for Ashby's Existing Zoning Map.

Policy 4.1.2: To develop form-based code for the village center to support the look and feel of a small New England Town.

Policy 4.1.3: Decrease off-street parking setbacks in the Town Center to create pedestrian friendly design by encouraging businesses and homes to be developed closer to the street which fits in with currently non-conforming buildings in the Town Center.

Policy 4.1.4: Conduct a complete evaluation of the zoning bylaws to determine if there are other potential amendments that can be pursued that will make it easier to conduct business in Ashby.

Objective 4.2: Consider the establishment of specific roles in local government that will enhance economic development opportunities and improve the overall business climate

Policy 4.2.1: Establish an economic development role in local government in conjunction either with the land use agent or the town administrator.

Policy 4.2.2: Consider retaining the Ashby Economic Development Plan Committee as an ongoing economic development committee charged with carrying out the implementation of the plan and for other purposes.

Policy 4.2.3: Develop a unified permitting program that allows for greater ease of handling complex or multi-board development applications.

Policy 4.2.4: Develop a comprehensive development permitting guide that will assist all customers with projects of any type and scale or that need to obtain any permit. Also develop separate handouts for more substantive processes that require additional detail or guidance.

Policy 4.2.5: Consider the identification of a development liaison or one-stop permitting role in Town Hall to walk customers through the process and serve as a point of contact for questions and progress.

Policy 4.2.6: Consider multi-jurisdictional (inter-municipal) partnerships to implement staffing or other resource obstacles to development review and permitting.

Policy 4.2.7: Consider entering into a dialogue with the Nashoba Board of Health to determine ways in which the issues identified by residents as impediments to conducting business can be overcome.

Objective 4.3: To evaluate local fiscal policies to determine if there are any adjustments or changes that could support sustainable economic development.

Policy 4.3.1: Consider a fiscal analysis that would seek efficiencies and opportunities to assist residents and businesses in establishing sustainable practices.

Objective 4.4: To establish a grant seeking role in local government.

Policy 4.4.1: Assign the responsibility of grant seeking, application, and administration to a paid role in local government such as the land use agent or town administrator. Grants should lead to self-sustenance of the grants administration role in no more than two (2) years from formal date of establishment.

GOAL 5: To develop tools and resources to better market, organize, and seek assistance for Ashby businesses.

Objective 5.1: Develop tools for local business advocacy.

Policy 5.1.1: Encourage the establishment of a peer-to-peer organization such as a local chamber of commerce, village center merchants association, or similar to engage in marketing, outreach, event planning, organization and lobbying, and other activities seen as useful to local businesses.

Policy 5.1.2: Encourage the establishment of a local newsletter or newspaper that provides advertising for local businesses and a listing of businesses plus local news of general interest.

Policy 5.1.3: Develop a handout for start-up businesses to navigate local and state regulations.

Objective 5.2: Develop marketing materials for Ashby businesses and local economy.

Policy 5.2.1: Develop a tri-fold brochure marketing Ashby's assets.

Policy 5.2.2: Create a newspaper or magazine advertisement for Ashby.

Policy 5.2.3: Establish a kiosk for placing brochures about Ashby and local Ashby businesses. Consider a stand-alone kiosk on the common or consider a niche in conjunction with another building such as the Market or Grange.

Policy 5.2.4: Extend the vision for sustainable economic development into a local brand for the Town of Ashby including phrases, images, and selling points and use this in marketing efforts.

DRAFT

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Goal, Objective, Policy	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Long Term	Responsible Agency	Funding Source
GOAL 1: To provide the necessary infrastructure for a successful sustainable economy						
Objective 1.1: To maintain and improve local transportation infrastructure to serve local mobility needs						
<i>Policy 1.1.1: Develop a local transportation plan to serve the Town's needs over the next 20 years and to serve as a policy and programming document for the TIP and LRTP. Such a plan should be cognizant of increasing scarcity and cost of energy, changing patterns of mobility, and focus on alternative modes locally to supplement the private car.</i>	Appoint members to MPO and MJTC. Comment on TIP Review Regional Transportation Plan	BOS, Planning & Highway meet jointly to establish transportation goals.		<input type="checkbox"/>	Ashby Planning Board Ashby Board of Selectmen Department of Public Works Ashby Police	Possibly DLTA Funding to do a regional transportation plan with Ashburnham
<i>Policy 1.1.2: Support the development of a pedestrian and bicycle plan to establish non-motorized routes to serve bicycles and pedestrians as an alternative mode of travel for residents and visitors.</i>		Part of the above. Involve interested private parties.		<input type="checkbox"/>	Ashby Planning Board MRPC	
<i>Policy 1.1.3: Consider the establishment of a Public Infrastructure Committee to oversee spending and prioritization recommendations for transportation, waste management, storm water and wastewater/sewage, telecommunications, and other local public infrastructure (include parks?)</i>	BOS hold public meeting to facilitate discussion		<input type="checkbox"/>		Ashby Board of Selectmen	
<i>Policy 1.1.4: Continue to apply for Community Development Block Grants and other grants such as the Mass Works Infrastructure Program for road reclamation and other infrastructure projects.</i>	ONGOING					

<p><i>Policy 1.1.5: Work with Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) to develop opportunities for additional public transportation. Routes could connect to high demand locations such as Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) and Fitchburg State University (FSU).</i></p>	<h1 style="margin: 0;">O N G O I N G</h1>						
<p>Objective 1.2: To establish facilities to better serve existing and potential future businesses.</p>							
<p><i>Policy 1.2.1: Rehabilitate the Grange Building to build a community center for the Town residents to use and hold continuing education classes and showcase local artists and businesses.</i></p>	<p>Review any documentation about building. Informal evaluation</p>	<p>Plan possible uses and funding sources.</p>	<p>Seek qualified users</p>		<p>Local volunteer group with Town assistance</p>		
<p><i>Policy 1.2.2: To establish a commercial kitchen in Ashby (or a shared facility in an adjoining community) to process and package local fruits and vegetables as well as prepared meals.</i></p>	<p>Review existing establishments and requirements</p>	<p>Recommend suitable locations in Ashby or area. Establish a plan and seek funding</p>	<p>Establish a committee to follow through.</p>		<p>Agricultural Committee</p>		
<p><i>Policy 1.2.3: To site an information kiosk or stand that could include a local map, list of points of interest, and brochures for local businesses and other attractions.</i></p>	<p>Locate site. Seek funding</p>				<p>Board of Selectmen Historic Society</p>		
<p><i>Policy 1.2.4: Develop a Public Water Feasibility Study to provide alternatives for water service in the Town Center. The availability of public water supply will provide the opportunity to bring in desired businesses such as restaurants to the center of Town.</i></p>	<p>Contact stakeholder to assess interest.</p>	<p>Seek funding, see 1.2.4</p>					
<p><i>Policy 1.2.5: Consider funding a Project Engineering Report (PER) to develop a decentralized wastewater treatment system in the Town Center following the first recommendation from Ashby Village Public Sewer Feasibility Study. Needed to apply for the Massachusetts Clean Water State Revolving Fund</i></p>							

Goal, Objective, Policy	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Long Term	Responsible Agencies	Funding Source(s)
Objective 1.3: To encourage all forms of alternative energy for residential, commercial, and public purposes to move toward greater energy self-sufficiency and resilience						
<i>Policy 1.3.1: Continue to work with the MRPC energy task force to identify regional opportunities for alternative energy. Such opportunities should consider municipal facilities as well as individual installations for businesses and residents.</i>	ONGOING				Ashby Energy Committee MRPC	
<i>Policy 1.3.2: Consider partnership with the Ashburnham municipal energy program as a potential alternative to the local provider (UNITIL). Determine what the Green Communities Act and other state law allow regarding such partnerships.</i>	Evaluate interest from Ashburnham & Unitil Appoint committee to talk to Unitil and AMPL		<input type="checkbox"/>		Ashby Board of Selectmen Ashby Energy Committee Town of Ashburnham	
<i>Policy 1.3.3: Consider becoming a Green Community. There are potential grants for municipal governments to install renewable energy systems that could save the Town money to power municipal buildings.</i>	Bring stretch code to vote at Town Meeting		<input type="checkbox"/>			
<i>Policy 1.3.4: Develop and implement as needed targeted educational resource materials regarding energy conservation, efficiency and the installation of small-scale and large-scale renewable energy systems for both residents and local businesses and other organizations.</i>	Ongoing, use web site FB and educational events				Ashby Energy Committee	
<i>Policy 1.3.5: Consider encouraging small-scale local wind turbines to save on future costs of energy, increase energy independence, and lower carbon footprint.</i>		Use 1.3.4 above to inform citizens of programs available			Responsible Ashby Energy Committee	

GOAL 2: To proactively meet local labor and training needs for current and future businesses						
Objective 2.1: Develop a local educational and labor training network to supply the Town with sufficient well-trained labor for a sustainable economy						
<i>Policy 2.1.2: To include in a survey of local businesses what type of labor and training they need for their specific business so that educational and training programs can be calibrated to current and future projected local needs.</i>		Conduct survey			Local schools and a local business Group or Economic Development Committee	
<i>Policy 2.1.1: To promote the establishment of a formal apprenticeship program in both the North Middlesex Regional High School and the Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School matched to the current and anticipated needs of local businesses. Such a program should include a formal relationship between the schools and a local business liaison.</i>		Work with School Committee member to discuss curriculum, intern programs, etc.	Recruit with in existing programs. Contact Fitchburg State U. for appropriate programs.		Ashby Land Use Agent or Economic Development Specialist	
Objective 2.2: To develop formal and informal mechanisms to match workers and businesses						
<i>Policy 2.2.1: To establish a local labor registry to match local businesses with people seeking work.</i>			Work with DET to promote local business needs		Economic Development Specialist	

Goal, Objective, Policy	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Long Term	Responsible Agencies	Funding Sources
Objective 2.3: To pursue economic security with the creation of local living-wage jobs with benefits to move toward economic self-sufficiency for households						
<i>Policy 2.3.1: To encourage and pursue the creation of local living-wage jobs with benefits.</i>	O N G O I N G					Fund through economic development activities
<i>Policy 2.3.2: To seek new businesses and support existing businesses that meet local sustainable economic development criteria and avoid businesses that clearly do not fit local goals.</i>	O N G O I N G					Fund through economic development activities
GOAL 3: To develop a sustainable local economic base that provides essential products and services to local residents and captures external dollars as a supplement to local revenue but not establish a fiscal dependency.						
Objective 3.1: To develop a local artisanal industrial, trade, and service sector that serves both export and local markets.						
<i>Policy 3.1.1: Identify existing artisanal industries, trades, and services, determine their needs, and establish policies and programs to support them, and identify additional business types that will complement and extend this economic sector locally.</i>		Review business list and contact appropriate businesses and assess needs.			Economic Development Specialist	
<i>Policy 3.1.2: Develop a Cultural/Creative Plan for Ashby to strategize for nurturing and expanding the Town's creative assets.</i>			Develop plan to promote creative businesses.			

Goal, Objective, Policy	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Long Term	Responsible Agencies	Funding Source(s)
Objective 3.2: To facilitate the establishment and growth of local businesses that meets the stated principles of this plan.						
<i>Policy 3.2.1: Investigate the potential of establishing a small business incubator facility in Ashby proper (or a shared regional facility) in order to cultivate the types of small businesses desired in the community. The incubator should encourage innovation, practical problem-solving, and local needs.</i>		Investigate existing resources in area	Depending on result, promote existing facility or seek funding regional one.		Economic development role	
<i>Policy 3.2.2: Consider the Grange Building or Maya Hall for a potential low-impact small business incubator facility.</i>		☐	Review existing buildings for above			
<i>Policy 3.2.3: Investigate needs of equine and farm businesses to support their continued existence to encourage more of these types of businesses. Encourage development of businesses to support their needs. These types of business help maintain Ashby's rural feel.</i>	Encourage Agricultural Committee	Collect data on needs.	Generate a list of local actions to promote farms and farm income		Agriculture Committee & Economic Development role	
Objective 3.3: To establish a plan for growing a tourism sector of the local economy that brings in external dollars but does not become a dependency nor disruptive of the local small-town feel.						
<i>Policy 3.3.1: Develop connections to tour busses and other organized tourism programs that visit or pass through Ashby.</i>	Contact tour companies and assess needs	Develop plan to attract bus tourists back.				
<i>Policy 3.3.2: Create an arts/food festival that showcases local artists.</i>		Work with existing festivals to expand them	Assess need of additional festivals			
<i>Policy 3.3.3: Develop a unique one-of-a-kind festival to bring people from all parts of the region to increase tourism and bring in external dollars.</i>				See 3.3.2 above		

Goal, Objective, Policy	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Long Term	Responsible Board	Funding Source
GOAL 4: To strategically use public policy to improve the economic development climate and foster a sustainable economy.						
Objective 4.1: Develop and improve local land use regulations that encourage the sustainable land uses and patterns of development desired by local residents.						
<i>Policy 4.1.1: To establish a village center zoning district that creates a village center that is the focus of community activity, commerce, entertainment, and residential living. See Appendix J for Ashby's Existing Zoning Map.</i>	Bring before Town Meeting				Planning Board Economic Development Specialist	
<i>Policy 4.1.2: To develop form-based code for the village center to support the look and feel of a small New England Town.</i>		Educate citizens on form based codes	Review impact of form based code on Town center		Planning Board	
<i>Policy 4.1.3: Decrease off-street parking setbacks in the Town Center to create pedestrian friendly design by encouraging businesses and homes to be developed closer to the street which fits in with currently non-conforming buildings in the Town Center.</i>		Review setbacks for appropriateness to district			Planning Board	
<i>Policy 4.1.4: Conduct a complete evaluation of the zoning bylaws to determine if there are other potential amendments that can be pursued that will make it easier to conduct business in Ashby.</i>			Review zoning bylaw		Planning Board	
Objective 4.2: Consider the establishment of specific roles in local government that will enhance economic development opportunities and improve the overall business climate						
<i>Policy 4.2.1: Establish an economic development role in local government in conjunction either with the land use agent or the town administrator.</i>	Assign the role				Board of Selectmen	

Goal, Objective, Policy	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Long Term	Responsible Agencies	Funding Source(s)
<i>Policy 4.2.2: Consider retaining the Ashby Economic Development Plan Committee as an ongoing economic development committee charged with carrying out the implementation of the plan and for other purposes.</i>	Re-appoint committee to implement E. D. plan				Board of Selectmen	
<i>Policy 4.2.3: Develop a unified permitting program that allows for greater ease of handling complex or multi-board development applications.</i>		Continue with basis already establish			Land Use Agent & multiple boards	
<i>Policy 4.2.4: Develop a comprehensive development permitting guide that will assist all customers with projects of any type and scale or that need to obtain any permit. Also develop separate handouts for more substantive processes that require additional detail or guidance.</i>	Continue with existing guide				Land Use Agent	
<i>Policy 4.2.5: Consider the identification of a development liaison or one-stop permitting role in Town Hall to walk customers through the process and serve as a point of contact for questions and progress.</i>			Review effectiveness		Board of Selectmen	
<i>Policy 4.2.6: Consider multi-jurisdictional (inter-municipal) partnerships to implement staffing or other resource obstacles to development review and permitting.</i>	Consider regionalizing some permitting positions		?			
<i>Policy 4.2.7: Consider entering into a dialogue with the Nashoba Board of Health to determine ways in which the issues identified by residents as impediments to conducting business can be overcome.</i>	Review objections				Land Use Agent	

Goal, Objective, Policy	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Long Term	Responsible Agencies	Funding Source(s)
Objective 4.3: To evaluate local fiscal policies to determine if there are any adjustments or changes that could support sustainable economic development.						
<i>Policy 4.3.1: Consider a fiscal analysis that would seek efficiencies and opportunities to assist residents and businesses in establishing sustainable practices.</i>		Review sustainable business practices	Educate business on sustainable practices		Economic Development Specialist	
Objective 4.4: To establish a grant seeking role in local government.						
<i>Policy 4.4.1: Assign the responsibility of grant seeking, application, and administration to a paid role in local government such as the land use agent or town administrator. Grants should lead to self-sustenance of the grants administration role in no more than two (2) years from formal date of establishment.</i>		Assess practicality and assign implementation			Board of Selectmen	
GOAL 5: To develop tools and resources to better market, organize, and seek assistance for Ashby businesses.						
Objective 5.1: Develop tools for local business advocacy.						
<i>Policy 5.1.1: Encourage the establishment of a peer-to-peer organization such as a local chamber of commerce, village center merchants association, or similar to engage in marketing, outreach, event planning, organization and lobbying, and other activities seen as useful to local businesses.</i>		Contact businesses to assess interest	Assist with establishment		Ashby Planning Board	
Policy 5.1.2: Encourage the establishment of a local newsletter or newspaper that provides advertising for local businesses and a listing of businesses plus local news of general interest.	Contact local reporter about assisting with establishment				TBD	
Policy 5.1.3: Develop a handout for start-up businesses to navigate local and state regulations.		Develop handout. Coordinate with 4.2.4 & 4.2.5			Land Use Agent and/or local economic development role	

Goal, Objective, Policy	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Long Term	Responsible Agencies	Funding Sources
Objective 5.2: Develop marketing materials for Ashby businesses and local economy.						
Policy 5.2.1: Develop a tri-fold brochure marketing Ashby's assets.					Multiple Boards	
Policy 5.2.2: Create a newspaper or magazine advertisement for Ashby.					Economic Development Specialist	
Policy 5.2.3: Establish a kiosk for placing brochures about Ashby and local Ashby businesses. Consider a stand-alone kiosk on the common or consider a niche in conjunction with another building such as the Market or Grange.						
<i>Policy 5.2.4: Extend the vision for sustainable economic development into a local brand for the Town of Ashby including phrases, images, and selling points and use this in marketing efforts.</i>					Economic Development Committee	

Appendices

A.Kick-Off Meeting Agenda and Minutes

DRAFT

**B. Ashby Sustainable Rural Economic Development Plan Public Visioning
Session Report**

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C. Ashby Economic Development Survey Report

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DRAFT

E. List of Businesses in Ashby with NAICS Code

DRAFT

F. List of Parcels in Ashby with Valuation

DRAFT

G. ESRI Retail Goods and Services Expenditures

DRAFT

**H. List of Past and Upcoming Festivals in the Surrounding 50 Mile Radius
around Ashby**

DRAFT

I. The Ashby Assistance Opportunities Report

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J. Ashby's Existing Zoning Map

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