

# Healthy Hilltowns



## Hilltowns, MA SDAT Report

**AIA** Communities by Design   
ENVISION. CREATE. SUSTAIN.





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## INTRODUCTION

In December of 2015, the Hilltowns region of Massachusetts submitted a proposal to the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for a Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) to assist the community and its citizens in addressing key issues facing the community. The issues included healthy communities, recreation, open space, and town revitalization. The AIA accepted the proposal and, after a preliminary visit by a small group in June 2016, recruited a multi-disciplinary team of volunteers to serve on the SDAT Team. In September 2016, the SDAT Team members worked closely with local officials, community leaders, technical experts, non-profit organizations and citizens to study the community and its concerns. The team used its expertise to frame a wide range of recommendations, which were presented to the community in a public meeting. This report represents a summary of the findings and recommendations that were presented to the community.

### The Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) Program

The Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) program focuses on the importance of developing sustainable communities through design. The mission of the SDAT program is to provide technical assistance and process expertise to help communities develop a vision and framework for a sustainable future. The SDAT program brings together multidisciplinary teams of professionals to work with community stakeholders and decision-makers in an intensive planning process. Teams are composed of volunteer professionals representing a range of disciplines, including architects, urban design professionals, economic development experts, land use attorneys, and others. Today, communities face a host of challenges to long-term planning for sustainability, including limited resources and technical capacity, ineffective public processes and poor participation. The SDAT approach is designed to address many of the common challenges communities face by producing long-term sustainability plans that are realistic and reflect each community's unique context. Key features of the SDAT approach include the following:

- **Customized Design Assistance.** The SDAT is designed as a customized approach to which incorporates local realities and the unique challenges and assets of each community.

- **A Systems Approach to Sustainability.** The SDAT applies a systems-based approach to community sustainability, examining cross-cutting issues and relationships between issues. The SDAT forms multi-disciplinary teams that combine a range of disciplines and professions in an integrated assessment and design process.
- **Inclusive and Participatory Processes.** Public participation is the foundation of good community design. The SDAT involves a wide range of stakeholders and utilizes short feedback loops, resulting in sustainable decision-making that has broad public support and ownership.
- **Objective Technical Expertise.** The SDAT Team is assembled to include a range of technical experts from across the country. Team Members do not accept payment for services in an SDAT. They serve in a volunteer capacity on behalf of the AIA and the partner community. As a result, the SDAT Team has enhanced credibility with local stakeholders and can provide unencumbered technical advice.
- **Cost Effectiveness.** By employing the SDAT approach, communities are able to take advantage of leveraged resources for their planning efforts. The AIA contributes up to \$15,000 in financial assistance for each project. The SDAT team members volunteer their labor and expertise, allowing communities to gain immediate access to the combined technical knowledge of top-notch professionals from varied fields.





The SDAT program is modeled on the Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) program, one of AIA's longest-running success stories. While the R/UDAT program was developed to provide communities with specific design solutions, the SDAT program provides broad assessments to help frame future policies or design solutions in the context of sustainability and help communities plan the first steps of implementation. Through the Design Assistance Team (DAT) program, over 500 professionals from 30 disciplines have provided millions of dollars in professional pro bono services to more than 200 communities across the country. The SDAT program leverages the pivotal role of the architectural community in the creation and support of sustainable livable communities.

The following report includes a narrative account of the Hilltowns SDAT project recommendations, with summary information concerning several principle areas of investigation. The recommendations are made within the broad framework of sustainability, and are designed to form an integrated approach to future sustainability efforts in the community.



## WE'VE HEARD THAT...



People in the Hilltowns want ways to be more physically active and eat more healthfully...



...but need more places to walk, bike, play and access healthy foods.



Join **YOUR NEIGHBORS**, Healthy Hampshire, Hilltown Community Health Centers, and Hilltown CDC...



...to think outside the box about finding local and regional solutions to:



**CREATING A HEALTHY  
HILLTOWN REGION FOR EVERYONE!**





# **The Hilltowns**



## THE HILLTOWNS

The Hilltowns region is an area in Western Massachusetts that includes rural towns in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire Counties. While the boundaries of the Hilltowns region are loosely drawn, the SDAT focused primarily on ten towns: Blandford, Chester, Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Huntington, Middlefield, Plainfield, Russell, and Worthington. The total population of these ten towns is 11,988 with an average town population of 1,200. Each of the ten towns has its own municipal government, and the towns are primarily governed by voluntary municipal boards and committees. Some services and community resources are shared across the region, but the rural nature and geographic distance between the towns makes widespread cooperation difficult. The isolated location of the region means that the average travel time to work for Hilltown residents is approximately 35 minutes, or 23 percent longer than the average commuting time for the state of Massachusetts. With limited transit opportunities and sparse local economic activity, most residents are forced to depend on 30+ minute drives for consumer goods. These physical constraints lead to a lack of opportunity as far as community-based pedestrian, physical activity, and healthy food access through the built environment in the Hilltowns.

Healthy Hampshire, a collaboration between local municipal leaders, elected officials, schools, public health departments, local businesses, parents, and youth, is part of the Mass in Motion statewide initiative administered through the Department of Public Health. With a mission to improve the health of all residents of Hampshire County by working with municipal and community leaders to effect changes to community policies and systems that will promote access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity, Healthy Hampshire is committed to working with the Hilltown communities to develop opportunities and strategies for building healthy, sustainable communities. To this end, and with the support of the City of Northampton, Healthy Hampshire applied for a 2016 SDAT with the hope of utilizing the SDAT program's process of community engagement to work with residents to devise strategies around active transportation, recreational space, and healthy food access. In their SDAT application, the Hilltowns specifically asked the SDAT to answer five questions:

- 1. What recreational and pedestrian opportunities exist in the selected communities that may not have been identified through the Hilltown assessment and other community engagement and planning processes?*
- 2. How can the selected communities encourage pedestrian opportunities by identifying—and improving community linkages to—magnets that will encourage utilitarian and recreational walking?*
- 3. How can the recommendations emerging from ongoing planning processes be implemented on the ground in the selected communities in a way that is most useful to local residents?*

*4. What is the role of institutions (e.g., Hilltown Community Health Center, Hilltown Community Development Corporation, schools, and houses of worship) in promoting healthy living?*

*5. How can healthy food production and consumption be encouraged, given low population density and weak market opportunities?*

## THE HILLTOWNS SDAT

Upon accepting the Hilltowns application into the SDAT program, a small team visited the region for an initial scoping visit and worked with the community to further refine the goals for the project. In September of 2016, the full SDAT team arrived in the region for a three day charrette that involved small group meetings with residents, business owners, and stakeholders; a regional tour; and two public engagement meetings. The conversations with residents allowed the team to better understand both the assets and challenges facing the region. Based on those conversations, the SDAT identified six key themes for the project:

1. Food Resources/Access
2. Transportation/Mobility
3. Economic Opportunities
4. Housing Resources
5. Open Space/Recreation
6. Social Connectivity

The following report is arranged around those six key issues; each section provides a vision statement with both long and short term recommendations for moving forward in those areas. In addition to those specific issue recommendation, the SDAT offers the following overarching principles for the community as they begin to move forward with the implementation of the suggested actions:

- Now is the time to act!
- Collaboration and cooperation is a must.
- Widespread participation in community efforts is essential for success.
- Work locally, think regionally.
- Connect resources – access funding.
- Capitalize on existing assets.
- Research other success stories, locally, nationally, and globally.
- Create a framework for focused investment.













**Food**

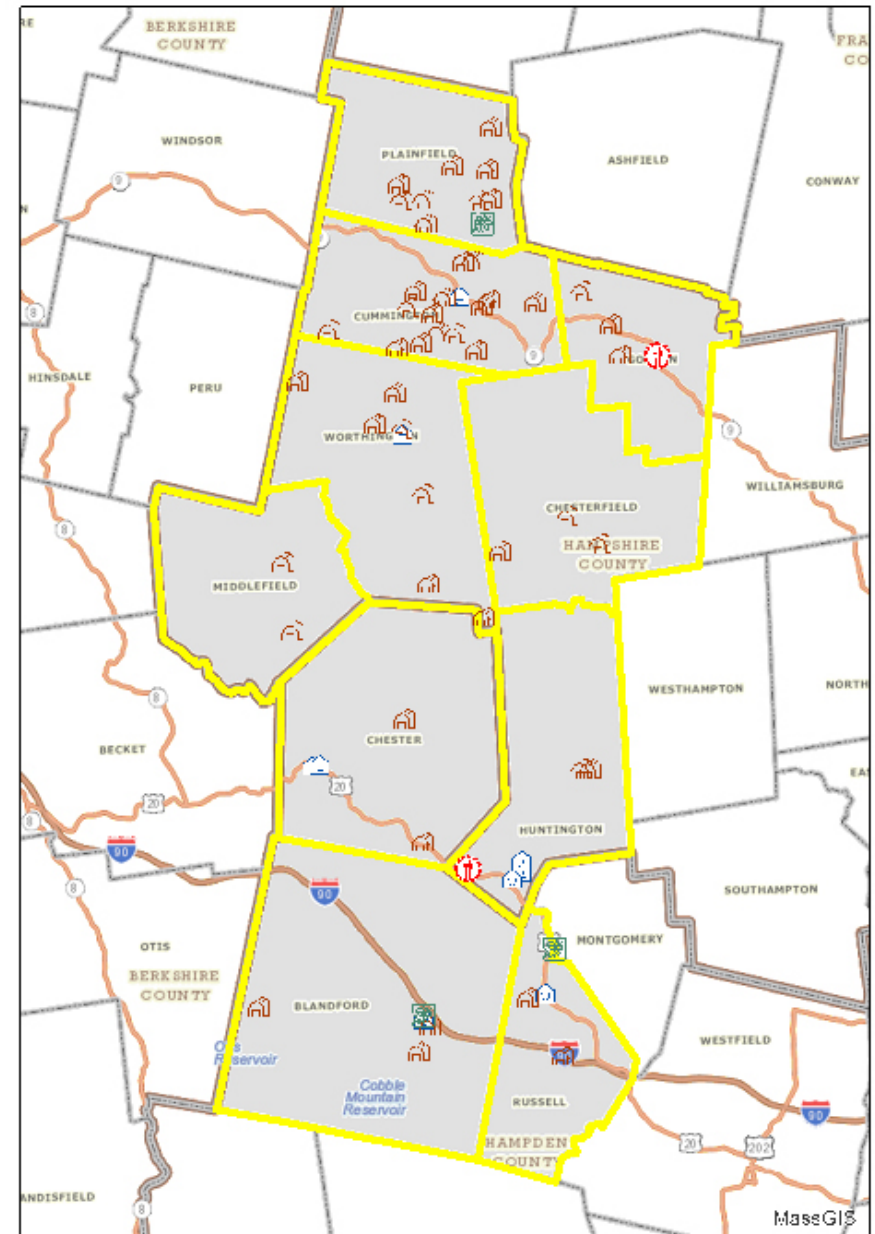


## FOOD ACCESS & PRODUCTION

Issues related to local food and farms have been on the radar of the Hilltowns region for at least the last several years, when “Access to Local and Healthy Food” emerged as a key issue from the 2012 community engagement sessions centered around the region’s sustainability. Since then, Hilltown CDC leveraged funding from the US Department of Agriculture’s Local Food Promotion Program to facilitate development of a community-driven action plan for supporting local agriculture, Keep Farming in the Hilltowns. In addition, the Healthy Hilltowns report commissioned by Healthy Hampshire compiled and analyzed data related to food access and determinants of health. These provide a great foundation upon which to build.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

Though people generally do travel a great deal and to multiple places to fulfil all their needs, food is already produced locally in the Hilltowns themselves and the surrounding communities. This production occurs at home and community gardens in addition to commercial farms. Many Hilltown communities and those just beyond have especially beloved local food resources such as Raspberry Hill Community Garden in Plainfield, The Old Creamery Co-op in Cummington, and Common Table in Chester.



- Community Garden
- Grocery
- Farm
- Food Pantry

*Hilltowns Food Access & Production Nodes*



The interest in expanding access to healthy, locally-produced food is palpable, but there are real challenges to confront. Consumers, particularly seniors, are constrained in terms of their willingness and/or ability to seek out and pay for local food. Local producers still rely on having multiple jobs due to high costs of farm inputs or marketing. Retail outlets are limited in their capacity to deal with the disaggregated sourcing from smaller, variable sources.

It is unclear how well the specific food access desires and preferences of Hilltown consumers align with those of local food producers and across the food supply chain. As “local food” connotes something different to different people, it will be important to think critically about the intentions of local food and farm interventions. Ideally, interventions can support win-win opportunities where local producers meet local demand for healthy, affordable food. But as preferences, health issues, costs or other factors are accounted for, it may be necessary to focus more on either the local consumer or producer end.

				Quintiles, 1 (low) to 5 (high)					
	Population	Percent Ages 65+	Percent of individuals, income below poverty level (2010)	Prevalence of Diabetes (2008-2010)	Prevalence of 5 or more fruit/vegetable servings (2005-2009); high is favorable.	Prevalence of high blood pressure (2005-2009)	Prevalence of overweight and obesity (2009-2011)	Prevalence of just obesity (2009-2011)	Lack of physical activity (2001-2009)
Massachusetts	6,587,536	14	11	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Blandford	1,184	8	6	3	4	2	3	4	2
Chester	1,275	16	7	2	4	3	2	2	3
Chesterfield	1,015	13	4	4	2	3	4	3	2
Cummington	1,100	15	14	3	2	4	4	3	4
Goshen	1,080	13	1	4	2	3	3	4	4
Huntington	2,206	14	11	3	2	2	4	5	2
Middlefield	418	13	1	5	2	5	4	5	4
Plainfield	611	25	5	5	2	5	4	3	4
Russell	1,665	11	6	4	1	2	4	4	2
Worthington	1,167	15	8	4	4	4	5	2	2

*Adapted from Healthy Hilltowns: A Report for Healthy Hampshire, 2016; based on Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data*



**VISION: An accessible regional food system rooted in community.**

Efforts already put toward studying the local food and farms needs of the region have yielded pragmatic recommendations, including those found in the Keep Farming in the Hilltowns Action Plan, that the community would be wise to continue implementing. These suggestions may complement those, provide additional motivation, and/or guidance on prioritization.

Moving forward with implementation, aim to realistically assess whether the resources to address a concern are (or could readily be) available/produced in the region. If not, taking an incremental approach, i.e. focusing more on basic food access or food production needs first, may be appropriate. As initial efforts gain traction, then think about how to better connect the local producer and consumer dots. That said, interacting with and relying on supply chains at diverse scales beyond just local/regional is somewhat inevitable—so think of this work as more rebalancing than outright replacing the existing food system.

And note that while we continue to use the phrase local food, understand that this is generally applied to the Hilltown region. We encourage you to embrace agriculture as part of the regional identity and the power of food in building a sense of community within and across the 10 Hilltowns.

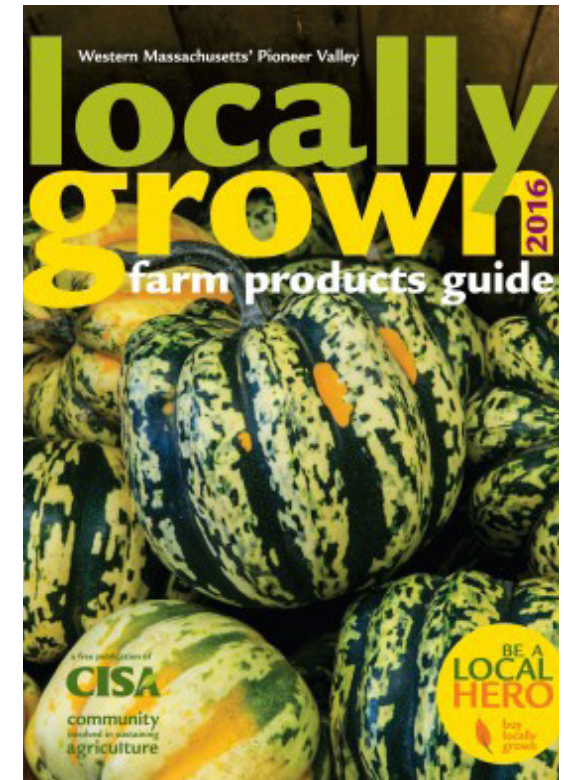
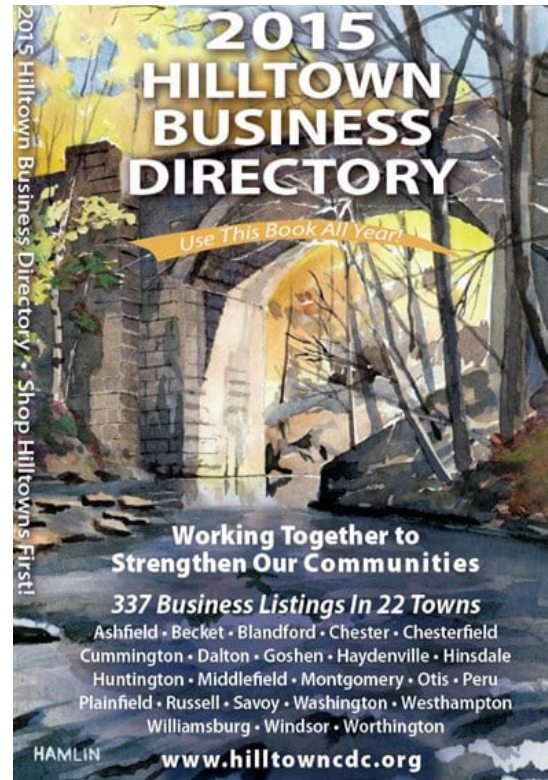
## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Quick, Cheap and Easy

#### *Expand awareness of regional food and farm resources.*

The Healthy Hilltowns report identified approximately 50 farms producing fruit, vegetables, dairy, or meat across the 10-community region. However, the 2016 Hilltowns Business Directory website includes just 11 farms and farm stands, with only about half found within our 10 communities of particular interest.

The more comprehensive Locally Grown: Farm Products Guide (pictured here) produced by Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) includes far more listings, but only for those businesses that have purchased more expensive memberships in the organization (which do come with additional benefits), and also covers the entire 3 counties of the Pioneer Valley.



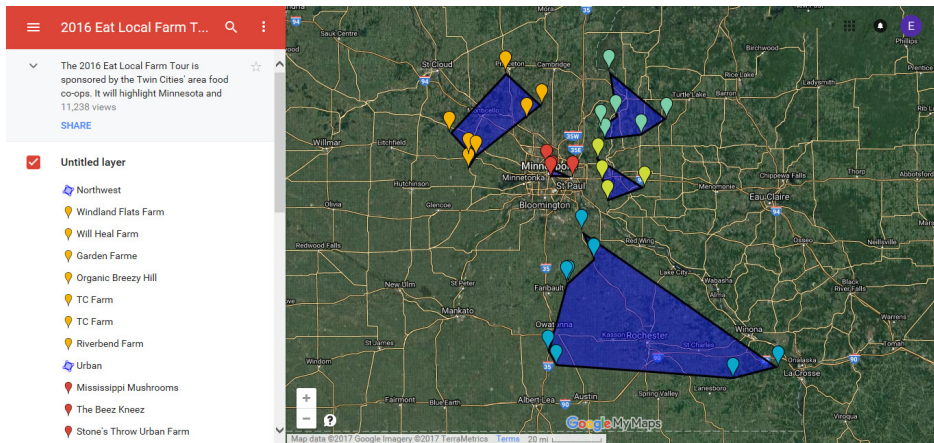
Given that there is already a printed and online directory focused more closely on the Hilltowns region, it makes sense to use those as an easy, low-barrier-to-entry means of collecting and sharing information about regional food and farm resources.

A next step could be to explore, possibly in consultation with CISA, the creation of a Hilltown-focused branding initiative, though there may be concerns about diluting the message of their longstanding “Be a Local Hero” campaign.

Another complementary approach, also suggested in the Keeping Farming in the Hilltowns Action Plan, could be to more intentionally link and promote regional food and farm resources along with opportunities for recreation and tourism. This could involve producing maps, coordinating schedules of pop-up markets or agritourism activities, implementing wayfinding signage, or other strategies. As a bridge to professionally-designed and printed maps and other collateral, it is possible to start by populating and sharing a simple, public Google Map labeling key nodes.

The Google Map on the following page was created for the 2016 “Eat Local Farm Tour” organized by Twin Cities co-ops maps and classifies locations of regional food producers. Visitors can easily access and download directions to individual or clusters of locations. It is also possible to link map markers to business websites, and to overlay the map with other points of interest for visitors to the region.





Source: [https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1tiK8jijOCtYPz2SqW3XxPRWqxGc&hl=en\\_US](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1tiK8jijOCtYPz2SqW3XxPRWqxGc&hl=en_US)

**Leverage key community spaces in activities that promote regional food production or distribution.**

Even in a region that prides itself on being somewhat remote and isolated, there is interest in and potential for using food to bring people together and foster a stronger sense of community. Many low- or no-cost opportunities exist, often ideal for encouraging intergenerational interaction, and should be further explored and promoted:

- Using refrigerator or freezer space, like the one in the below picture in Woodstock, VT, for take-or-leave shared spaces will reduce some maintenance/shelf-life issues associated with open-air carts.
- Local dump/transfer station facilities: Provide opportunities for composting of food waste, which could then be made available to community gardens. These high-traffic locations may also be good places to promote other community activities related to food.

## Trails Supporting the Farm Economy



"When the trail developed, this farm only had cows next to the trail. They sold ice cream and put up a small hut on their farm next to the trail. It has grown ever since and is a destination for trail users and the public in the area." - Paul Yauk, MI DNR

"MI tries to work with the Agricultural community on partnership like this with farm markets and other ventures that assist locally grown goods." - Paul Yauk, MI DNR

Trails and Agriculture: Bridging Productive and Recreational Landscapes



The Hart-Montague Trail in Michigan links recreation and agricultural points of interest. Source: <https://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/1324/files/trails%20and%20agriculture%20-%20bridging%20productive%20and%20recreational%20landscapes.pdf>



Refrigerated shared space



Community educational opportunities



Local dump/transfer station facilities



Community gardens



- Libraries or other municipal buildings: Provide shared fridge/freezer space inside community facilities (municipal buildings, etc.) for leaving or taking produce or frozen meals. Creative messaging encouraging people to donate surplus produce or other food for those in need (e.g., around holidays) may help to jump-start usage and maintain awareness that this opportunity exists. Consider further riffing on the “little free library” concept and provide adjacent space for cookbook and/or recipe exchanges.
- Community gardens: Enhance success of existing and prospective gardens by first clarifying where they can locate and updating zoning if necessary, as well as with guidelines or readiness checklists (see Decatur, GA an example) and by making connections to regional expertise and resources (Cooperative Extension, existing strong gardens). Cross-promote opportunities to preserve and/or share participants’ harvest with others in need, including potentially expanding classes offered by the Southern Hilltown Adult Education Center. <http://www.decaturga.com/home/showdocument?id=1973>
- Schools and churches: Community members expressed interest in more local food processing facilities. As a first step, survey these and other related facilities as appropriate about available kitchen infrastructure - equipment, space, etc. - that could be made available to the public. A report by the Center for Ecoliteracy provides links to example programs that have emerged from this type of school-community kitchen matchmaking. [https://www.ecoliteracy.org/sites/default/files/uploads/shared\\_files/CEL-School-Community-Kitchens.pdf](https://www.ecoliteracy.org/sites/default/files/uploads/shared_files/CEL-School-Community-Kitchens.pdf)
- Other shared infrastructure: Consider whether there are barns, sheds, or other buildings that could be used for a farm/garden equipment library. See Maine’s Shared-Use Farm Equipment Pool as an example. <https://www.maineFarmlandtrust.org/farm-viability-new/shared-use-farm-equipment/>

#### ***Provide guidance on opportunities and regulations for food-related entrepreneurial activities.***

As an immediate step, update local regulations to ensure sales from farm stands and community gardens are more broadly permitted. In Chester specifically, eliminating the 5-acre minimum size requirement for parcels will open up opportunities for smaller-scale gardeners/farmers. As legality of community gardening is reviewed across the Hilltowns, particularly in Plainfield and Russell, it is recommended that communities also consider allowing for sales of produce grown on these sites.



Work with local planners, community members, and additional experts as appropriate to develop and share fact sheets, checklists, dos-and-don’ts, etc. for those interested in various food-related entrepreneurial activities. In addition to retail at the site of production, these activities could include pop-up/temporary dining or retail events or the making of value-added food or farm products (also known as “cottage food” industries; see Massachusetts Guidelines on Residential Kitchens as an example ). We observed interest in these types of activities, so materials should cover and interpret applicable regulations but be framed to encourage activities to the extent possible. A prevalence of food and community-minded events and expanded opportunities to produce and distribute local food and farm products will contribute to the culture of regional agriculture.

#### **Longer Term Strategies**

Recommended longer-term strategies hinge on continuing to engage farmers and other stakeholders (including non-profits and representatives of local, state and federal authorities) in dialogue and planning for an agricultural future that supports the entry and scaling up of new and existing farm businesses, and in turn, expanded access to local food. Specific ideas to explore include:

**Creating a mobile market pilot.** While local farmers markets have languished, there is interest in exploring a mobile farmers market model that would make fresh, regionally-produced food more accessible—including to those customers with transportation challenges. Siting market stops at community centers, libraries or facilities can help bring vitality to village centers.

The Arcadia Mobile Market (pictured on the following page) serves the greater Washington, D.C. region, prioritizing low-income and low-access neighborhoods and accepting healthy food benefit programs such as SNAP (food stamps) and double voucher incentives. Arcadia offers guidance to other mobile markets on operations and evaluation via their annual reports, and may also be available for further consulting on program design.

Further, as the state’s Healthy Food Incentive Pilot expands into a full program over the next several years, the region should seek to increase its participation. Federal dollars distributed through this program are eligible for redemption at, among other types of retailers, mobile markets.





*The Wormfarm Institute's Roadside Stands, designed and built by local artists, integrate culture and agriculture. <http://wormfarminstitute.org/programs/culturestands/>*



*Arcadia Mobile Market: <http://arcadiafood.org/programs/mobile-market>*

**Mitigating barriers to entry and challenges to growth for prospective and existing farmers.** The survey data collected through the Keep Farming in the Hilltowns process provides some insights for further investigation. Conversation starters could include:

- What infrastructure needs are most pressing for regional producers?
- To what extent are regional producers engaged in any conservation or succession planning efforts?
- How can we bridge gaps and better network regional producers and retail/institutional buyers? Between producers and direct consumers?
- To what extent are farmers interested in agritourism opportunities? What are pros and cons?
- To what extent are regional producers interested in collective marketing or distribution opportunities?
- How are farms meeting their labor requirements?

Ongoing conversations can help to foster a peer network and create space for workshopping these and other emergent issues. Many counties and local governments have successfully brought people to the table for these types of events, but it is anticipated an organization like Hilltown CDC would kick this off initially, bringing in additional subject matter experts and facilitators as necessary.

**Create a comprehensive regional farmland inventory and conservation/management strategy.** In anticipation of changes to the region's population and expanded economic opportunities in the region, a comprehensive plan for preserving the Hilltowns' agricultural identity will be important. In developing such a plan, connect with the agricultural commissions, planners, land trusts, local producers and other entities that have knowledge about farmland in region. Think about opportunities to designate and prioritize prime farmland, facilitate linkages from landholders to landseekers, and to align agricultural development with complementary active and passive recreational opportunities.

## KEEP FARMING IN THE HILLTOWNS



1/1/2016

Action Plan

The following is a summary of the Keep Farming in the Hilltowns history, process, and findings that were used to inform the development of an action plan. These findings are the result of the past year of work by the local community who gathered and analyzed data through community forums, work group meetings, interviews, and surveys. It is our hope that these findings will lead the way for our region to implement this action plan to address the needs expressed by our neighbors, community leaders and farmers.

**HILLTOWN**  
Community Development Corporation

**Mobility**





## MOBILITY OVERVIEW

Improving mobility is an important issue for the Hilltowns communities. A transportation study conducted by the Hilltown Community Development Corporation (HCDC) in 2015 indicated a strong desire among residents to have alternate transportation choices. Heavy dependence on cars and limited walking and cycling facilities reduce mobility options and contribute to inactive lifestyles and associated health issues. With an ageing population, long travel distances to basic services and limited public transit investments, there is a need to consider other modes and types of transportation in the Hilltowns.

### Hilltowns Community Today

The Hilltowns communities have certain distinct opportunities with regard to their transportation infrastructure. There is a robust network of well-maintained streets that connect different communities. Most of the streets are flanked by beautiful scenery that ranges from pastures and farmlands to wooded areas. Tree-lined streets in the neighborhoods also create a 'tunnel effect' which help calm traffic. The topography in the region lends itself to winding roads and slopes, lowering vehicular speeds and thus improving road safety. However, the topography causes visibility issues while driving and can be challenging for non-motorized modes, especially cycling.

Traffic volumes are generally low, which makes walking and cycling safe, if adequate facilities are provided. Currently, Hilltowns communities have limited sidewalks and no dedicated cycle lanes. Sidewalks are provided in some of the town centers, but are not always continuous. Accessible ramps are not provided at all crosswalks, discouraging people with disabilities and those pushing strollers from walking.

There are no current plans by the State or the Pioneer Valley Region to bring additional transit service to the Hilltowns. The Pioneer

Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) and the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) currently provide some of the towns with demand-based transportation service. However, according to CDC's 2015 transportation study, there is lack of awareness of these services as well as scheduling challenges and management issues. Many residents, especially seniors, depend on their families or neighbors to overcome their limited mobility. A van service or public transit would immensely benefit the residents and nearly 75% of CDC's survey respondents were willing to pay double the current fare for transit.

Lack of public transit and adequate walking and cycling facilities have led to high rates of car ownership per household. Residents are increasingly dependent on cars, requiring access to a range of resources for vehicle maintenance. Some towns, such as Cummington, have facilities for car repair, automobile accessories and other supplies. These are accessible to other communities by road, though they face long drives for basic supplies such as gasoline.

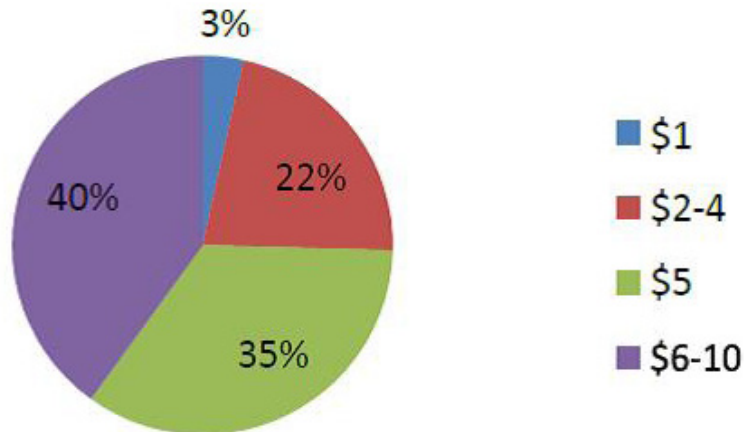
Heavy dependence on cars, high vehicle speeds on some roads and limited availability of sidewalks discourage walking. Utilitarian walking is not very practical in a rural setting with dispersed population. However, walking within destinations, such as in village centers, can have a positive impact on public health. The table below summarizes some of the key characteristics of village centers.

Town	Retail Stores	Housing Density	Sidewalks	Library in Village
Blandford	1	Medium	Yes	Yes
Chester	5	High	Yes	Yes
Chesterfield	0	Medium	Yes	Yes
Cummington	1	High	Yes	No
Goshen	1	Low	No	Yes
Huntington	15	High	Yes	Yes
Middlefield	0	Low	No	No
Plainfield	0	Low	No	Yes
Russell	3	High	Yes	Yes
Worthington	1	Low	No	Yes

*Source: Healthy Hilltown: A Report for Healthy Hampshire, 2016*

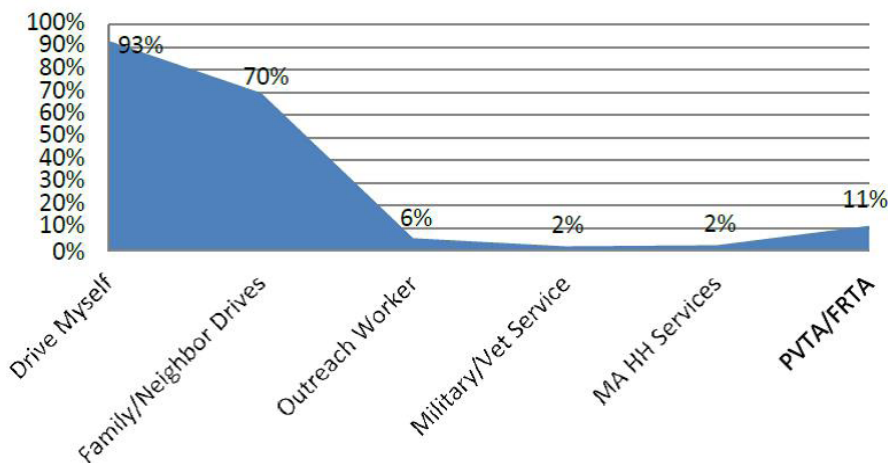


## Fare Residents Are Willing to Pay



Breakdown by fare the percentage of respondents are willing to pay. Source: Summary Report of Hilltown Transportation Study, Hilltown CDC, 2015.

## Types of Transportation Respondents Sometimes/Always Rely On



Percentage of respondents that rely on various transportation modes. Source: Summary Report of Hilltown Transportation Study, Hilltown CDC, 2015.

Having higher housing density, more retail enterprises, better sidewalks and public amenities such as a library or other community buildings in the village center can encourage residents to walk within the centers. Providing alternate transportation choices would also improve mobility for residents, especially seniors. Safety should be of high priority, for all modes of transport, when multi-modal systems are being considered. The following narrative describes the transportation vision, objectives and recommendations for the Hilltowns communities.

**VISION:** A well-connected Hilltowns region with streets that support surrounding uses and offer access to a variety of transportation options for all.

### Objectives

1. Encourage transportation choices that include walking, cycling, transit and ride-share.
2. Ensure safety for all road users and all modes of transport.
3. Make existing and new street/trail infrastructure accessible.
4. Consider needs of people with all ages and abilities while addressing transportation choices.
5. Create opportunities for active lifestyle along existing streets and trails.
6. Consider special needs and features of each community.

### Recommendations

Each Hilltowns community has its unique assets and challenges. Their needs vary, and so do their demographics and priorities. However, the transportation challenges are somewhat similar among these different towns. There is a need for regional thinking when it comes to implementing transportation policies and projects. Following recommendations may suit some communities more than others, as some have better infrastructure and access to resources than others. However, the attempt here is to address the concerns shared by these communities through a range of programs and projects. In order to aid their implementation, following recommendations are divided into short and long term interventions, depending on associated costs, duration and ease of implementation.

### Short Term Initiatives:

**1. Adopt Complete Streets Policy and receive funding through the MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program**

TMunicipalities within the Hilltowns should officially adopt a Complete Streets policy to ensure safe and accessible streets for all users. A complete streets policy then





allows municipalities to access funding for improvements through the MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program. As of Feb. 2017, 119 municipalities have passed complete streets policies, 29 have completed prioritization plans (with funding from MassDOT) and 26 have received funding for actual infrastructure improvements. For more information about the MassDOT program, contact Healthy Hampshire at [www.healthyhampshire.org](http://www.healthyhampshire.org) or go to the MassDOT website at <https://masscompletestreets.com>.

## 2. Create Asset Maps

Some of the Hilltowns communities have great assets in terms of trails, sidewalks, rest areas and attractions, which offer opportunities for recreation. Although several publications exist today, there is no single resource map that shows all of these assets. This information needs to be mapped as joint effort between communities, ultimately serving as a live resource for residents to use and help organize activities. The map should be updated periodically to ensure new routes and facilities are included. It can be made available by print and online. This map can also help communities identify gaps in the network and prioritize capital investments.

## 3. Minor Street Retrofit

Implement small-scale improvements within existing rights-of-way that require minimal capital investments but have tremendous benefits in terms of mobility and safety. One example would be to paint a pedestrian walkway or dedicated bike lane within existing streets. This can be done with paint at low cost. The adjacent example illustrates a 'before and after' scenario of adding bike lane within the shoulder of an existing street, thus providing a safe, dedicated route for cyclists. <https://tinyurl.com/HampshireCompleteStreets>



*Existing streetscape (above) and proposed conversion of shoulder to bike lane (right).*



The Complete Streets Design Manual provides design and implementation guidance on such street retrofits. Below are some examples of adding painted walkways along existing roadways. Such walkways can be a cost-effective alternative where separate sidewalks are not possible or desirable.





#### 4. Shared-Use Transit

Provide shared-use transit services for youth and seniors using school buses and community led ride-share programs. School buses are great resources for communities, yet they sit idly during non-school hours, weekends and holidays. Several studies<sup>1</sup> have been done on using school buses as public transit vehicles in suburban and rural communities. Many states have laws that allow for their use by certain demographics, especially seniors, youth, people with disabilities and those who cannot afford cars. According to Massachusetts law (Mass. Gen. Laws Ann. ch. 159A §32), 'school department of any town may make vehicles under its control available to transport senior citizen groups, little league teams and town recreational groups. The school department may charge the group an amount sufficient to cover its costs' (National Conference of State Legislatures Report, 2008)<sup>2</sup>. Such a program would help seniors and youth who are unable to drive or do not have access to cars be independent and mobile. This can be achieved in the short term, through shared-use agreements between community organizations and school boards.



There are several models for shared transportation services, especially for seniors and youth. Some of these are listed below. Associated references provide more information on program administration and funding. There is a great opportunity for Hilltowns residents and local organizations to work together to bring such services to their communities.

- Smiles<sup>3</sup> (Senior Miles) program in Blount County, Tennessee is a voluntary transportation service that offers a membership-based program that offers transportation to seniors.
- HealthTran<sup>4</sup>, a program administered by Missouri Rural Health Association is a non-emergency transportation service to provide rural patients access to medical services in South-Central Missouri, especially for primary and preventive care.
- Specialized Transit Program<sup>5</sup> funded by Riverside County Transportation Commission, provides specialized transit services to seniors, low-income residents and people with disabilities.
- VA's Highly Rural Transportation Grants<sup>6</sup> program offers funding for free transportation for veterans who live in highly rural areas to attend medical appointments.

#### Long Term Initiatives:

##### 1. Develop Complete Streets Implementation Plan

Once the Complete Streets policy is adopted, municipalities should develop an implementation plan that establishes project priorities, costs and timeline based on local needs and existing conditions with funding available through the MassDOT Complete Streets Funding Program. Before developing the plan, it is highly recommended that the communities complete a street audit to determine what facilities exist for pedestrians and cyclists. Locations that face safety issues due to higher traffic speeds and/or potential conflicts with walkers and cyclists should also be identified. Guidance on applying a complete street approach for rural communities can be found in the Urban, Rural and Suburban Complete Streets Design Manual: <https://tinyurl.com/HampshireCompleteStreets>

Transportation cannot be considered independent of the land use context. Pedestrian and cycle amenities should first go to parts of villages that either already have or are planned to have the highest densities, where a critical mass of walkers and cyclists are expected to use these facilities. Input from local communities, land use planners and transportation experts are valuable in understanding current challenges and opportunities for improvement. Guidance provided in the Complete Streets Design Manual will help develop design solutions and associated cost estimates. This will enable communities to work collectively to identify and allocate funding.



## 2. Implement Safety Improvement Projects

Based on the implementation plan, invest in projects that will create safe environments for pedestrians, cyclists and car users and minimize conflicts between the different modes. These can vary from minor interventions like signage placement or painting crosswalks to major projects such as adding accessible sidewalks with curb ramps, raised crosswalks or center islands on roadways to calm traffic.

The manual provides guidance on their design; details can vary depending on existing conditions such as topography, availability of street right-of-way, permitting requirements and available funding. Detailed engineering analysis and input from a landscape architect may be required prior to choosing the appropriate design solution. Provided below are some design solutions for safety improvement projects, as illustrated in the Design Manual.



*Examples of existing road safety measures: Pedestrian crossing sign and sidewalk with accessible curb ramp (above and top right); center island to calm traffic (bottom right).*



*Sidewalks across driveways to prioritize ped movement & lower vehicle speed.*



*Raised crosswalks for greater pedestrian prominence and better visibility.*



*Center islands that reduce width of travel lanes, thus reducing vehicle speeds.*



*Two-way cycle path located immediately adjacent/parallel to roadway.*

## 3. Install Outdoor Exercise Equipment

Lack of physical activity remains one of biggest challenges to public health. Higher rates of obesity and diabetes and related cardiovascular problems have been linked to lack of active lifestyles. This becomes even more problematic in rural communities like the Hilltowns, where residents depend on cars for most trips and have limited access to exercise facilities. In addition to providing pedestrian walkways and recreational trails, communities should consider investing in outdoor exercise equipment within existing parks and along the trails.

A range of equipment is available today, varying in cost and complexity. In order to minimize public spending and ensure the effectiveness of such equipment, communities should consider the following:

1. Start with a pilot project.
2. Select equipment that is simple to use and not too costly.
3. Install equipment in a park or trail that is very active, in a location clearly visible from entry/main access points and is easily accessible from existing paths
4. Provide clear instructions, signage, etc. to encourage use
5. Ensure the ground is topped with mulch or compacted aggregate to ensure safety and avoid recurring maintenance.
6. Review community use, interest and experiences during the pilot phase before additional installations.



#### 4. Extend Medical Emergency Services

One of the challenges faced by the Hilltowns communities is access to emergency medical services. It is important to extend these facilities to wider geographic areas to avoid delays and related health complications, especially during winter months when harsh driving conditions can cause further delays. However, due to small and dispersed population, it is difficult and costly to maintain full-time Emergency Medical Services<sup>7</sup> (EMS) personnel. Their services are not usually required full-time due to low volume of care needed. Traditionally, rural communities have depended on volunteer Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) to cover the gaps left by lack of accessible EMS personnel. However, this model is difficult to maintain as volunteers often become over-burdened with training requirements, schedule conflicts and personal commitments.

Many rural communities are now moving towards community paramedicine<sup>8</sup>, as it extends the role of EMS personnel to provide primary healthcare services and educational programs to rural population while they are not attending to emergency situations. This system enables paramedics to be active full-time, relieves pressure on the primary care system, and helps reduce emergency medical needs through improved preventive care and post-trauma follow-up. A regional system approach should also be considered in order to foster partnerships and develop strategies to implement a robust trauma care system through shared resources<sup>9</sup>.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>"Integrating School Bus and Public Transportation Services in Non-Urban Communities"; TRCP Report 56; 1999. [http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp\\_rpt\\_56-a.pdf](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_56-a.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>"School Buses and Special Needs Transportation Options for Policymakers"; National Conference Of State Legislatures; 2008. [http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/NCSL\\_School\\_Bus\\_Coordination\\_Brief\\_August2008\\_Farber1.pdf](http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/NCSL_School_Bus_Coordination_Brief_August2008_Farber1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>SMiles Senior Transportation Program: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/community-health/project-examples/809>

<sup>4</sup>HealthTran Services: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/community-health/project-examples/859>

<sup>5</sup>Specialized Transit Program: <http://www.rctc.org/rail/transit/specialized-transit-providers>

<sup>6</sup>VA's Highly Rural Transportation Grant: <http://www.va.gov/HEALTH/NewsFeatures/2014/October/Free-Rides-for-Vets-Living-in-Highly-Rural-Areas.asp>

<sup>7</sup>Rural Emergency Medical Services: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/emergency-medical-services>

<sup>8</sup>Community Paramedicine: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/community-paramedicine>

<sup>9</sup>Vernberg DK1, Rotondo MF; "Sustaining an inclusive trauma system in a rural state: the role of regional care systems, partnerships, and quality of care"; 2010. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20838161>





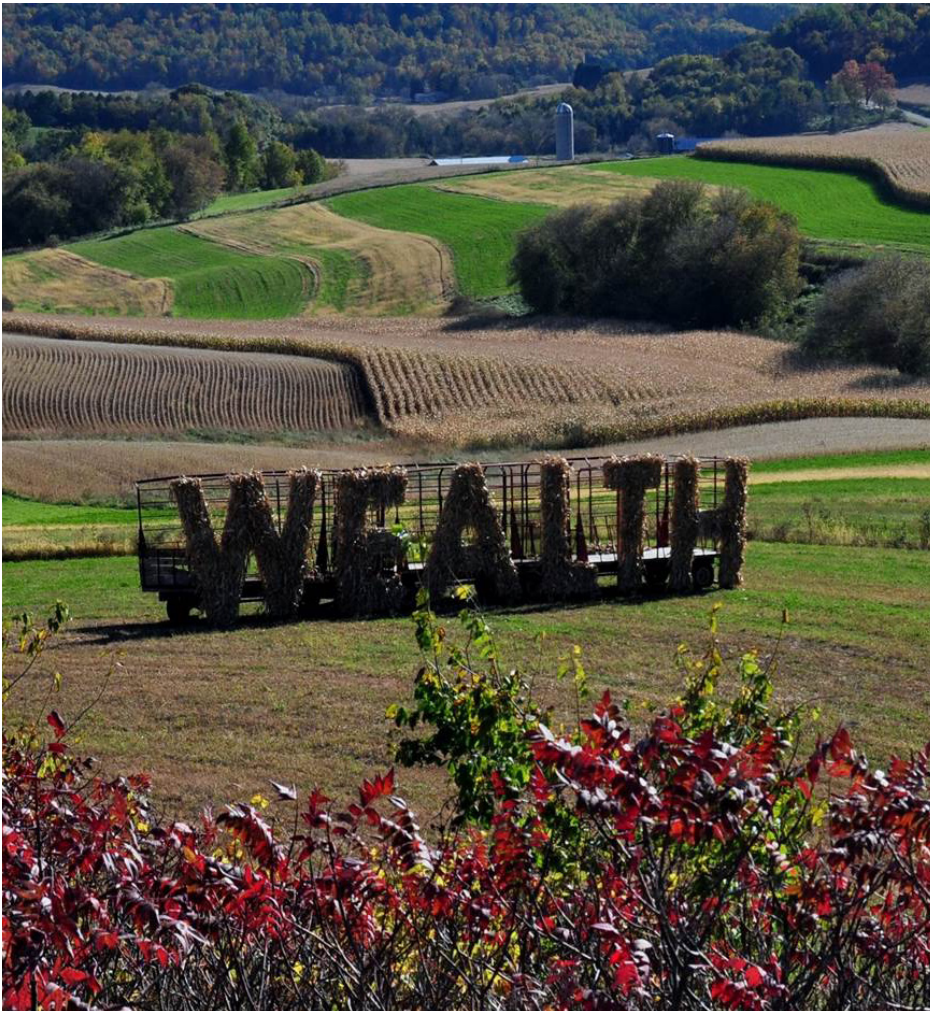
**Economy**



## TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

During our visit to the Hilltowns region, we were struck by the considerable existing assets and opportunities for sustainable development: a wealth of natural resources; attractive and unique architecture; bountiful farm land; the beauty of the countryside; and proximity to major population centers. Assets for a more robust Hilltowns tourism industry include:

- Tourism possibilities
- Growing interest in local food
- Proximity to large population centers
- Historic architecture



Because of its location and its rich asset mix, the Hilltowns could take better advantage of tourism. All of the following branches of tourism could be relevant to an expanded approach for encouraging tourism:

- **Eco-tourism** - Eco-tourists are interested in unspoiled natural resources, and are highly sensitive to their environmental impact. Examples of eco-tourists might include cyclists and visitors to state parks and natural areas with an interest in sustainable agriculture and conservation.
- **Culinary Tourism** - Culinary travelers seek out learning opportunities to improve their cooking skills, learn beer brewing techniques and gain other general culinary expertise. They also will pay a premium for local and seasonal foods.
- **Agritourism** - The local food movement is the fastest growing sector of the food economy. The rise in farmers markets, farm-to-school programs and local food systems has reignited an interest by urban folks in the rural lands and farms upon which we all depend.
- **Cultural tourism** - Cultural tourists regularly participate in the arts in either traditional (i.e., museums/concerts) or non-traditional ways. Cultural travelers seek to expand their experience with the arts and local history
- **Adventure tourism** - Adventure tourists prefer to travel to locations that will allow them to take part in physically challenging outdoor activities, such as canoeing, hiking, fishing, hunting, and snowmobiling.

Challenges for a more robust Hilltowns tourism industry include:

- Lack of jobs.
- Declining/aging population.
- Low investment.
- “Self-sufficient” identity may be a barrier to collaboration.
- Difficulty in distinguishing the Hilltowns region from the Berkshires given their close proximity.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A successful strategy would require a unified vision for the Hilltowns region that supports the unique qualities each town.

**VISION:** A diverse economy that draws visitors, new residents and business investment based on existing natural resources and cultural assets including; historic architecture, farming, and the arts.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Short Term

#### *Quick, Cheap and easy interventions in towns*

- Take advantage of stunning vernacular architecture – underutilized or vacant storefronts can be used for Temporary / pop up restaurants, farm-to-table dinners, art galleries, or maker spaces.
- Civic engagement projects located in town squares and public parks
- Passport/ treasure hunt/ poker game events to encourage travel to all the Hilltowns in the region.
- Research the Smithsonian's Museum on Main St Program (<https://museumon-mainstreet.org/>), which aims to provide access to the Smithsonian for small-town America through museum exhibitions, research, educational resources, and programming.

#### *Quick, Cheap and easy interventions on the land*

- Host pop-up events in fields and farm buildings, barns, corn cribs etc.
- Scenic farmland can be used to draw more attention to farm enterprises, thereby partnering across sectors. Arts and farming are excellent complimentary endeavors
- Farmers markets can include farm tours, experiential education, and other activities in addition to traditional food/produce commerce.

#### *Target Visitors*

- Identify targeted visitor profile
- Form relationships with local universities to explore tourism marketing/ branding assistance

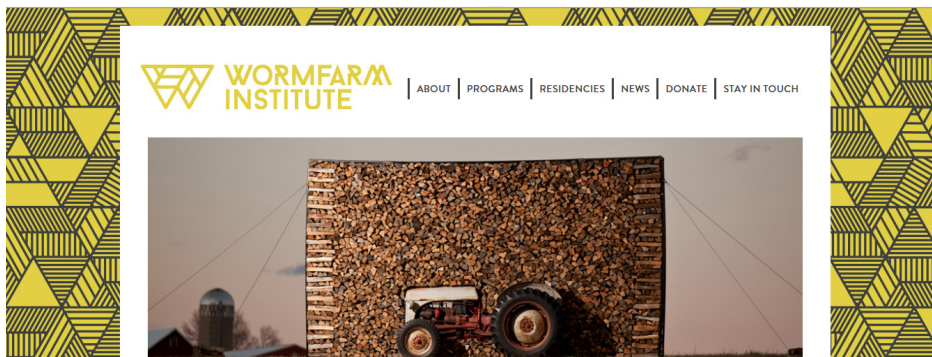
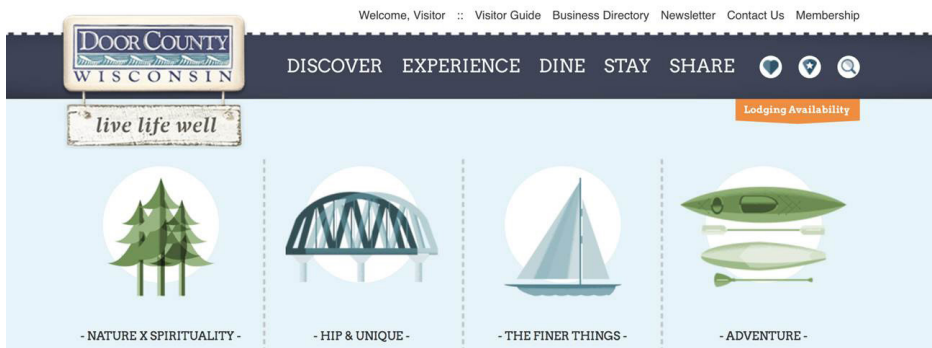
#### *Identify Solutions to major obstacles*

- Lack of high speed internet?
- Zoning restrictions discourage home-based businesses?
- Existing Single town focus versus collaborative –regional strategy?



## Long Term

- Survey existing tourism opportunities and explore potential for complimentary business development, such as B&Bs, restaurants, bike shops, gas stations, campgrounds, breweries, outfitters, etc.
- Establish a Tourism and Entrepreneurism business incubator.
  1. Work with regional tourism entities to explore what has worked elsewhere.
  2. Provide technical assistance and low interest loans.
- Conduct a careful study of Berkshires targeted visitors – Hilltowns should not duplicate those targets but should perhaps overlap/compliment them.
- Create a distinctive identify marketed to targeted visitors from 250-mile radius.
- Incentivize small towns working together – are there state or county resources that can be leveraged?
- Research other county or regional destinations :
  1. Case study: Door County, Wisconsin – 12 small towns marketed as a destination. <http://www.doorcounty.com/>
  2. Wormfarm Institute, Reedsburg WI– 50 mile tour through small farming towns. <http://arts.gov/exploring-our-town/farmart-dtour>



## General recommendations

- Don't wait for perfection- do a series of experiments; learn what works and what doesn't. Fail fast, try again.
- Develop evaluation tools for experiments.
- Document all experiments and share with elected officials.

## Resources

- Several universities in the area might provide opportunities to partner with departments for everything from project planning, marketing, and branding, to small business planning and evaluation.
- "Keep Farming in the Hilltowns" initiative promotes agricultural economic development and expansion of the availability of locally grown food.
- Hilltown Artisans Guild
- Creative Placemaking – see who is doing it in your area i.e. Old Stone Mill Center of Arts, and Creative Engineering recent ArtPlace America grant recipient, Adams, Mass <http://www.artplaceamerica.org/>





**Housing**



## HOUSING

Improving access to housing was identified as an important topic during the public meetings within the Hilltowns communities. There currently exists an impressive collection of historic single-family housing stock spread throughout the Hilltowns. However, options are limited with regards to the supply of different housing options other than single family residences, such as rental apartments or condos located in the town centers, although the potential exists for conversion of some vacant buildings in these locations that could serve this purpose.

Additional housing-focused policies, such as accessory dwelling units - also known as "Granny Flats" - which provide smaller homes for seniors who may wish to downsize, or first time home residents - would be beneficial in providing increased housing options to the existing single family home.

### Assets

- Plentiful, diverse historic housing stock.
- The region is not currently overdeveloped.
- There is relative housing affordability within the region.
- A regional interest in sustainability.
- Multiple reuse opportunities within the existing building stock.

### Challenges

- There is currently a lack of housing options other than single family homes.
- Older homes can be expensive to maintain.
- There is existing tension between locally-occupied vs. vacation homes.
- Aging in place options are limited.





**VISION:** A diverse region that provides a range of housing options and affordability – from homes for new families to aging seniors.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Quick, Cheap and Easy

- Provide opportunities for seniors to age in place.
- Enact policies that allow Accessory dwelling units (ADU) – “In-law flats / homes on properties.
- Enact sustainability practices for retrofitting homes, which helps reduce monthly utility bills.
- Partnership with University of Massachusetts Architecture to do housing design studies for town centers of appropriate scale and density.

### Long Term

- Provide a range of affordable housing options in town centers. Provide a range of housing unit types other than single family homes.
- Consider cohousing developments – options for intergenerational living (see adjacent box).
- Evaluate adaptive reuse options for housing, could include former churches, schools, old mills or other industrial buildings.
- Strengthen connections between town centers and existing housing areas, thought multi-use pathways, sidewalks, etc.

## COHOUSING

Cohousing is an exercise in collaboration. Residents actively participate in both the design and operation of their community.

Private homes in a cohousing development contain all the features of conventional homes, though they are often much more compact. Residents have access to extensive common facilities: open space, courtyards, community gardens, playground, and a common house where residents may choose to share cooking responsibilities and dine together as a group. Weekly chores, such as yard work, are also shared among the residents. Cohousing thus provides a lifestyle with many amenities at an affordable price.

The ideal makeup of cohousing residents is multi-generational. Retired seniors may play the part of caregiver for residents with children, while younger residents can provide assistance with errands to those who need it, creating social cohesion resembling that of an extended family.

The decision-making process for a cohousing community is not hierarchical. Residents own individual units and may buy and sell them as they please, but the members of the community run the homeowners' association. Consensus among all residents is used to solve problems and make decisions. Everyone is encouraged to take part in whatever capacity they can best serve.

Most cohousing projects do start with a “burning soul,” someone who has the passion to begin the process of forming a cohousing community. These individuals can spend several years cultivating relationships with people who want to live in this type of community.

The plan for Germantown Cohousing, Nashville's first choosing community, includes 25 condos with a common house on almost an acre of property. The site is within walking distance of grocery stores, coffee shops, restaurants, the farmers' market, and two parks, as well as being bikeable to downtown. The site plan includes edible landscaping with fruit trees and planter beds for growing vegetables. A rain garden system runs through the center of the site to catch rainwater, creating a stream that eliminates the need for an underground retention system. [www.germantowncohousing.com](http://www.germantowncohousing.com)





**Open Space**



## OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

Our contact with and access to nature contributes to individual wellbeing - mental and physical health, community wellness, social involvement and academic achievement of our children, appreciation of the aesthetic and biological values nature provides, and protection of the environment. This study area is rich in resources and in opportunities for healthy living. Rivers, forests, unbroken vistas, the true night sky, scenic roads, small towns and villages, farmland and open pasture encompass a landscape that provides quiet and repose in the midst of an increasingly hectic world. Taking care of, but using this landscape productively for our physical, mental, aesthetic and economic sustenance sets the direction of actions for the environments and our social resilience.



## Opportunities and Constraints

A brief listing by hill town residents revealed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the study area. They described a scenic, historic, tranquil and expansive rural landscape whose proud and resourceful residents need stronger connections to regional networks and activities, without losing the resources that define them.

## Challenges

Physical geography has created an important physical landscape asset in western Massachusetts, and has also resulted in a social environment needing basic services and connections. How to maintain this unique landscape and provide the resources needed to sustain local community health and vitality is the challenge.



## VISION: A preserved, managed and used rural landscape. What does that mean?

- Continuous monitoring/protection of the region's biological health and functioning ecosystems.
- Use of local visual and physical resources for physical and social activity.
- Creation of convenient and accessible physical experiences throughout the landscape, whether in the natural world, working landscape or within communities.
- Comprehensive environmental strategies that preserve and protect the region's visual and natural environment, air and water quality, and community character.





## Quick Wins

What can you easily do with limited capital and manpower and using existing social and environmental resources to begin filling the needs within your own community?

1. Get outside every day and move. A good dose of daily exercise (e.g. 20 minutes) and a daily look at trees, the river or the view, whether from your yard or during a walk with your neighbor, makes a big difference. Organize and conduct easy nature walks or walking loops around your community.

2. Connect. Make use of your existing village greens and local open spaces (e.g. cemetery, church yards) to create both outdoor and social opportunities close at hand. Make a place that people want to be in. Add benches on the green or a table with a game board and seating so people can sit in the sun or linger outside. Add a bench or two outside a popular or central store so people can meet and talk. Think of ways to promote other uses of your existing outdoor space, all year.

3. Bring nature into town. Add flowers or shrubs to business entries. Plant more community and flower gardens – on the green, on church or city hall grounds, or at a four corner stop. Plant trees (see # below). Using green spaces regularly increases property values, increases access to beauty, attracts business and creates a stronger sense of place and social cohesion.

4. Use your streets for community and physical activity, where possible. For example, turn your central or connector streets into a biking route for kids, once a week all summer. Close a side street for a monthly community meal, street concert or new local event ('best kept secret' trail sharing fair, an outdoor concert, a nightly star gazing hour). Consider making a parklet - a seasonal outdoor space near existing community buildings. Add benches, planters, café tables and chairs, bike corrals, game boards, even fitness equipment and activities to a parking spot for a day. These pop-up sites beef up community vitality—especially in areas lacking sidewalks or public space. They become a mini park designed for socializing.

5. Let people know where they are and what is going on. Word of mouth spreads information most quickly, but a community bulletin board listing activities, projects, events, times and locations, etc. placed at a central town site and shared around the region disseminates ideas, generates interest and helps people feel involved.



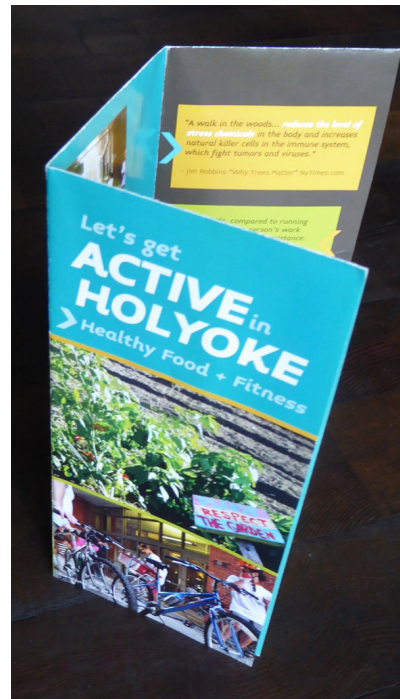
*Example of a “Traffic Garden” on a side street, showing how the street could be used for children. This is a sophisticated design but one could use chalk and the biking would be just as fun.*

6. Share local roadways. ‘Unlaned’ roads are currently used by residents for walking and cycling but are not marked for such uses. Paint thick pedestrian and/or bike lane lines (a minimum of 4’ wide) on existing routes in both towns and on rural roads to discourage encroachment into this used lane space. The presence of a painted striped shoulder provides a safety signal for both pedestrians and cyclists and lets drivers know there is activity on that roadway. See the Urban, Rural and Suburban Complete Streets Design Manual for the City of Northampton and Communities in Hampshire County for examples.

7. Build a comprehensive asset map that identifies existing natural and community features, recreation opportunities and other ongoing activities close to your town, (e.g. museums, markets, local trails, events, etc). University of Massachusetts Landscape Architecture and Planning Departments and The Conway School may be able to assist with the development of high quality, accurate and user-friendly maps. Share the asset maps among your fellow communities and use them to strengthen your geographic network and to build conversation among existing and new community interests. The



Holyoke Food and Fitness Policy Council and Holyoke YMCA have produced a simple, readable map (Shown here) of places to visit in Holyoke by foot, bike or bus.



8. Review your existing local and county environmental protection standards to identify what resources are protected and what important resources still need protection and could be interpreted or visited.

## Longer Term Actions

How can you build on local successes and integrate them into a larger strategy for your area?

1. Make your towns edible and walkable. Vegetate your architecture and the 'green.' Develop edible planting plans for local buildings, side yards and other unused but useable 'chunks' of community space. Reinvent your streets for walking and play (see #5). Develop a community wide 'off-road' walking program. Build sidewalks or sidepaths along roadways, develop town trail systems and on site trails throughout the town and to nearby natural and scenic resources, where possible.

2. Plant trees on rights-of way and on other barren or unused areas within your community. Henry David Thoreau once wrote "I cannot preserve my health and spirits unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—

sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements." While most of us do not have the luxury of spending that much time in nature, a view of trees close to home works wonders for one's health perception, facilitates academic achievement in schools, mitigates pollution and pays for itself in community beautification and increased community property values.

3. Develop play sites and sport facilities for children and youth at remaining school yards but also in areas which people frequent. Share the village green, church or town hall yard, local shopping street, senior housing facilities, the coop, etc.

4. Design physical and mental health activity areas on new development sites as a fundamental part of the site program. For example, a Senior housing project to be developed in Goshen could be revised to include on site walking trails, small gardens, even a play site for grand children. Clustering the housing units closer together and revising circulation and parking would free up areas of the property for convenient outdoor seating, exercise and garden spaces. Walking trails could be designed around and through the property and connected to unit sidewalks and the main road. Landscaping (e.g. flower beds along property edges and street trees along the driveway and main road) would enhance the site's overall appearance and personality, making a comfortable, pleasant and usable place for residents and visitors alike.







5. Consider developing bike route maps for Hampshire County that document popular and suitable cycling routes, connect to existing scenic byways through the county. While cycling for local residents may be difficult, many cyclists from around the region come to both Hampshire and Franklin counties to ride, especially because of its quiet, scenic and often challenging landscape. The maps will augment the existing bikeway route maps developed for Franklin County by MassDOT, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, and Franklin County, and facilitate awareness of a larger regional recreation network.

6. Fill regional and local environmental protection gaps. Encourage business that supports local working farms and landscape protection.

7. Complete the Highland Trail as a regional landscape and recreation corridor from east to west. Use the trail as a spine from which to identify clustered locations for potential development as recreation sites, trailheads, visitor service or community development nodes. Use this framework as a strategic landscape planning strategy for considering future heritage/agro tourism/ecotourism plans.

## SUMMARY

During our SWOT analysis, many residents described an 'appreciation of their isolation,' or a desire to 'maintain the insulation of the region from outsiders, to 'not have it turn into the Berkshires.' Yet the food, transportation, broadband and housing issues facing you require continuous and persistent collaboration within and outside of the region, regardless of the quickness or length of the endeavor. So, the first step to success and the most important recommendation in meeting the open space and recreation vision is to build civic capacity so you can, over time, take on the issues directly affecting your community, adapt to change, build stronger social and economic independence, and sustain your sense of place:

- Strengthen the active working relationships among your towns and villages.
- Cultivate leaders from within your existing community bases – book clubs, health, library and church communities, farm groups, lunch groups, etc. to create a critical mass.
- Connect those leaders with key constituencies who understand the larger economic, transportation and social contexts within which your problems must be solved.
- 'Collect' advocates from other places that can assert themselves on your behalf.

## REFERENCES

### Case Studies

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- Moses Lake, WA Heron Bluff Trail
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**Social  
Connectivity**



## COMMUNITY & SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

The SDAT focused on ten towns within the loosely defined Hilltowns region- Blandford, Chester, Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Huntington, Middlefield, Plainfield, Russell, and Worthington. While each of the ten towns has its own municipal government, many of the towns share community resources, including schools, the health center, the Hilltown Community Development Corporation (HCDC), and the Hilltown LandTrust. Despite this municipal cooperation, the isolated nature and physical distance between the towns makes for difficult social connections from town to town. The Hilltowns are a collection of communities that have strong bonds internally - this was readily apparent to the SDAT team members. What could be further strengthened are the connections between all of the towns. Creating a stronger sense of shared community would not only benefit residents, but could create a more powerful lobbying force to gain assets that are needed for the region in its efforts to become a healthier place.

The lack of reliable broadband service presents its own challenges to the region. Underserved communities in the SDAT focus area include Chesterfield, Goshen, Blandford, Worthington, Middlefield, Plainfield. The lack of broadband discourages younger people from moving to the region, limits educational opportunities for children, limits business operations, and limits opportunities to work from home, which contribute to the necessity of commuting long distances for work and resources. While funding is available for broadband installation through the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, it requires state approval, and towns still need to advocate for themselves given constraints such as low-population density, geographical barriers, and cost.

The Town of Leverett, MA formed a Broadband Committee to advocate for broadband access. Their efforts resulted in the formation of LeverettNet, a broadband network owned by the town and operated under the local telecom authority. The Committee developed a plan and economic model that would work for their town, which made installation of broadband possible. <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/how-the-tiny-town-of-leverett-got-itself-the-internet>



## Social Connectivity Assets

- Friendly, neighborly residents and an existing strong sense of cooperation within the individual towns.
- Existing networks, orgs., groups – COA, CDC, Healthy Hilltowns – that operate across the region.
- Existing facilities/building stock, which could be repurposed for community spaces.

## Social Connectivity Challenges

- Lack of broadband connectivity.
- Underutilized and vacant gathering spaces.
- Remote and isolated regional location of the towns.
- Limited interaction between towns.



**VISION:** Effective networks of communication and enhanced sense of community.


## SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS



### Quick, Cheap and Easy


- Create a leadership network that operated across Hilltowns' communities that fosters communication and collaboration.
- Establish a "Hilltowns Regional Council" or "Hilltowns Tomorrow" group made up of representatives from each town to promote and cross-coordinate efforts
- Institute a Hilltowns marketing campaign, using online resources such as a facebook page or Nextdoor webpage to promote activities, events, and resources.
- Utilize a Community Assessment Toolbox to measure the community's assets, both individually and collectively.


### Long Term


- Implement Broadband infrastructure access to entire Hilltowns region.
- Build a website with resources and asset map for each community.
- Determine best practices for communication to residents in rural areas (weigh the expense of print outreach versus limited online access in targeted outreach.)
- Establish places to exchange surplus items, including food – "Dump Share," freezer storage, excess veggies at stands, clothes, tools, etc.
- The towns should form broadband committees to identify specific opportunities/challenges, and coordinate with one another to form a louder voice to the state, demanding broadband.





 Invite 


 Help friends connect with neighbors! [Invite them](#) to get their neighborhood on Nextdoor and you'll both receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.


 Home


 Inbox

 Neighbors

 Map


 26 Events Calendar

 Recommendations **NEW**

 LOCAL

Historic Germantown

Local Agencies

 CATEGORIES

Classifieds

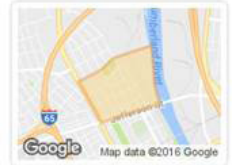
Crime & Safety


Documents

Free items

## Historic Germantown + Nearby Neighborhoods

1203 NEIGHBORS · 2579 NEARBY NEIGHBORS






### Invite a few of your neighbors

You have **8** accepted invitations. Thanks for building your neighborhood. [Invite more neighbors](#) to join Nextdoor.

INVITE NEIGHBORS



### Titans vs Packers Tickets

[Latasha Gregory](#) from [Historic Buena Vista](#) · 1d ago

Anybody selling tickets for the Titans vs Packers Game?

Shared with Historic Buena Vista + 11 nearby neighborhoods in General



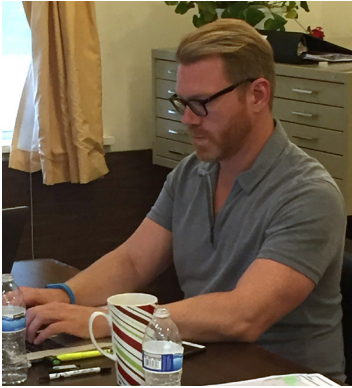






## **Team Roster & Thanks**



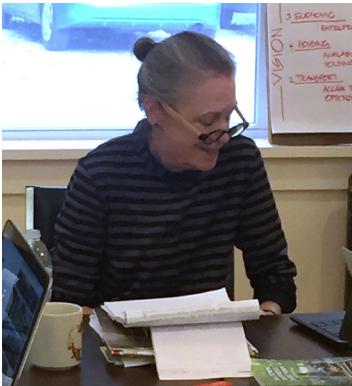


## GARY GASTON- TEAM LEADER

Gary Gaston is the Executive Director of the Nashville Civic Design Center, and also serves as a Lecturer with the University of Tennessee College of Architecture and Design. He joined NCDC in 2002, and has led numerous planning and design efforts for the organization. Gary was a principal contributor to *The Plan of Nashville: Avenues to a Great City*, published by Vanderbilt University Press in 2005, and co-authored *Moving Tennessee Forward: Models for Connecting Communities*, published in 2012. Gary served as the project

director and executive producer of the NEA funded documentary film *Design Your Neighborhood*; and is currently finalizing work on a new book, *Shaping the Healthy Community: the Nashville Plan*, to be published by Vanderbilt University Press in 2015.

Next City Magazine named Gary a "Next American Vanguard" in 2010; he was a member of the 2010-2011 Leadership Nashville class; is an alumnus of the Young Leaders Council; and has served on the Board of Directors of Nashville CARES, Artrageous, GLBT Chamber of Commerce and Historic Nashville Inc., and is currently on the advisory board for Transit Now Nashville.



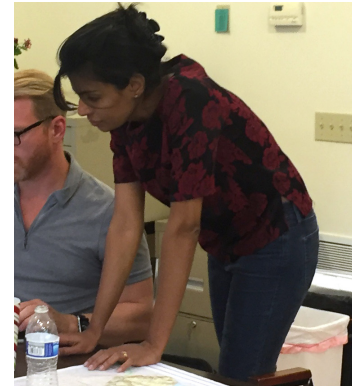
## CHRISTINE CARLSON

Christine is Senior Fellow and Adjunct Assistant Professor in the University of Minnesota's Department of Landscape Architecture. She has over 25 years of experience at in the design of greenways and ecological corridors, natural and cultural resources, regional and federally designated rivers, scenic byways, land conservation and restoration strategies, and community participation and Charrette processes. She has taught professional, graduate and undergraduate courses in regional landscape design and planning,

conservation practices, urban design, landscape and garden history, and mine land reclamation. Her current focus is management of the Department's role in the Laurentian Vision Partnership, a regional initiative she helped launch on Minnesota's Mesabi Iron Range over ten years ago. The Partnership reshapes taconite mine sites into productive community landscapes and habitat, and builds the coalitions necessary to implement such plans. Her most recent related case study is featured in the latest issue of *Landscape Journal* (30:1).

Christine is a former Branch Chief of the National Park Service's Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program, Pacific Northwest Region, and a former Planning

Manager of Portland Metro's Natural Areas, Parks and Trails Program. She has served on the board of the Minnesota Land Trust and currently on the board of the National Waterfront Center. Christine holds a BLA and MLA in Landscape Architecture from the University of Washington and an MA in medieval studies from the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto.

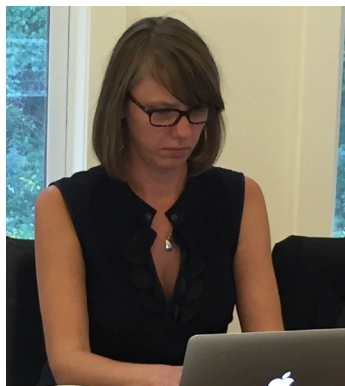


## PARVATHI NAMPOOTHIRI

Parvathi Nampoothiri is a Senior Planning Advisor, PLURAL Architecture+Design, a design consultancy based in Toronto, Dubai and Kochi. She has worked on a variety of projects including large scale master plans, mixed-use developments, urban revitalization plans, streetscape design and university campuses. She has contributed to several urban design guidelines, such as the award winning Abu Dhabi Urban Street Design Manual and was the recent recipient of ULI Toronto's Brampton Downtown revitalization design competition's

winning entry.

Parvathi strongly believes in creating places and communities that are functional, sustainable and attractive. Parvathi has lived, studied and worked in India, Montreal, Nashville, Abu Dhabi and Toronto. Parvathi has served on the Board of Lambda Alpha International (UAE Chapter), Tennessee Urban Forestry Council, Nashville Street Life Project and the Executive Committee of Indian Institute of Architects. She has also contributed to WHO's 2016 Global Report on Urban Health: Equitable, Healthier Cities for Sustainable Development.



## LAURA GODDEERIS

Laura Goddeeris, AICP, is a specialist with the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS), which engages the people of Michigan, the United States, and the world in applied research, education, and outreach to develop regionally integrated, sustainable food systems. At CRFS, Laura's work focuses on food systems planning and policy. She led two comprehensive national studies of local government engagement in food systems, conducted in partnership with the International City/County Management

Association, and also coordinates research and outreach exploring economic development and smart growth opportunities associated with local and regional food systems. She has organized and presented at international, national, state, and local



events, working with such additional partners as the American Planning Association, Local Government Commission/New Partners for Smart Growth Conference, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, AGree, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation, among many public and private entities.

Laura's broad background includes more than a decade of experience in research, outreach, and program administration around issues of economic development, community and social equity, and transportation planning, much of it within the context of food systems. She holds a Master's degree in Urban Planning and Policy from the University of Illinois at Chicago and a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies in Social Science from Michigan State University, is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners, and is a graduate of the Great Lakes Leadership Academy Emerging Leaders Program. She currently serves as vice-chair of her local planning commission and leads the city's community development advisory committee.



### **DONNA NEUWIRTH**

Donna Neuwirth is co-founder and Executive Director of Wormfarm Institute whose mission is to integrate culture and agriculture to build thriving communities across the rural/urban continuum. After many years in art and theater in Chicago, Neuwirth and co-founder Jay Salinas moved to a small farm in Wisconsin. Seduced by the life in the soil and struck by the parallels in process between farming and art making, they formed the Wormfarm in 2000 and began an Artist Residency program.

A self-described impresario with a BFA in theater from The School of Art Institute of Chicago, Donna has led numerous projects inspired by, and centered at the fertile intersection of culture and agriculture including Wormfarm's annual Fermentation Fest – A Live Culture Convergence which received both NEA Our Town and ArtPlace grants in their initial year of funding. Former NEA Chair Rocco Landesman has called Wormfarm “the poster child for creative placemaking.”

### **STAFF:**

#### **ERIN SIMMONS**

Erin Simmons is the Senior Director of Design Assistance at the Center for Communities by Design at the American Institute of Architects in Washington, DC. The Center is a leading provider of pro bono technical assistance and participatory planning for community revitalization. Through its design assistance programs, the AIA has worked in over 250 communities across 47 states, and has been the recipient of numerous awards including “Organization of the Year” by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), a “Power of A Award” from the Center for Association Leadership,

and the “Outstanding Program Award” from the Community Development Society.

Erin is a leading practitioner of the design assistance process, providing expertise, facilitation, and support for the Center's Sustainable Design Assistance Team (SDAT) and Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) programs. In this capacity, she works with AIA components, members, partner organizations and community leaders to provide technical design assistance to communities across the country. Her portfolio includes work in over 100 communities across the United States. A frequent lecturer on the subject of creating livable communities and sustainability, Erin contributed to the recent publication “Assessing Sustainability: A guide for Local Governments”. Prior to joining the AIA, Erin worked as historic preservationist and architectural historian for an environmental and engineering firm, where she practiced preservation planning, created historic district design guidelines and zoning ordinances, and conducted historic resource surveys. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Florida State University and a Master's degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Georgia.

#### **JOEL MILLS**

Joel Mills is Senior Director of the American Institute of Architects' Center for Communities by Design. The Center is a leading provider of pro bono technical assistance and democratic design for community success. Its programs have catalyzed billions of dollars in new investment across the country, helping to create some of the most vibrant places in America today. The Center's design assistance process has been replicated and adapted for use across the world. Joel's 22-year career has been focused on strengthening civic capacity and civic institutions around the world. This work has helped millions of people participate in democratic processes, visioning efforts, and community planning initiatives across four continents.

In the United States, Joel has worked with over 100 communities, leading participatory processes that facilitated community-generated strategies for success. His past work has been featured in over 1,000 media stories, including ABC World News Tonight, Nightline, CNN, The Next American City, Smart City Radio, The National Civic Review, The Washington Post, and dozens of other sources. He has served on numerous expert working groups, boards, juries, and panels focused on civic discourse and participation, sustainability, and design. He has also spoken at dozens of national and international conferences and events, including the Remaking Cities Congress, the World Eco-City Summit, the Global Democracy Conference, the National Conference on Citizenship, and many others.



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Special thanks to the many local professionals and students who worked with the team throughout the project:

- |                      |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|
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- Gateway High School
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Communities by Design

ENVISION. CREATE. SUSTAIN.