



# Strategic Plan for Community Transformation

*2016 and Beyond*

*Prepared By Main Street Skowhegan*

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# Executive Summary

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Skowhegan is at a pivotal point in time. With recent changes in manufacturing and the wood industry, the need for business diversification has never been more critical. The town and members of the community recognize this need for change and have begun to look to Skowhegan's strengths as potential game changers. Several social issues have become more prominent as of late, illuminating the need to address these as a community. In order to resolve issues, strengthen our economy, and realize our full potential, we all need to begin rowing the boat in the same direction.

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*"It will take all people getting on the same page with the same vision to make [it] happen." – electronic survey participant*

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Capitalizing on our unique location and natural resources, emphasizing our strengths, and empowering our community are all important elements outlined in the following pages. Skowhegan must continue to think innovatively and creatively to solve social problems, enhance economic vitality, and become the type of place residents are proud to call home and visitors fall in love with. This plan will help guide the community toward this shared vision.

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*"Embrace Skowhegan's assets. Elevate the unique. Include everyone in the future." – electronic survey participant*

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Main Street Skowhegan undertook the process of developing this plan in the fall of 2015. Over the course of the following months, the strategic planning committee gathered and analyzed data and engaged local residents, listening to their dreams for Skowhegan. After eight months and conversations with more than 500 members of the community, this plan was created.

In the following pages, you will find observations, analysis, data, and anecdotal information from residents. You'll also find goals, objectives, strategies, and action steps for navigating Skowhegan toward a prosperous future.

## Transformation Strategies

### Diversify and Grow the Economy

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- Attract a broad range of new businesses.
- Support existing businesses to encourage growth.
- Expand Skowhegan's agricultural food hub.
- Cultivate programs to engage, support, and retain youth workforce.
- Invest in infrastructure.
- Enhance recreation and promote natural resources.
- Nurture the creative economy and enrich arts and cultural assets.

### Make Skowhegan a Tourist Destination

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- Invest in tourism product development and promotion.

### Restore Community Pride, Strengthen Reputation, and Promote a Positive Public Image

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- Communicate events, opportunities to get involved, and progress of action steps.
- Employ marketing strategy and an external communications plan.

Skowhegan is poised for change. We should learn from the past but make the future our own. A core group of people has stepped forward to lead, prepared to tackle projects both big and small. Collaboration is essential, and hard work is inevitable. With the future of Skowhegan at stake, we encourage **everyone** to get involved.

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*“Community development is strongest when it involves a broad base of community action. Citizens should be viewed as players, not recipients, in development.”*  
– electronic survey participant

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Over the next several years our town will be a place that people watch in awe, as we join together as a community to achieve our ultimate goal of becoming a thriving economic, cultural, and recreational destination where residents enjoy a high quality of life.



# Introduction

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## The Need for a Strategic Plan

A prime place for observing fish and wildlife, Skowhegan was a stop for the Abenaki on their journey from northern hunting grounds to the sea. The Skowhegan of today is not only a primary transportation hub, but also serves as the seat of Somerset County and the gateway to the Maine woods, with routes leading north to Jackman, Moosehead Lake, and beyond. Our town is an important part of the Kennebec Valley, and the future prosperity of the region is tied directly to the success of Skowhegan.

During the past few years, Skowhegan has made impressive strides toward revitalization through the creation of the municipal parking lot and the Renaissance Center, formalization of trails on the south side of the gorge, and the establishment of the Somerset Grist Mill.

It's critical for Skowhegan to maintain this positive momentum. In March of 2016 local paper mill Sappi, which represents 47 percent of the town's tax base, was devalued by \$64 million, resulting in a loss of \$1.2 million in tax revenue for the town. Five of Maine's paper mills have shut down since 2013, leaving only six remaining in the state. This is evidence that we can no longer rely on just one business to carry our community. Change is inevitable, and in order to spur active transformation a shared community vision must lead the way.

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*"Change is possible and necessary." –online survey respondent*

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Strategic plans are important for businesses, organizations, and municipalities. A carefully crafted plan provides direction and outlines strategies and tactics for getting there. It also prioritizes financial needs and includes a timeline and tools for measurement to help gauge success. But perhaps the most important reason for investing in a strategic plan is that it provides a focus for everyone to work together to achieve a specific goal, while concentrating energy, resources, and time.

This strategic plan for transformation will guide the entire community toward a bright future—a future that will provide opportunities for all citizens to thrive, a more diverse economy where businesses prosper, and a vibrant epicenter of cultural and recreational offerings for locals and visitors alike. And we'll work together as a community to get there.

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*"Future choices must be bold and entrepreneurial. Staying the same will gradually kill the town." – online survey respondent*

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## Strategic Planning Process

### Overview of Approach

Main Street's strategic planning committee felt that it was absolutely necessary to review all available data and gather feedback from residents in order to fully understand Skowhegan's challenges and opportunities. From the beginning, the goal of this strategic planning process was to engage as many stakeholders as possible.

### Collaboration as a Foundation

While the Main Street Skowhegan Strategic Planning Committee was preparing to begin the planning process, two groups emerged as important partners: the TIF Oversight Committee and the Somerset Cultural Planning Committee (SCPC).

- The TIF Oversight Committee, appointed by the Skowhegan Select Board, was tasked with reviewing the current TIF and making a recommendation for or against its renewal. The committee endorsed renewal, and their proposal includes several economic development strategies for Skowhegan. This plan incorporates these strategies and will serve as Skowhegan's Downtown Revitalization Plan as required by the Department of Economic and Community Development for the TIF amendment—though it includes transformation strategies for the entire town, not just the downtown.
- SCPC will begin a cultural planning process for Somerset County in July of 2016. Gathering art and cultural data from the Skowhegan community was important for both Main Street's planning process and the cultural planning process. SCPC will take what we have learned and use it as a starting point for their detailed cultural plan.

***TIF (Tax Increment Financing):**  
A financing method that allows the town to capture increased tax revenue for community-improvement projects.*

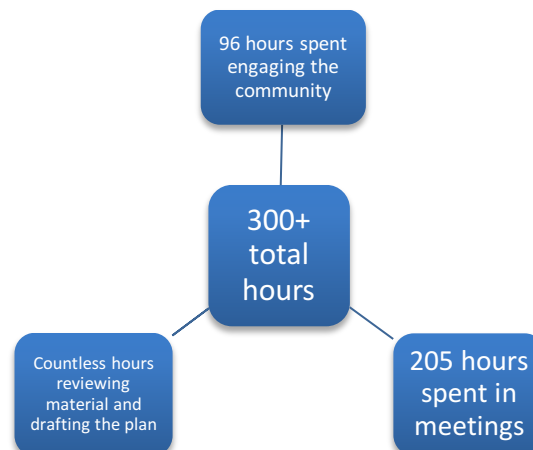
Main Street's strategic planning committee, the TIF Oversight Committee, and SCPC worked collaboratively to ensure that all planning efforts resulted in a shared vision for Skowhegan.

For more information about each committee, please see Appendix A.

### Time Invested

Collaboration and inclusion take time. This strategic planning process was purposeful and intentional, and it took eight months from beginning to end.

For more details about the planning process, please see Appendix B.



# Elements of the Plan

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## Market Understanding

### Review of Existing Secondary Data

The committee gathered, reviewed, and analyzed qualitative and quantitative secondary data to gain insight into past redevelopment plans, proposed traffic patterns, demographics of Skowhegan residents, educational attainment, health statistics, recreation planning, and more.

It was the committee's priority to use past economic development plans as a starting point for this strategic plan. Solid groundwork has already been laid and projects were completed; building on these accomplishments is important.

For a full list of secondary data resources and links, please see Appendix C.

### Situation Analysis

Important themes emerged from past economic development plans: economic vitality and revitalization, design/infrastructure improvements, the need for marketing and community engagement events, and traffic/parking/pedestrian safety. Several tasks outlined in past plans were completed, including façade improvements, the municipal parking lot, and the Renaissance Center (shared ADA access and public restrooms). Strategies and projects that remain incomplete and/or in progress were considered for inclusion in this plan.

It's important to note that Skowhegan's agricultural food hub is fairly new and was only recognized in the most recent plan (2011), and that art and culture were, for the most part, left out of all past plans.

Information from other sources revealed community issues: Skowhegan has an aging population and is losing its youth to out-migration; unemployment, poverty, food insecurity, substance abuse, and obesity are harsh realities for many adults and children in Somerset County; educational attainment levels among local high school graduates are fairly low; and child abuse and neglect rates are quite high.

The committee also reviewed tourism data to determine who visits the Kennebec Valley and why. We discovered that tourists are trending younger, and many are traveling with children and looking for cultural activities and ways to connect with nature<sup>1</sup>. In addition, recreation was cited as a top reason for visiting the region. Craft breweries and farmers' markets are also named as primary tourist attractions<sup>2</sup>.

See current data in the table following. For more detailed information, please see Appendix D.

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<sup>1</sup> Maine Office of Tourism Annual Plan 2016, pg. 10

<sup>2</sup> Kennebec Valley Regional Report 2014 (Maine Office of Tourism)



SKOWHEGAN STATISTICS			
Metric	Year	Somerset County	Maine
<b>Education: Skowhegan Area High School College-Bound Students<sup>3</sup></b>	2015	SAHS Class of 2015: 44% entered a four-year college, 22% entered a two-year college	
<b>Education: Residents with at Least an Associate Degree<sup>4</sup></b>	2009-13	26.66%	39.9%
<b>Education: Residents with No Diploma<sup>5</sup></b>	2013	Skowhegan: 13.5%	
<b>Workforce: Unemployment Rate<sup>6</sup></b>	2014	7.9%	5.7%
<b>Poverty: Adults Living in Poverty<sup>7</sup></b>	2009-13	17.8%	13.6%
<b>Poverty: Children Living in Poverty<sup>8</sup></b>	2009-13	24.9%	18.5%
<b>Health: Fruit and Vegetable Consumption (Among High School Students)<sup>9</sup></b>	2013	16.2%	16.8%
<b>Health: Fruit Consumption (Among Adults 18+, less than one serving per day)<sup>10</sup></b>	2013	44.4%	34%
<b>Health: Vegetable Consumption (Among Adults 18+, less than one serving per day)<sup>11</sup></b>	2013	20.1%	17.9%
<b>Health: Obesity (Adults)<sup>12</sup></b>	2013	33.8%	28.9%
<b>Health: Obesity (High School Students)<sup>13</sup></b>	2015	19%	14%
<b>Health: Drug-Related Death Rate Per 100,000<sup>14</sup></b>	2012-14	14.9	13.7
<b>Health: County with the highest risk factors for child abuse and neglect<sup>15</sup></b>	2015	Somerset ranks #1	
<b>Demographics: Population Age 65+<sup>16</sup></b>	2013	18.3%	17.7% (U.S. is 14.1%)
<b>Demographics: Population Age 20-44<sup>17</sup></b>	2010	28.5%	29.8% (U.S. is 34.5%)

<sup>3</sup> Skowhegan Area High School and Bloomfield Academy Education Data; Class of 2015

<sup>4</sup> *A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education – Maine Brief* (Lumina Foundation: April 2015)

<sup>5</sup> [Demographics Report, Skowhegan, Maine](#) (Cubit Planning: 2014)

<sup>6</sup> Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment District Summary, 2015

<sup>7</sup> Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment District Summary, 2015

<sup>8</sup> Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment District Summary, 2015

<sup>9</sup> Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment District Summary, 2015

<sup>10</sup> Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment District Summary, 2015

<sup>11</sup> Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment District Summary, 2015

<sup>12</sup> Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment District Summary, 2015

<sup>13</sup> Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, Greater Somerset County 2015

<sup>14</sup> [SEOW Special Report: Heroin, Opioids, and Other Drugs in Maine](#) (Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services: Oct. 2015, pg. 15)

<sup>15</sup> [Kennebec Valley Community Action Program Community Needs Assessment](#), Fiscal Year 2015

<sup>16</sup> Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment District Summary, 2015

<sup>17</sup> [Population Distribution by Age Group and Gender](#) (Somerset County Economic Development Corporation: 2010)

## Community Visioning

### Inclusion and Engagement

The strategic planning committee gathered feedback from members of the community through several techniques. Community members, business leaders, artists, and youth, from not only Skowhegan but also the surrounding region, were engaged through one-on-one interviews, small-group discussions, forums, and surveys. In order to paint a full picture, we intentionally opened the engagement process to consumers who work or shop in Skowhegan but live elsewhere.

*The community, as well as all members of the Select Board, was invited to participate in a public forum on March 31, 2016.*

### Methodology

Members of the strategic planning committee were trained to facilitate group conversations. In order to establish trust, committee members conducted interviews and discussions with individuals and groups with which they had previously established relationships or connections. To learn more about the engagement strategy, please see Appendix E.

After listening to the community and taking copious notes, the committee analyzed all responses to determine top themes and created a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis.

Please see Appendix F for top themes and Appendix G for the SWOT Analysis.

### Total Engagement



## Using this Strategic Plan

### Intent of the Plan

The 2016 Skowhegan Strategic Plan for Community Transformation was created to be a living, breathing document that includes a goal for the town and a road map for achieving it. The plan is intended to bring the community together and enable all parties to move forward collaboratively toward shared success. An annual public forum will allow for community updates, progress reporting, and the inclusion of new ideas.

In addition to being a plan for the town, this document will serve as the plan that will accompany the proposed TIF Amendment.

Please see Appendix K for more information.

### How this Plan Is Different

From committee makeup to desired outcomes, this plan is different from past plans in several ways.

1. This plan is for all of Skowhegan—not just the downtown. Strategies outlined herein are intended to elevate the entire town. In fact, if implemented correctly, this plan will benefit the whole region.
2. The planning committee comprised a cross-section of individuals from the community—business and municipal leaders, health professionals, artists, farmers—who are all deeply invested in seeing Skowhegan realize its full potential.
3. The process was inclusive. The entire community was invited to participate, and more than 500 residents took advantage of the opportunity to share their vision for the future of Skowhegan.
4. The plan is more comprehensive—it's a plan for community transformation that incorporates economic development strategies. Business enhancement cannot happen in a vacuum; we must also consider the well-being of our community. Strategies for boosting the economy are intricately tied to sense of place and quality of life.
5. The plan is written for easy consumption by all.
6. It includes specific action steps for each strategy, a timeline, and metrics for success.
7. Every year Main Street Skowhegan will hold a forum to review the plan, report out on progress, and adjust as needed.

This plan will not sit on a shelf. It is intended for implementation, and Main Street will ensure action is taken and progress is measured.

### Reading the Plan

#### GOAL

The ultimate outcome we are striving to achieve; may take an extended period of time to accomplish.

#### OBJECTIVES

Specific outcomes that support the attainment of a desired goal.

#### STRATEGIES

A plan of action to achieve a specific objective.

#### ACTION STEPS

Detailed initiatives, projects, or steps to fulfill a strategy.

## The Timeline

Look for the circles below, indicating the timeline for completion.



Short Term: One year, before June 2017



Mid Range: Two to three years, by June 2019



Long Term: Five or more years

# Strategies for Transformation

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## **The Ultimate Goal: Skowhegan is a thriving economic, cultural, and recreational destination where residents enjoy a high quality of life.**

In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives have been identified based on data analysis and feedback from the community. Each objective has one or more corresponding strategies that provide a road map for success.

### **Objective #1: Diversify and Grow the Economy**

*Economic Transformation (ET) Strategies:*

- ET#1** Attract a broad range of new businesses.
- ET#2** Support existing businesses to encourage growth.
- ET#3** Expand Skowhegan's agricultural food hub.
- ET#4** Cultivate programs to engage, support, and retain youth workforce.
- ET#5** Invest in infrastructure.
- ET#6** Enhance recreation and promote natural resources.
- ET#7** Nurture the creative economy and enrich arts and cultural assets.

### ***Community's Vision for Skowhegan***

*A vibrant cultural center with a variety of shops and restaurants, bustling with activity into the evenings. Businesses facing the Kennebec, with a river promenade, vendors, and pedestrians. Water Street as a pedestrian mall. Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area in full swing. Enhanced trails, parks, and other recreation activities. No longer just a pass-through town, but instead a true Maine tourist destination.*

### **Objective #2: Make Skowhegan a Tourist Destination**

*Tourism Transformation (TT) Strategies:*

- TT#1** Invest in tourism product development and promotion.

### **Objective #3: Restore Community Pride, Strengthen Reputation, and Promote a Positive Public Image**

*Communication Transformation (CT) Strategies:*

- CT#1** Communicate events, opportunities to get involved, and progress of action steps.
- CT#2** Employ marketing strategy and an external communications plan.

## Objective #1: Diversify and Grow the Economy

Currently, Sappi represents 47 percent of Skowhegan's tax base. We cannot continue to rely on just one business to shoulder the tax burden. In order to achieve a stable tax base, Skowhegan must diversify its economy by attracting new and growing existing businesses. The community visioning process unearthed economic development as the most important objective for the future of Skowhegan. From adding jobs to developing our cultural facilities, finalizing Run of River, and expanding the agricultural food hub, it's vital for Skowhegan to begin viewing economic development from a broadened perspective. The employment of seven different strategies will accomplish this objective.

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*"I hope Skowhegan becomes a more attractive community for young, middle-class families, with a strong economy, active community, and access to recreation."  
– electronic survey participant*

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### Economic Transformation Strategy #1: Attract a broad range of new businesses.

In every conversation during the community visioning process, encouraging entrepreneurs and business owners to start a business in or expand to Skowhegan was a primary topic of conversation. The community wants to see a wide range of new businesses—businesses that will ultimately create jobs and diversify the tax base.

#### Action Plan and Timeline

- ST** Create incentive package and employ an 'open for business' marketing campaign.
- MR** Explore opportunities for a business incubator space.
- LT** Add 10 new businesses, including two restaurants and one employer with 20+ employees.
- LT** Increase tax dollars generated by locally owned businesses by 10 percent.

*Residents want new restaurants and accommodations—ideally a hotel and conference center. Other ideas for new businesses included a coffee shop, book store, smoothie shop, recreation store, art supply store, museum, and food trucks in town.*

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*"I think more people would stop and shop the downtown area if there was a nice little place to hang out for an hour or so." – electronic survey participant*






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For a list of action items associated with strategies above, please see Appendix M.

### **Economic Transformation Strategy #2: Support existing businesses to encourage growth.**

Residents of Skowhegan take pride in local businesses and feel that supporting these businesses is important. With additional support, businesses will prosper and grow, ultimately creating new jobs.

#### *Action Plan and Timeline*

-  **ST** Plan a minimum of four educational seminars annually for small business owners.
-  **ST** Increase business-to-business communication through a formalized mentorship program and regularly scheduled gatherings.
-  **MR** Execute a regional ‘shop local’ marketing campaign.
-  **MR** Plan local business events, including Small Business Saturday promotions, a small business week celebration, and a restaurant week, to attract customers and increase sales revenue.
-  **LT** Add a total of 50 full-time employees in the next five years.

For a list of action items associated with strategies above, please see Appendix M.

### **Economic Transformation Strategy #3: Expand Skowhegan’s agricultural food hub.**





Skowhegan is known regionally as a rural food hub where locally grown food is aggregated, processed, and sold, and the agricultural sector is an important economic driver for the town. With key anchor businesses already established and an abundance of local producers, the agricultural economy provides Skowhegan a unique growth opportunity.

The infusion of locally grown food into our community has the potential to address economic development, unemployment, food insecurity, and poor health—key factors in the longevity and resilience of the community.

Support for and expansion of Skowhegan’s agricultural economy and related assets could also make the town a destination for people who are interested in agritourism, the farm-to-table movement, and the craft brewing industry.

*People recognize Skowhegan’s agricultural food hub as a significant benefit to the community as well as a tourism asset. They’d like to see physical infrastructure expanded to include a four-season market, food processing infrastructure, space for an expanded CSA, and more.*

#### *Action Plan and Timeline*

-  **ST** Create agritourism activities for visitors, including one farm-to-table tour.
-  **ST** Work with agricultural community to increase consumption of local foods among students as well as residents receiving financial assistance.
-  **MR** Increase fruit and vegetable consumption among adults and high school students—determine metric with help from key collaborators.
-  **LT** Explore opportunities for expanding available marketable products and for adding and upgrading infrastructure to increase available space for the agricultural community.



Grow square footage dedicated to agriculture in Skowhegan—determine metric with help from key collaborators.

For a list of action items associated with strategies above, please see Appendix M.

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*“I think Skowhegan has GREAT potential to be a major local food hub. In fact, this is already happening in my observation. Skowhegan has one of the best farmers’ markets in the New England region; it has a truly excellent bakery; it has Maine Grains and its associated projects underway; it has an absolutely wonderful community of local farmers and people who excel at using locally sourced ingredients to produce excellent prepared meals. There is a great deal of interest in expanding this already exceptional potential and I would like very much to see this encouraged.”*  
– electronic survey participant

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#### **Economic Transformation Strategy #4: Cultivate programs to engage, support, and retain youth workforce.**

In addition to having a steadily aging population, Skowhegan is rapidly losing its young adults to out-migration. With retirement of baby boomers and the outpouring of local youth, businesses are struggling to find skilled workers to fill jobs. The creation of youth development programs will keep young adults engaged beyond school and help to prepare them for the workforce.

Civic engagement opportunities, cultural activities, and infrastructure enhancements for our students will instill hometown pride and provide an increased sense of belonging and quality of place. Investing in youth and connecting them with the local community are key priorities that could increase the likelihood that students will stay local or return to Skowhegan later in life.

*Local youth want more places to hang out with their friends, like a pool or community center. They are also looking for expanded outdoor experiences.*

#### **Action Plan and Timeline**



Assess current opportunities and determine baseline data for youth workforce development and community involvement programs.



Create youth programming, including job shadowing, civic engagement, technical training, volunteering, and apprenticeships through partnerships with local businesses, organizations, and the municipality.



Explore opportunities for youth workforce development through trail maintenance.



Increase the proportion of all high school students involved in the local community by 50 percent.

For a list of action items associated with strategies above, please see Appendix M.



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*“We have to lower the drop-out rate and improve the engagement opportunities for our students. They are the future of Skowhegan. If they are disengaged now, they will be disengaged later.” – electronic survey participant*





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### **Economic Transformation Strategy #5: Invest in infrastructure.**

Though several improvements and upgrades to existing infrastructure have been made in recent years, the community feels that additional investment is vital to economic growth. Broadband and increased Internet speeds, pedestrian safety, building improvements, alternative and more efficient energy options, and affordable housing were all important topics of discussion.

In order to attract and retain businesses, the town must be able to offer basic necessities, including high-speed Internet and safe access to all shops, merchants, service providers, retailers, and restaurants.

#### **Action Plan and Timeline**

-  Explore opportunities for pedestrian safety; include timeline for repainting sidewalks and needs assessment (additional signage/indicators, etc.).
-  Investigate opportunities for adding solar-powered charging stations to municipal parking lot.
-  Extend broadband access to Skowhegan residents and businesses and increase broadband speed to 10 Mbps (download)/10 Mbps (upload).
-  Assess infrastructure needs, create a plan for meeting these needs, and apply for matching grant dollars to fund these activities—metrics to be determined by key collaborators.

For a list of action items associated with strategies above, please see Appendix M.

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*“More parking, internet access, building upgrades are critical.” – electronic survey participant*

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### **Economic Transformation Strategy #6: Enhance recreation and promote natural resources.**

The community recognized the Kennebec River, as well as other existing natural resources, and adventure tourism as potential economic development drivers. The Run of River project, the creation of a whitewater recreation area in the Kennebec River gorge running through downtown Skowhegan, is a top priority.

#### **Action Plan and Timeline**

-  Complete Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area business plan and raise additional funding for the project via a capital campaign.

*Youths recognize the importance of our natural resources and want more opportunities to spend time outside.*



Construct whitewater features in the gorge.



Develop additional recreational opportunities—including enhanced trails for hiking and biking, scheduled raft rides, and more—in the area surrounding gorge.

For a list of action items associated with strategies above, please see Appendix M.

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*“Run of River could completely change the economic environment of Skowhegan and Somerset County.” – electronic survey participant*

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### **Economic Transformation Strategy #7: Nurture the creative economy and enrich arts and cultural assets.**

With an abundance of local artists and craft makers, a rich history, and several performance venues, Skowhegan’s cultural offerings are not only plentiful but also play a significant role in the story of our town. Secondary data and conversations with the community suggest that art and culture are important to the economy and to tourism product development. For these reasons, the incorporation of art and culture into Skowhegan’s community should be further explored and developed.

*Artists would like to see an arts/cultural center, more galleries, and studio/community spaces for artists.*

#### **Action Plan and Timeline**



Work with the SCPC to create a cultural plan for Somerset County.



Create comprehensive plan for bringing more events and programming to Skowhegan.



Line up 12 months of entertainment programming at local venues.



Implement necessary upgrades and repairs to existing art and culture infrastructure, including the Skowhegan Opera House and Grange Hall—metrics to be determined by key collaborators.



Implement Somerset County Cultural Plan (MR-LT).

For a list of action items associated with strategies above, please see Appendix M.

## **Objective #2: Make Skowhegan a Tourist Destination**

Skowhegan has the potential to become more than just a pass-through town. Its setting, natural resources, agricultural food hub, and arts/cultural assets could transform Skowhegan into a destination for tourists. In addition to strengthening the economy, developing Skowhegan as a destination will invigorate community pride and further develop and define sense of place.

### **Tourism Transformation Strategy #1: Invest in tourism product development and promotion.**

Skowhegan's current offerings provide opportunity for tourism product development. With the expansion of the food hub, the enhancement of recreational facilities and opportunities, and the development of arts and cultural assets, the town will become a destination for adventure seekers, foodies, and families. Identifying, packaging, and promoting these assets—now and as products are developed—will be key to transforming Skowhegan into a top tourist destination in Maine. Metrics will be determined by key partners and contributors.

#### ***Action Plan and Timeline***

-  Work with the Maine Office of Tourism's new Destination Development Specialist and other collaborators to create an asset inventory, form a steering committee, and plan for future tourism development.
-  Package existing assets and events to create tourism products (i.e. cultural offerings, local and regional tours).
-  Offer a minimum of two tours for visitors.
-  Welcome a minimum of five bus tours and/or tour groups per year.
-  Complete Riverfront Renaissance plan to create a walking trail alongside the Kennebec from the downtown to the boat landing.

For a list of action items associated with strategies above, please see Appendix M.






### **Objective #3: Restore Community Pride, Strengthen Reputation, and Promote a Positive Public Image**

Community conversations have uncovered the need to communicate Skowhegan's unique story to both internal and external audiences. A strong brand and cohesive messaging go a long way in restoring community pride and promoting a positive image. Skowhegan's reputation is an important factor in business development, tourism, attracting funding, enhancing sense of place, and encouraging in-migration.

#### **Communications Transformation Strategy #1: Communicate events, opportunities to get involved, and progress of action steps.**

Community pride is equally as important as public perception. The need to communicate with our residents is urgent as we look to strengthen our reputation and shape the future of Skowhegan.

##### *Action Plan and Timeline*





-  Create an internal communications plan for the community.
-  Create a comprehensive community calendar.
-  Gather additional email addresses from community members to use as a method for communication.
-  Communicate with more than 2,000 email subscribers.
-  Communicate with more than 4,000 email subscribers (nearly half the population).

For a list of action items associated with strategies above, please see Appendix M.

#### **Communications Transformation Strategy #2: Employ marketing strategy and external communications plan.**

We must shape public perception of Skowhegan by recognizing and promoting our unique assets, emphasizing our strengths, and telling our story. Changing our reputation will take time, but utilizing Skowhegan's brand to promote quality of place and quality of life will bring tourists, developers, entrepreneurs, and new residents to our town.

##### *Action Plan and Timeline*

-  Create and execute an annual external communications plan that is inclusive of a marketing strategy and media plan.
-  Design and launch VisitSkowhegan.com to use as a primary marketing tool.
-  By the end of year one, drive more than 5,000 unique visitors to VisitSkowhegan.com.
-  Increase unique visitors by 2 percent year-over-year.



Work with local tourist service providers to develop additional metrics.

For a list of action items associated with strategies above, please see Appendix M.

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*“I hope to see Skowhegan as a destination for visitors from Maine and beyond, with a reputation for great locally sourced food, art, entertainment, a beautiful riverfront with access for the local community and visitors to enjoy, a vibrant economy with employment potential for professionals, laborers, and entrepreneurs; a place where youth choose to remain as they grow to adulthood, and seniors move to after retirement. In other words, a place for our local community to be proud of and for visitors to wish they lived here too.” – electronic survey participant*

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## Summary

The above objectives and strategies were identified as top priorities by members of the community. We recognize that there is a lot to be done within the community that isn’t directly addressed in this plan. However, it’s our hope that as we work to advance the economy, enhance our sense of place, and promote a positive image of our town, that we’ll help to improve the quality of life for all. All citizens of Skowhegan should have the opportunity to thrive.

A rising tide lifts all boats, and through the implementation of this plan, we’ll transform the community into a vibrant, new Skowhegan.

## Plan for Action and Collaboration

On May 10, 2016, the Main Street Skowhegan Strategic Planning Committee sent the first draft of this plan to the community via email and posted it to the Main Street Skowhegan Facebook page. They also presented the plan to the town at a public hearing. At the hearing and until May 27, the committee welcomed feedback. All suggestions, edits, and comments were taken into consideration, and updates were made accordingly. The final plan was sent to the town on May 29, 2016, in advance of the annual town meeting scheduled for June 13, 2016.

Main Street Skowhegan has already begun to tackle many action steps. Please see Appendix H for a complete list of current projects.

## Roles of Economic Partners

Collaboration is vital to the success of this plan. Strategies were developed through a community visioning process, and executing them will require a community effort. Main Street Skowhegan intends to play a lead role in implementation, and the organization will continue to move forward, fostering partnerships and soliciting help from the community along the way.

In July, Main Street Skowhegan will reach out to interested community members and organizations to meet and determine who is working on what, where goals and action steps overlap, and how we can partner to achieve success.

Shaping the future of our town is both exciting and challenging. It will require hard work and determination. The more invested groups and individuals we have working toward the ultimate goal, the more quickly we will achieve it.

We encourage anyone who is interested in lending a hand, leading a project, or learning more to contact Main Street Skowhegan (207-612-2571 or [info@mainstreetskowhegan.org](mailto:info@mainstreetskowhegan.org)).

# Appendix

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## Appendix A: Planning Partners and Committee Members

### TIF (Tax Increment Financing) Oversight Committee

In October 2015 the Town of Skowhegan's Select Board appointed a committee to review the current downtown TIF and put together a recommendation for or against renewing the TIF for the next 18 years. Skowhegan's current TIF, established in 2006, will expire in March of 2017.

The TIF Oversight Committee met regularly during the fall of 2015 and winter of 2016 and prepared updated information for the Select Board and the town regarding effectiveness of the TIF and the benefits of renewal. The committee recommended to the town and Select Board that Skowhegan take full advantage of the 30 years allowable by state law and renew the TIF for the remaining 18 years. They also provided a list of TIF objectives that will determine where TIF dollars are allocated. TIF objectives are in line with the community vision and have been incorporated into this strategic plan. They are included in full within the TIF amendment.

### TIF Oversight Committee Members

Amber Lambke, Chair

Owner of Maine Grains; Skowhegan, ME

Sam Hight, Vice Chair

Owner of Hight Family of Dealerships; Norridgewock, ME

Vicki Alward, Secretary

Vice President at Skowhegan Savings Bank; Cornville, ME

Donald Skillings

Chair of Skowhegan Select Board; Owner of Donald Skillings Insurance Agency, Inc.; Skowhegan, ME

Christine Almand

Town Manager; Skowhegan, ME

Sally Dwyer

Vice President and Branch Manager at Franklin Savings Bank; Madison, ME

Jeff Hewett

Director of Skowhegan Economic Development; Executive Director of Skowhegan Economic Development Corporation; Skowhegan, ME

Heather Johnson

Executive Director of Somerset Economic Development Corporation; Skowhegan, ME

Cory King

Executive Director of Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce; Augusta, ME

Kristina Cannon

Executive Director for Main Street Skowhegan; North Anson, ME

#### **TIF Oversight Committee Contact Information**

Amber Lambke, Chair  
225 Water St., Skowhegan  
Office: 207-474-6905  
Skowhegan.org

#### **Somerset Cultural Planning Committee (SCPC)**

The Wesserunsett Arts Council's Somerset Cultural Planning Committee (SCPC) is preparing to write a cultural plan for Somerset County. We've intentionally partnered—by including members of SCPC on the Main Street Strategic Planning Committee and vice versa—to incorporate arts and culture into our plan and to ensure that we are all working together to implement these strategies.

#### **Somerset Cultural Planning Committee Members**

Jon Kimbell, Chair  
Resident Producer for SenovvA, Inc.; Skowhegan, ME

Margi Browne, Vice Chair  
Owner of Lakewood Golf Course; MSS Board; Madison, ME

Mary Burr, Treasurer  
Owner of Blue Ribbon Farm and 122 Corson Restaurant; Artist; Mercer, ME

Elizabeth Tilton, Secretary  
Arts Advocate; Detroit, ME

Christopher Papagni  
Owner of CP Management; Portland, ME

Nina Pleasants  
House Manager for Colby College Theater Department; Norridgewock, ME

Barbara Sullivan  
Artist; Art Instructor at University of Maine Farmington; Solon, ME

Stephen Dionne  
Owner of Dionne & Son Builders and Oak Pond Millworks; Skowhegan, ME

Tim Curtis  
Madison Town Manager; Madison, ME

Erin Scally  
Program Director of Maine Grain Alliance; Skowhegan, ME

Lolly Phoenix  
President of Wesserunsett Arts Council; Artist; New Portland, ME

Cory King  
Executive Director of Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce; Augusta, ME



Kristina Cannon

Executive Director for Main Street Skowhegan; North Anson, ME

#### **Wesserunsett Arts Council / Somerset Cultural Planning Committee Contact Information**

Jon Kimbell, Chair

P.O. Box 203, Skowhegan

Office: 207-660-1066

[wesarts4@gmail.com](mailto:wesarts4@gmail.com)

WesArts.org

#### **Main Street Strategic Planning Committee**

In the summer of 2015 Main Street Skowhegan applied for and received a grant from the Maine Community Foundation to fund a strategic plan. In order to manage the strategic planning process, Main Street Skowhegan hired a consultant and formed a steering committee—made up of representatives from the town, the business community, and MSS, as well as recreation enthusiasts, artists, farmers, and public health officials.

#### **Main Street Skowhegan Strategic Planning Committee Members**

Shanna Cox

Strategic Planning Consultant and Owner of Project Tipping Point; Lewiston, ME

Matt DuBois

Board President of Main Street Skowhegan; Owner of the Bankery and Skowhegan Fleuriste & Formalwear; Skowhegan, ME

Kristina Cannon

Executive Director for Main Street Skowhegan; North Anson, ME

Betty Austin

Town of Skowhegan Select Board; Employee at Clark Insurance; Skowhegan, ME

Lisa Landry

Director of Human Resources at Redington-Fairview General Hospital; Norridgewock, ME

Dan Tilton

Senior Vice President, Chief Sales and Relationship Manager at Skowhegan Savings Bank; Detroit, ME

Matt L'Italien

Assistant Project Director at Somerset Public Health; Sidney, ME

Nina Pleasants

House Manager for Colby College Theater Department; Norridgewock, ME

Mary Burr

Owner of Blue Ribbon Farm and 122 Corson Restaurant; Artist; Mercer, ME

Jon Kimbell

Resident Producer for SenovvA, Inc.; Skowhegan, ME

#### **Main Street Skowhegan Contact Information**

Kristina Cannon, Main Street Skowhegan

PO Box 5, 93B Water Street, Skowhegan  
Office: 207-612-2571 Cell: 207-614-4078  
[info@mainstreetskowhegan.org](mailto:info@mainstreetskowhegan.org)  
MainStreetSkowhegan.org

## Community Involvement of Committee Members

Name	MSS Strategic Planning Committee	WesArts SCPC	TIF Oversight	Town of Skowhegan	Skowhegan EDC	Somerset EDC	Somerset Public Health	MSS Board of Directors	Skowhegan Area Chamber	Kennebec Valley Tourism Council	Kennebec Valley Council of Govt	Run of River Committee
Amber Lambke			X									
Barbara Sullivan		X										
Betty Austin	X			X								X
Christine Almand			X	X							X	
Christopher Papagni		X										
Cory King		X	X						X	X		X
Dan Tilton	X											
Donald Skillings			X	X								
Elizabeth Tilton		X										
Erin Scally		X										
Heather Johnson		X	X			X						
Jeff Hewett			X		X							
Jon Kimbell	X	X										
Kristina Cannon	X	X	X							X		X
Lisa Landry	X							X				
Lolly Phoenix		X										
Margi Browne		X						X				
Mary Burr	X	X										
Matt DuBois	X							X				
Matt L'Italien	X						X					
Nina Pleasants	X	X										
Sally Dwyer			X		X							
Sam Hight			X					X				
Shanna Cox	X											
Stephen Dionne		X										
Tim Curtis		X										
Vicki Alward			X			X						

## Appendix B: Details of the Strategic Planning Process

The strategic plan came to fruition over the course of many months. Conversations between Main Street Skowhegan, consultant Shanna Cox, and representatives from the Wesserunett Arts Council began in October 2015. The strategic planning committee was formed in November 2015 and met 10 times between December 2015 and May 2016. They invested more than 300 hours in the strategic planning process, including 205 hours in meetings; 96 hours engaging the community through one-on-one interviews, small group discussions, and forums; and countless hours gathering and analyzing data, discussing findings, and drafting and reviewing the report.

A public forum was held on March 31 at the Skowhegan Municipal Building, and the planning committee invited the entire community and the five-member Select Board to participate.

Data and progress were posted on MainStreetSkowhegan.org, and regular updates were reported to the Select Board, televised on public access cable channel 11, and included in several articles in the *Morning Sentinel*. Main Street also kept the public informed via regular e-newsletter updates and social media.

## Appendix C: Secondary Data/Reports Referenced

### Agriculture

- Agriculture Development Program of the Somerset Economic Development Corporation (2011)
- [Growing Maine's Food Industry, Growing Maine](#) Betsy Biemann, 2015

### Arts and Culture

- [National Innovations and Trends](#): Review of towns that have had tremendous success promoting and growing the arts

### Brand Report

- [2011 Skowhegan Brand Report](#)

### Demographic Data

- [Demographics Report, Skowhegan, Maine](#); Cubit Planning
- [Population Distribution by Age Group and Gender, 2010](#); Somerset Economic and Community Development Corporation

### Economic Development/Downtown Plans

- [Preliminary Downtown TIF Project Ideas](#), 2016
- [Kennebec Valley Council of Governments Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#), Annual Update effective June 2015
- [2011 Downtown Comprehensive Plan](#) (Main Street and Town of Skowhegan)
- 2010 Skowhegan Comprehensive Plan Update ([Volume I](#) & [Volume II](#))
- [2007 Skowhegan Trade Area Consumer Survey](#) (conducted by Thomas College)
- [2005 Downtown Redevelopment Plan](#)
- Town of Skowhegan Development Program for the Downtown TIF
- [1999 Riverfront Renaissance](#)
- [1995 Downtown Revitalization Action Plan](#)

### Education Data

- [MSAD 54 Academic and Graduation Data](#), 2014-15
- [Maine High School Graduates: Trends in College-Going, Persistence, and Completion, August 2015](#); Mitchell Institute
- [A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education – Maine Brief, April 2015](#); Lumina Foundation

### Financial Literacy Data

- [2016's Most and Least Financially Literate States](#)
- [National Financial Capability Study](#), Finra Investor Education Foundation

### Health Data

- [Central District \(Kennebec and Somerset\) Community Health Needs Assessment – Full Indicator List](#), 2015
- [SEOW Special Report: Heroin, Opioids, and Other Drugs in Maine, October 2015](#); Maine State Epidemiological Workgroup, Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
- [Kennebec Valley Community Action Program Community Needs Assessment](#), Fiscal Year 2015
- Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, Greater Somerset County 2015

### Housing Information

- [Central Maine Housing Report](#), prepared by Allied Realty, December 2015

Main Street Structure/Refresh

- [Refreshed Main Street Approach](#)

Maine Office of Tourism Data

- 2015 Maine Office of Tourism Annual Report
- [2015 Summer Season Topline Report](#)
- [2015 Maine Lodging Report](#)
- [2014 First Time Visitors Report](#)
- [2014 Annual Report](#)
- [2014 Kennebec Valley Region Report](#)
- [2014 Economic Impact: Kennebec Valley Region](#)
- [2014 Canadian Visitor Report](#)
- [Recreational Hunter and Angler Market Report](#)

Recreation Reports

- [Parks and Recreation Information](#)
- [Parks and Trails Assessment](#)
- [Parks and Trails Information](#)
- [Map of Recreational Opportunities in Skowhegan](#)
- [Skowhegan Physical Activity and Recreation Committee Plan](#)

Run of River Reports

- [2004 Run of River Feasibility Study](#)
- [2014 Run of River Preliminary Design Report](#)

Traffic/Transportation Data

- [Kennebec/Somerset Explorer Ridership Report](#), 2015-16
- [Proposed Traffic Changes for Downtown Skowhegan](#); Public Hearing Presentation, 2007

Other

- [Maine's shrinking workforce points to one thing — we need more people](#), *Bangor Daily News* article, December 18, 2015

## Appendix D: Findings from Secondary Data

### Demographic/Education/Health Findings

- Aging population, low median household income (\$38,642 as of 2015)
- 25% of adults and 18% of children live in poverty (Somerset County)
- 34% of adults and 19% of high school students are considered obese (Somerset County)
- Skowhegan Area High School Class of 2014—fewer than half (44%) went on to a four-year college
- Child abuse and neglect—Somerset County has highest risk factors in the state

### Tourism Findings

- Tourists are trending younger, often traveling with children, and looking for cultural/educational opportunities to supplement recreational opportunities (primary reason for visiting)
  - This is particularly true for Balanced Achievers and Genuine Originals, primary audience segments targeted by the Maine Office of Tourism

- Balanced Achievers are married with children, in their 40s, and have an average household income of \$117,500. They are looking for cultural experiences for their children, and they like both urban and outdoor experiences that are “brag-worthy” and educational.
- Genuine Originals are married and in their 40s, with an average household income of \$130,600. Some have children. People in this group are drawn to adventure and risk, pursue outdoor recreation, and make it a priority to explore nature and observe wildlife. They are interested in art, history, and cultural activities.
- Local brew pubs and craft breweries are popular tourist attractions
- The Kennebec Valley region has a higher percentage of visitors who attend farmers’ markets than the state as a whole.

### Consumer Findings

- 42% visit Skowhegan three times or more per week
- 53% would like stores open later in the day
- 78% would like to see more stores in the area
- Respondents ages 18-25 feel more residential development would be beneficial
- 31% stated that rotary and traffic problems are main reasons why people don’t enjoy visiting the downtown area
- 44% said the greatest perceived challenge is traffic and rotary problems
- 51% rated parking convenience as poor; 69% rated traffic flow as poor

\*\*All above data from [2007 Skowhegan Trade Area Consumer Survey](#) conducted by Thomas College

### Findings from Past Economic Redevelopment Plans

#### Top Priorities

- Economic vitality and revitalization (expand retail offerings, support retention of existing businesses)
- Design/infrastructure improvements
- Food hub development
- Marketing/events (to external audiences)
- Collaboration between the municipality and economic development organizations
- Traffic/parking/pedestrian safety (was a top priority, but a resolution has not emerged)

#### Secondary Priorities

- Workforce development/training
- Entrepreneurship/innovation/small business development
- Leadership cultivation
- Tourism via natural resources (prominent in regional plan, not in town plans)
- Tourism as a profitable industry in Maine (prominent in regional plan, not in town plans)
- Regional collaboration/cooperation
- Broadband/technology needs

Note: The arts and culture were for the most part nonexistent in past Skowhegan strategic plans, though other towns across the country consider the arts/culture as factors in economic development.

### Assessment of Past Skowhegan Economic Redevelopment Plans (from 1995, 2005, 2011)

Accomplishments from Past Plans	Tactics from Past Plans Not Accomplished
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walkable path from Grist Mill to Gorge</li> <li>• Pocket Park in place of old buildings at corner of Madison Ave./Commercial St.</li> <li>• Three rounds (2008, 2010, 2015 in progress) of CDBG Community Enterprise Grant façade improvements, affecting more than 40 businesses</li> <li>• Municipal parking lot (complete)</li> <li>• Renaissance Center, which includes public restrooms and ADA accessibility to several second floors on Water Street</li> <li>• Infrastructure improvements to Grist Mill</li> <li>• Renovations and accessibility improvements to Skowhegan Free Public Library (except elevator)</li> <li>• New streetlights installed</li> <li>• Lighted crosswalks installed</li> <li>• Public infrastructure improvements, including sidewalks, sewer, water</li> <li>• Debe Riverside Trail and Philbrick Trail</li> <li>• Establish revolving loan fund</li> <li>• Establish Downtown TIF Oversight Committee (complete as of Fall 2015)</li> <li>• Branded light-pole banners and wayfinding signage</li> <li>• Greenspace enhancements via gardens, street trees</li> <li>• Collaborative community programming/events</li> <li>• Skowhegan brand study, inclusive of positioning statement, logos, fonts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business-to-business communications strategy**</li> <li>• Business assistance program**</li> <li>• Expand existing businesses*</li> <li>• Recruit new businesses*</li> <li>• Develop and fund marketing plan*</li> <li>• Revise traffic flow/improve image as pedestrian friendly**</li> <li>• Run of River (feasibility and preliminary design done, economic impact study and business plan in progress)**</li> <li>• Walking and viewing platforms around gorge (included in ROR plan)**</li> <li>• Riverfront renaissance completion **</li> <li>• Incentives for second-floor development</li> <li>• Traffic calming strip on Water Street*</li> <li>• Signage, maintenance, and collaborative marketing to preserve and promote local cultural assets, including History House, public library, Coburn Park, fairgrounds, etc.*</li> </ul> <p>*Added to 2016 Strategic Plan for Community Transformation as part of strategy  **Added to 2016 Strategic Plan for Community Transformation as action step (see Appendix K)</p>

## Appendix E: Community Engagement Strategy

The committee identified several community segments to target during the engagement process. People and organizations were selected for interviews and group discussions. Skowhegan-area business leaders were invited to the business leaders forum, members of the arts community in Somerset County were invited to attend the arts forum, and all community members were invited to attend the public forum on March 31, 2016. Surveys were sent out to the community via Facebook (organic and boosted posts), the Main Street Skowhegan website, and several different community email groups.

Stakeholders	Engagement Strategy						
	Interviews	Group Discussion	Business Leaders Forum	Arts Forum	Public Forum	Adult Survey	Youth Survey
Affordable housing residents and renters					X	X	
Artists	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Civic organizations		X	X	X	X	X	
Community leaders	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Cultural groups	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Educators	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Employers/business owners	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Faith organizations					X	X	
Farmers/agriculture producers	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Healthcare providers	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Heritage groups	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Low income individuals and households					X	X	
Municipal leaders		X			X	X	
Recreation enthusiasts	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Seniors		X		X	X	X	
Technology providers	X				X	X	
Youth							X

## Appendix F: Summary of Themes from Community Engagement

To determine top themes, the committee hand-counted the number of times each theme or item related to an overarching theme was mentioned. For instance, “trail system” was included in the Recreation theme.

### Interviews Top Themes

1. Community (32)
2. Arts/Culture (26)
3. Economic Development (24)
4. River/Run of River (24)
5. Natural Resources/Recreation (22)

### Small-Group Discussions Top Themes

1. Economic Development (65)
2. Arts/Culture (60)
3. Recreation (46)
  - a) River/Run of River (33)
4. Agricultural Hub (40)
5. Community (40)

### Forum Top Themes

#### Arts:

1. Arts/Culture (50+)

2. River/Recreation (23)
3. Agricultural Hub (22)

**Business:**

1. Agricultural Hub (22)
2. Arts/Culture (21)
3. Marketing (14)

**Public:**

1. Arts/Culture (37)
2. Economic Development (26)
3. Natural Resources/Recreation (19)

## Appendix G: SWOT Analysis

The following SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis is a result of qualitative data gathered from the community during the month of March 2016. The committee referenced this information when drafting revitalization strategies.

### SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community</li> <li>Emerging leaders</li> <li>Natural resources</li> <li>River runs through downtown</li> <li>Location</li> <li>County seat</li> <li>Strong history/heritage</li> <li>Agriculture/food hub</li> <li>Route 2/201 intersection</li> <li>River walk, trails, and parks</li> <li>Two local breweries</li> <li>Innovation and entrepreneurial spirit</li> <li>Somerset Grist Mill</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic diversity</li> <li>Lack of skilled workers</li> <li>Lack of high-paying jobs</li> <li>Lack of housing/affordable housing</li> <li>Downtown not pedestrian-friendly</li> <li>Downtown businesses closing at 5 p.m.</li> <li>Old, rundown buildings throughout town</li> <li>Lack of reliable Internet/broadband connection</li> <li>Lack of retail diversity</li> <li>Few restaurants</li> <li>Few accommodation options</li> <li>Downtown businesses face away from river</li> <li>Negative internal and external image</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of arts and cultural offerings</li> <li>Better use of opera house, fairgrounds, grange</li> <li>Agritourism</li> <li>Farm-to-table movement</li> <li>Tourist destination</li> <li>Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area</li> <li>Infrastructure improvements</li> <li>Multi-generational programming/activities/events</li> <li>College prep/technical training</li> <li>Marketing communications/brand identity</li> <li>Kennebec/Somerset Explorer (bus)</li> <li>Empty storefronts and second floors in downtown</li> <li>Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rising costs for businesses</li> <li>Aging population</li> <li>Decreasing population size</li> <li>Out-migration of young adults</li> <li>Poverty</li> <li>Opiate drug use</li> <li>Low level of educational attainment</li> <li>Low median income</li> <li>Decline in paper industry and associated jobs</li> <li>Lack of broadband</li> <li>Food insecurity, poverty, and poor health</li> </ul>



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cultural tours (food, breweries, art, heritage)</li><li>• Regional cooperation</li><li>• Eaton Mountain</li><li>• Renewable/alternative energy</li><li>• Business incubator</li><li>• Four-season recreation opportunities/activities</li><li>• Multi-generational community center</li><li>• Youth development</li></ul> |  |
|---|--|

## Appendix H: Main Street Skowhegan 2016 Projects

Main Street Skowhegan has been listening to community stakeholders, and the organization has already begun to work on several action steps included in this plan.

- Collaborate with the Somerset Cultural Planning Committee to create a cultural plan for the county (ongoing).
- Develop business plan for Run of River (due this spring).
- Aid Run of River Committee in creation of marketing strategy and execution of capital campaign (spring/summer).
- Find funding for projects and initiatives (ongoing).
- Plan, implement, and enhance community-building events, including Maple Festival, River Fest, the inaugural Skowhegan Craft Brew Festival, the Main Street Gala, the Halloween Parade, Small Business Saturday Passport to Savings Program, and the Holiday Stroll (ongoing).
- Collaborate with other economic development organizations to create a formalized business incentive package to entice entrepreneurs or business owners to start a business or expand to Skowhegan (summer).
- Promote business incentive package to successful business owners in Maine (summer).
- Coordinate and host business development workshops for business owners (ongoing).
- Continue to enhance public art collection by raising funding for and installing new Barry Norling hand sculpture in Pocket Park (ongoing).
- Maintain the green space and garden areas downtown (ongoing).
- Develop VisitSkowhegan.com as a marketing tool for the town (summer/fall).
  - Incorporate a community calendar for events and activities.
- Nurture the established relationship with Donna Moreland, the Maine Office of Tourism's new destination development specialist (spring).
- Plan for future tourism development by conducting asset inventory and creating a tourism steering committee with key community members and town officials (summer/fall).
- Work with the Maine Mortorcoach Network to bring bus tours back to Skowhegan (ongoing). Main Street is now a member of the network.
- Meet with Bicycle Coalition of Maine to discuss potential of BikeMaine coming to Skowhegan (summer).
- Meet with DOT to discuss the possibility of extending the Old Canada Road Scenic Byway from Solon to Skowhegan (summer).
- Collaborate with Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce to develop visitors' guide for Skowhegan (summer/fall).
- Hold welcoming events for all new businesses that include a ribbon-cutting, a certificate from Skowhegan Economic Development, a plant from the Skowhegan Fleuriste, a press release drafted by Main Street and sent out to media contacts, and Facebook promotion (ongoing).

Have questions? Want to help? Contact us at [info@mainstreetskowhegan.org](mailto:info@mainstreetskowhegan.org) or 612-2571.

## **Appendix I: Calendar of Annual Skowhegan Events**

February: FAB (Fun and Business) Fair, Lake George Annual Winter Carnival and Ice Fishing Derby

March: Maple Festival

April: Skowpendous Family Night

May: Run for the Roses Kentucky Derby Fundraiser, Dance & Dine

June: Float Your Boat Day

July: Kneading Conference, Artisan Bread Fair, Plein-Air Art Event

August: River Fest, Skowhegan State Fair, New Balance Factory Tent Sale

September: Craft Brew Festival, Lake George/Somerset Sports and Fitness Sprint Triathlon

October: Wesserunett Arts Council Open Studio Tour, Halloween Parade, Haunted Hay Rides and Zombie Run

November: Small Business Saturday

December: Holiday Stroll

## **Appendix J: Demographics of Engaged Community Members**

### **Adult Survey**

Total respondents: 235

- 52% Skowhegan residents
- 42% age 55+
- 22% business owners
- 11% farmers
- 29% other

### **Youth Survey**

Total respondents: 67

- 55% ages 12-14
- 22% ages 15-17
- 63% live in Skowhegan

### **Interviews**

Total participants: 12

- 8 males, 4 females
- 2 Native Americans, all others Caucasian
- Ages 35-65
- Representation included:
  - Business owners-6
  - Economic development employees-2
  - Recreation-1
  - Education-1
  - Native American community -2
- All intimately tied to Skowhegan, but not all live in town

### **Small Groups**

Total participants: ~111

- Bankery employees and MOPS (faith organization)-23
- Seniors-18

- Rotary-18
- Skowhegan Economic Development Corporation-10
- Somerset Tech Educators Group-8
- Skowhegan women's clubs-12
- History House-4
- Farmers' market-18

## **Forums**

Total participants: ~115

- Arts forum-32 people, ages 30-75
- Business forum-35 people, ages 35-60
- Public forum-60 people, ages 35-65

## **Appendix K: Transformation Plan and Relationship with TIF Amendment**

This plan, the Skowhegan Strategic Plan for Community Transformation, will also serve as the town's Downtown Revitalization Plan that accompanies the First Amendment to the town of Skowhegan Downtown (Omnibus) Municipal Development Tax Increment Financing District Development Program, as required by the Department of Economic and Community Development.

The town's Downtown Municipal Development Tax Increment Financing District, as proposed to be amended by the First Amendment to the Town Skowhegan Downtown (Omnibus) Municipal Development Tax Increment Financing District Development Program, is an important part of the town's Downtown Revitalization Plan. All projects listed in Table 1 of that First Amendment (also included as action steps in Appendix L) will be important elements of downtown district and town revitalization and will assist in achieving the objectives of this plan and accomplishing the transformation strategies set forth herein.

## **Appendix L: Letters of Support**

## **Skowhegan History House Museum & Research Center**

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May 23, 2016

To whom it may concern:

Skowhegan History House Museum and Research Center is pleased to add its voice in support of the Main Street Skowhegan Comprehensive Plan and, in particular, its efforts to create a long-range plan that will leverage our region's cultural assets in ways that will enhance economic development, in particular, and our community's quality of life, in general.

From its inception, Skowhegan History House has been dedicated to preserving an increasingly valuable collection representing Skowhegan's historical legacy and promoting Skowhegan's cultural heritage, not only through our own efforts, but in collaboration with other partners, such as the Margaret Chase Smith Library, the Skowhegan Free Public Library, Somerset Woods, School Administrative District No. 54, the Skowhegan Heritage Committee and Main Street Skowhegan.

Therefore, please accept this letter in support of Main Street Skowhegan's long range plan and its application for funding. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact me at (207) 474-6632.

Sincerely,



Melvin P. Burnham  
President/Director

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66 Elm St., PO Box 832, Skowhegan, ME 04976-0832 • (207) 474-6632 • [skowheganhistoryhouse.org](http://skowheganhistoryhouse.org)



Cornville Regional Charter School  
1192 West Ridge Road  
Cornville, ME 04976  
(207) 474-8503 Tel.  
(207) 474-8515 Fax.

May 25, 2016

Cornville Regional Charter School (CRCS) is pleased to contribute full support of the Main Street Skowhegan Comprehensive Plan. CRCS is currently developing Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) programming for grades 9-12 and there is strong overlap between the school's goals and objectives and those found within the Comprehensive Plan. We will be seeking to expand within a local downtown area and the school's programming would specifically support and augment the following strategies created to diversify and grow the economy such as, but not limited to, the following:

- Attract new businesses
- Support existing businesses to encourage growth
- Cultivate programs to support and retain youth workforce
- Invest in infrastructure
- Enhance recreation and promote natural resources
- Nurture the creative economy and enrich our arts and cultural assets

CRCS was the first proficiency based elementary charter school to open in Maine and has outgrown the current campus in Cornville and is currently looking to expand two programs (4 year-olds and grades 9-12) within the town of Skowhegan. The programming thus far has focused on creating self directed and independent learners at the K-8 level and the next level of programming for our students in grades 9-12 will build upon those skills, but will be focused on systemic and sustainable programming that is deeply embedded and interconnected within the local community. Students will work with local businesses, community partners and agencies to identify a problem, use STEAM skills to develop a solution to that problem, and could potentially involve obtaining funding/resources for the local partner. In addition, we will build strong relationships with the local art community and it will be a significant part of our programming.

The school is attracting a lot of positive attention, support, and resources from around the country and we believe that there is a strong economic benefit to the town of Skowhegan as we continue to grow and expand. Students currently travel from Belgrade, Fairfield, Waterville, Farmington, Bingham, Harmony, St. Albans, Newport and all points in between to attend CRCS. In addition, the majority of our teachers are National level presenters and they are serving as consultants for schools across the country as far away as South Dakota. Researchers around the country are connecting with our school and looking at ways we can replicate our model and others can learn from our experiences and successes.

We see ourselves as a major stakeholder and contributor to the overall plan and therefore we fully support the Main Street Skowhegan Comprehensive plan. Please accept this letter in support of Main Street Skowhegan's long range plan and its application for funding. If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact me at (207) 474-8503.

Sincerely,

Travis Works  
Head of School

## **Appendix M: Action Steps**

Action Steps	New Business	Existing Business	Food Hub	Youth retention	Infrastructure	River and Rec	Arts and Culture
	ET#1	ET#2	ET#3	ET#4	ET#5	ET#6	ET#7
Plan regular business owner gatherings	X	X	X	X		X	X
Plan regular seminars/workshops/trainings for business owners	X	X	X	X		X	X
Plan and execute a “shop local” campaign	X	X	X	X		X	X
Identify businesses to entice with incentive package	X	X	X	X		X	X
Design “open for business” campaign; highlight stories of local entrepreneurs and business owners	X	X	X	X		X	X
Explore opportunities and draft plan for business incubator	X			X	X		
Explore opportunities for adding/upgrading agricultural infrastructure, expanding available marketable products, and supporting farmers, makers, and producers	X	X	X	X	X		X
Consider adding volunteering as a high school graduation requirement	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pilot portable services to underserved (library, mental health services)	X	X		X			

Actions steps impacting multiple strategies		ET#1	ET#2	ET#3	ET#4	ET#5	ET#6	ET#7
	Create program to get youth involved in town politics (e.g., junior select board members)	X	X		X			
	Create job shadowing, civic engagement, and youth workforce development programs through local partnerships	X	X	X	X			
	Explore and support alternative and more efficient energy opportunities (solar, geothermal, etc.) and improvements	X	X	X	X	X		
	Investigate opportunities for adding solar charging stations in municipal parking lot							
	Explore ways to add affordable housing, specifically in downtown	X	X		X	X		X
	Explore opportunities for additional recreation attractions, including Eaton Mountain, ATV trail connections, mountain biking trails, etc.	X	X		X	X	X	
	Investigate necessary upgrades and repairs to existing art and culture infrastructure, including the Skowhegan Opera House, Grange Hall, Coburn House	X	X		X	X		X
	Explore opportunities to bring more programming to Skowhegan via the opera house, fairgrounds, Coburn Park, and other performance venues	X	X		X	X		X
	Partner with local organizations and others to tell Skowhegan's story from a historical perspective, include educational information about our heritage in order to build understanding of multiple cultures	X	X	X	X		X	X
	Formalize Skowhegan's Langlais Art Trail through partnership with other Maine organizations that possess sculptures; create promotional materials and an online presence	X	X		X	X		X



Actions steps impacting multiple strategies		ET#1	ET#2	ET#3	ET#4	ET#5	ET#6	ET#7
	Encourage public art displays, sidewalk shows	X	X		X	X		X
	Forge partnership with the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture to further integrate the school and its artists into everyday life in Skowhegan	X	X		X	X		X
	Explore opportunities for extending the Old Canada Road from Solon to Skowhegan					X		
	Package existing assets and events to create tourism products (e.g., recreation and cultural offerings, local and regional tours)	X	X	X	X		X	X
	Plan and execute events that will draw visitors to Skowhegan (e.g., River Fest)		X	X	X		X	X
	Create youth workforce development and community engagement opportunities through recreational trail development	X	X		X	X	X	X
	Complete Riverfront Renaissance plan and develop riverfront for enhanced walkability and river viewing (e.g., path from Coburn Park to boat landing)	X	X		X	X	X	X
	Create and execute internal communications plan; include “shop local” campaign and incorporate Skowhegan’s brand to encourage cohesive messaging		X	X	X		X	X
	Consider establishing a brand ambassadors group to promote the town’s brand	X	X		X			
	Utilize Skowhegan brand to promote quality of place and quality of life	X		X			X	X

		ET#1	ET#2	ET#3	ET#4	ET#5	ET#6	ET#7
Action steps impacting all strategies	Tell Skowhegan's unique story through promotion of our assets: heritage/history, agriculture food hub, cultural offerings, recreation opportunities and facilities, economic opportunities, welcoming community	X		X			X	X
	Create annual marketing plan and strategy for Skowhegan that will promote Skowhegan as a tourist destination	X		X			X	X
	Utilize Maine Office of Tourism and Kennebec Valley Tourism Council as vehicles for promotion	X		X			X	X
	Research and apply for grant funding to support initiatives; match funding where possible	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Create comprehensive business incentive package and startup guide	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Draft a plan for capitalizing on the popularity of agritourism and the farm-to-table movement. Consider tours, new restaurants, and inclusion of local brewers and farmers.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Implement job training/shadowing, civic engagement, apprenticeship, or internship programs through local partnerships	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Explore partnership opportunities with KVCC and other local colleges	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Action steps impacting all strategies		ET#1	ET#2	ET#3	ET#4	ET#5	ET#6	ET#7
	Upgrade existing buildings to make usable for businesses (purchase, demolish, reconstruct, remodel, repair)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Improve broadband and bring faster Internet speeds to businesses and residents	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Explore opportunities for enhancements to parking, lighting, sidewalks, crosswalks, drainage, sewer	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Continue town beautification projects to attract businesses and shoppers (e.g., apply for fourth round of CDBG façade grant funding)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Explore options for improving pedestrian walkability and safety	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Actively pursue outreach to developers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Complete Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area, including construction or improvement of associated buildings for recreational purposes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Expand, improve, and maintain current trail system for hiking, biking, and more	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Create cultural plan for Somerset County	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Nurture relationship with Donna Moreland, the Maine Office of Tourism's new destination development specialist, to develop Skowhegan as Rural Destination	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Continue meeting with Maine Motorcoach Network; work with the network to bring bus tours back to town	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

		ET#1	ET#2	ET#3	ET#4	ET#5	ET#6	ET#7
Action steps impacting all strategies	Grow accommodation offerings (e.g., Airbnb, campgrounds, B&Bs, hotels)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Collaborate and partner with organizations and/or professional service providers to assist with implementation of the plan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Add diverse offerings in town, including food vendors, restaurants, coffee shops	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Explore opportunities to improve transportation (e.g., more biking and walking trails, better utilize/promote Somerset/Kennebec Explorer)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Design and launch VisitSkowhegan.com, a marketing tool and informational resource for visitors, developers, potential business owners; incorporate community calendar	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Action steps continued below.

	Action Steps	Tourism	Internal Marketing	External Marketing
		TT#1	CT#1	CT#2
Actions steps impacting multiple strategies	Plan regular business owner gatherings		X	X
	Plan regular seminars/workshops/trainings for business owners		X	X
	Plan and execute a regional “shop local” marketing campaign		X	X
	Identify businesses to entice with incentive package	X	X	X
	Design “open for business” campaign; highlight stories of local entrepreneurs and business owners		X	X
	Explore opportunities and draft plan for business incubator		X	X
	Explore opportunities for adding/upgrading agricultural infrastructure, expanding available marketable products, and supporting farmers, makers, and producers.	X	X	X
	Consider adding volunteering as a high school graduation requirement		X	X
	Pilot portable services to underserved (library, mental health services)		X	X
	Create program to get youth involved in town politics (e.g., junior select board members)		X	X
	Explore and support energy efficiency opportunities		X	X
	Create job shadowing, civic engagement, and youth workforce development programs through local partnerships		X	X
	Explore and support alternative and more efficient energy opportunities (solar, geothermal, etc.) and improvements		X	X
	Investigate opportunities for adding solar charging stations in municipal parking lot		X	X
	Explore ways to add affordable housing, specifically in downtown		X	X

Actions steps impacting multiple strategies		TT#1	CT#1	CT#2
	Explore opportunities for additional recreation attractions, including Eaton Mountain, ATV trail connections, mountain biking trails, etc.	X	X	X
	Investigate necessary upgrades and repairs to existing art and culture infrastructure, including the Skowhegan Opera House, Grange Hall, Coburn House	X	X	X
	Explore opportunities to bring more programming to Skowhegan via the opera house, fairgrounds, Coburn Park, and other performance venues	X	X	X
	Partner with local organizations and others to tell Skowhegan's story from a historical perspective; include educational information about our heritage in order to build understanding of multiple cultures	X	X	X
	Formalize Skowhegan's Langlais Art Trail through partnership with other Maine organizations that possess sculptures; create promotional materials and an online presence	X	X	X
	Encourage public art displays, sidewalk shows	X	X	X
	Forge partnership with the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture to further integrate the school and its artists into everyday life in Skowhegan	X	X	X
	Explore opportunities for extending the Old Canada Road from Solon to Skowhegan	X		X

Actions steps impacting multiple strategies		<b>TT#1</b>	<b>CT#1</b>	<b>CT#2</b>
	Package existing assets and events to create tourism products (e.g., recreation and cultural offerings, local and regional tours)	X	X	X
	Plan and execute events that will draw visitors to Skowhegan (e.g., River Fest)	X	X	X
	Complete Riverfront Renaissance plan and develop riverfront for enhanced walkability and river viewing (e.g., path from Coburn Park to boat landing)	X		X
	Create and execute internal communications plan; include “shop local” campaign and incorporate Skowhegan’s brand to encourage cohesive messaging	X	X	
	Consider establishing a brand ambassadors group to promote the town’s brand		X	X
	Utilize Skowhegan brand to promote quality of place and quality of life	X	X	X
	Tell Skowhegan’s unique story through promotion of our assets: heritage/history, agriculture food hub, cultural offerings, recreation opportunities and facilities, economic opportunities, welcoming community	X	X	X
	Create annual marketing plan and strategy for Skowhegan that will promote Skowhegan as a tourist destination	X	X	X

Action steps impacting all strategies		TT#1	CT#1	CT#2
	Utilize Maine Office of Tourism and Kennebec Valley Tourism Council as vehicles for promotion	X		X
	Research and apply for grant funding to support initiatives; match funding where possible	X	X	X
	Create comprehensive business incentive package and startup guide	X	X	X
	Draft a plan for capitalizing on the popularity of agritourism, the farm-to-table movement, and craft brew industry. Consider tours, new restaurants, and inclusion of local brewers and farmers.	X	X	X
	Implement job training/shadowing, civic engagement, apprenticeship, or internship programs through local partnerships	X	X	X
	Explore partnership opportunities with KVCC and other local colleges	X	X	X
	Upgrade existing buildings to make usable for businesses (purchase, demolish, reconstruct, remodel, repair)	X	X	X
	Improve broadband and bring faster Internet speeds to businesses and residents	X	X	X
	Explore opportunities for enhancements to parking, lighting, sidewalks, crosswalks, drainage, sewer	X	X	X
	Continue town beautification projects to attract businesses and shoppers (e.g., apply for fourth round of CDBG façade grant funding)	X	X	X



Action steps impacting all strategies		<b>TT#1</b>	<b>CT#1</b>	<b>CT#2</b>
	Explore options for improving pedestrian walkability and safety	X	X	X
	Actively pursue outreach to developers	X	X	X
	Complete Run of River Whitewater Recreation Area	X	X	X
	Expand, improve, and maintain current trail system	X	X	X
	Create cultural plan for Somerset County	X	X	X
	Nurture relationship with Donna Moreland, the Maine Office of Tourism's new destination development specialist, to develop Skowhegan as Rural Destination	X	X	X
	Continue meeting with Maine Motorcoach Network; work with the network to bring bus tours back to town	X	X	X
	Grow accommodation offerings (i.e. Airbnb, campgrounds, B&B's, hotels)	X	X	X
	Add diverse offerings in town, including food vendors, restaurants, coffee shops	X	X	X
	Explore opportunities to improve transportation (e.g., more biking and walking trails, better utilize/promote Somerset/Kennebec Explorer)	X	X	X
	Design and launch VisitSkowhegan.com, a marketing tool and informational resource for visitors, developers, potential business owners; incorporate community calendar	X	X	X