

I. Economic Development

INTRODUCTION

It is important for Woonsocket to ensure that residents and businesses have access to economic opportunities and that Woonsocket's business climate provides the supports necessary for a thriving and robust economy in the community. Through efforts from the City and its partners like the Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative and homegrown developers, renovation is occurring and residential, office, and retail space has been added in Woonsocket over the last several years. In addition to these positive factors, interviews, focus groups, and survey data revealed that there are several areas where Woonsocket can continue to grow and improve its economic development efforts, including improvements in communication with and resources for businesses, developing a robust business climate, adding housing Downtown and other key areas to spur the demand side of the economy, creating more business-related amenities, and improving marketing and coordination.

Vision for Economic Development

Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will invest in its economic development and support businesses to create opportunity, growth, sustainability, and resiliency.

For greater detail on data and statistics related to economic development, see the Economic Development chapter of the Baseline Report of the Comprehensive Plan.



Downtown Woonsocket businesses during the holidays (Providence Journal)

ADVOCATE FOR AND SUPPORT BUSINESSES & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

One of the biggest themes that emerged from engagement with residents and businesses in Woonsocket was the need to advocate for and support new and existing businesses in the City. Woonsocket's business community brings employment opportunities, tax revenue, and prosperity to the community, and successful businesses serve as anchors for related growth in sectors like health care, entertainment, retail, and food service and accommodations.

WHAT WE HEARD

There is room for improvement when it comes to the City's interactions with businesses

Woonsocket is home to some major employers, including CVS, Honeywell, Summer Infant, Landmark Medical Center, and Woonsocket Health & Rehab. The City itself is also a significant employer. Despite the presence of these large employers, interviews indicated that most of the larger businesses exist in Woonsocket because that is where the business started. If they were starting over, the feedback from engagement efforts is that they would not choose Woonsocket.

Engagement with community stakeholders and businesses indicated that the business permitting process in Woonsocket is slow and communication is lacking. Interviews and focus groups highlighted that it is difficult to start a business in Woonsocket, and that communicating with the City, receiving information, getting permits, and finding support is a challenge. Business owners discussed how there is no one person a resident can go to at the City if they want to start a business. Stakeholders mentioned that the City should consider hiring an economic development director or assigning a member of the City's staff to be the point person to handle business development needs.

One business owner described the City's process in the following way:

"As a small business owner, I feel there is a disconnect between the departments in this city. It was very difficult to move my location. Some of the departments had never even heard of me and after being a thriving business here for seven years, that is not acceptable. We need to make it easier for businesses to come into or expand in this city. Having someone be the "go between" for the departments would be a godsend. I feel that an Economic Director (or a team of) is the answer to this problem."

Focus group conversations with businesses discussed a desire for façade and small business grants to be more available. There is a need to determine what is working, what is not, and refine programs to be more useful. Some City programs do exist, but they are underutilized.

BUSINESS INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

The City of Woonsocket has a number of programs available to support businesses. These include:

- Omnibus Tax Stabilization Plan for Woonsocket Downtown Redevelopment Area: This program allows businesses who are building, rehabilitating, revitalizing, or restoring properties in the Downtown Overlay District to exempt or stabilize taxes for a period of up to 12 years.
- Tax Increment Financing: TIF is a process by which a municipality allows some or all future property tax revenues from development to support and finance public and private development costs, including those for infrastructure, projects, and programs related to economic development. In Rhode Island, qualified development projects can include infrastructure, new facilities that will increase the number of jobs in the state, or subsidies toward a project that will contribute to a community's economic development.
- Opportunity Zones: Woonsocket has three designated Opportunity Zones in Census tracts 179, 180, and 185, which includes portions of Main Street, the south side of the Blackstone River, and a portion of Highland Corporate Park.
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program: Created to help support viable communities through economic opportunity and housing programs, Woonsocket is a designated entitlement community through CDBG. Specific programs available under the CDBG Program include:
 - Commercial Façade Restoration Grant Program
 - Small Business Loans
 - Micro-enterprise Grant

Interviews with businesses and community stakeholders suggested there are opportunities for additional assistance. Interest was expressed for the development of City incentives for:

- Business retention and attraction
- Beneficial development and support for at-home businesses ready to make a leap to a retail space

Beyond direct incentive programs, there is an opportunity for the City to become more of an advocate for businesses and property owners wanting to improve blighted areas. A desire exists for the City to do more for small businesses. The community survey conducted in summer 2022 as part of the comprehensive planning process found that 93% of respondents say that it is important the City support existing small businesses and 89% say it is important to attract new businesses.

Another challenge described by businesses in Woonsocket is finding appropriate space, especially for smaller businesses. Trends indicate that businesses want to have a storefront but that many do not need a large space. Developing home-grown businesses will be key, and as entrepreneurs move from idea to plan to execution, they will need spaces to grow. There is a struggle to have a rent-ready place for these businesses, and a lack of buildable space for new development. Woonsocket already has resources for food business entrepreneurs, and NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley's Millrace Kitchen provides opportunities for businesses ready to expand in the food sector. For other entrepreneurs, similar support and space to thrive can help Woonsocket develop the next generation of businesses across the community. Continuing to develop and support a thriving entrepreneurial environment creates prosperity and improves the overall standard of living in a community, with entrepreneurs developing new and innovative products and services. Over time, these businesses employ members of the community and become part of the economic system of Woonsocket.

SPOTLIGHT ON: ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurs are critical to the functioning of any economy – they see a need where others do not, driving product development and innovations in services and goods. Entrepreneurial impact is accelerated when support and networks are available to help entrepreneurs motivate each other and create exchanges of ideas and partnerships.

From the City, it is important for entrepreneurs to feel welcome and valued. One of the clearest ways to send this message is to make the process of opening a small business clear and easy to navigate. Programs and policies the City can support include services and training to enable thoughtful and accurate business planning, marketing, website development, and online presence, as well as ways to improve skill through effective communication, accessing capital, money management, leadership, etc. can further boost their effectiveness. These are things the City can invest in itself or partner and connect with other local providers on.

Woonsocket should be proactive in developing a robust climate for businesses and their employees to thrive in

Interviews revealed concern that over time Woonsocket's population will continue to age and younger residents and workers will not be available to sustain growth. In order to continue to support the City's economy, the City needs to invest in housing and supporting jobs and the local economy. Housing development is economic development. A balance of diverse housing opportunities and adequate supply supports economic development – residents are customers, employees, entrepreneurs, and generate foot traffic in key corridors, which creates consistency in demand for businesses. While housing for households across the income spectrum is needed, the development of market-rate housing in particular will broaden the City's consumer base and attract residents with the spending potential to support local consumer-oriented businesses.

As discussed in greater detail in the Housing Element of this Comprehensive Plan, it will be key for Woonsocket to make housing investments part of economic development plans. Housing demand is generated by population growth and demographic changes (i.e., an aging population or growing families); new employers bringing jobs to the area; and a great quality of life enticing people to move. While there are ongoing residential developments occurring in and around Oak Grove, Sapphire Estates, Simonne Ave, and Liane Drive, adding additional housing could continue to increase the population and drive overall economic growth.

Two other areas of emphasis stand out – Woonsocket’s uncompetitive tax rates, and challenges related to helping businesses grow and improve their physical footprints. Woonsocket’s commercial taxes are high, and lower than only Central Falls and Providence regionally. Developers and employers in interviews repeatedly mentioned high taxes as an impediment to doing business. Conversations with business owners also indicated that it is difficult to get the right permitting to improve or grow their spaces. Suggested changes include reducing the time and effort required to get reasonable waivers for businesses looking to improve their physical infrastructure as well as reexamining parking minimums needed for new businesses.

Woonsocket can also improve its business climate by supporting its workforce through education and training. Woonsocket can address long-term workforce needs by working with schools to identify where gaps exist and to act as a liaison between local employers, the Woonsocket Education Department, trade schools, alternative learning institutions, the Woonsocket Education Center, and others to connect employers to workforce and support workforce training.



Woonsocket Education Center (WOC) opened October 2022 (WOC and Providence Business News)

Improve Woonsocket's Image & Celebrate Successes

Developing a better external reputation for Woonsocket will require both more effective City support to businesses as well as marketing efforts to showcase those efforts. Marketing the City as a business-friendly community will involve taking steps to create a friendlier business climate – those successes will inform marketing efforts. The City has undertaken beneficial projects that have enhanced neighborhoods and corridors throughout Woonsocket. These need to be highlighted both internally and externally to promote a more positive image City-wide. Some examples include:

- Blackstone River Bikeway
- Highland Corporate Park
- Walnut Hill
- Redevelopment of 122 North Main (17 residential and 2 commercial spaces with a microbrewery and business center)
- Incubator at Millrace Kitchen

The marketing of the City has improved, but still could be better through enhanced business attraction, retention, and entrepreneurship programs. The creation of a marketing strategy to work on improving the negative perception of the City would also be a positive step toward improving Woonsocket's image. These efforts would require resources and staff time to pursue. Given that, the City should consider the viability of funding a specific economic development division within the Department of Planning & Development to illustrate and produce investment in creating and supporting business.

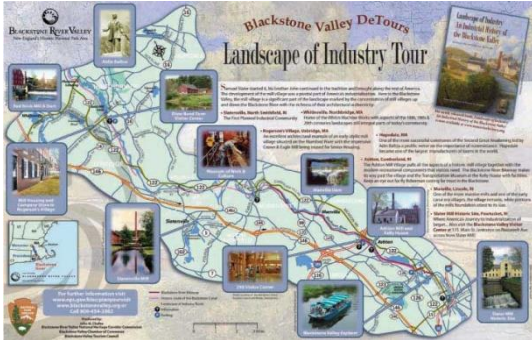
One stakeholder involved in the public engagement process of this work, when asked how Woonsocket could improve its marketing, stated:

“Advertise locally and nationally incentives for medium and large companies to relocate to Woonsocket -have a pamphlet/website dedicated to business development and a clear-cut easy-to-follow process for starting a business in the city.”

Woonsocket already has a business webpage and pamphlet resource available for businesses looking to relocate or expand, but would benefit from updated and more targeted materials, development of which could be achieved with additional staff time dedicated to economic development.

According to interviews, the Opportunity Zones in Woonsocket are drawing some interest from prospective investors. Woonsocket's Opportunity Zones cover three Census tracts, and provide businesses located within the zones the opportunity to defer or reduce their capital gains taxes and eliminate federal capital gains taxes on future gains if the investment has been held for at least 10 years. A targeted marketing program may be able to draw more investment opportunities.

Interviews and focus groups with local businesses indicated that many business owners feel disconnected from the City and that Woonsocket is not always responsive to their needs and concerns. More connection between the City, developers, and businesses are needed to act in partnership to improve the current conditions of the city. The City should place an emphasis on being collaborative with data and projects to keep local businesses and entrepreneurs invested in the City's economic success and to maintain lines of communication in order to collaborate as needed to improve the economic vitality of Woonsocket.



Tourism Brochure (National Park Service)



Highland Corporate Park (Google Earth)



Millrace Kitchen (Millrace Kitchen)



Walnut Hill Plaza (Valley Breeze)

FOCUS ON SPECIAL PLANNING AREAS & COMMUNITY AMENITIES

These special planning areas offer unique assets and opportunities that can be leveraged to achieve goals around business attraction/retention, creation of community amenities, integrating housing into the community, and other goals. Woonsocket has identified four key areas for economic development planning purposes – Downtown, Social District, Highland Corporate Park, and Diamond Hill Road.

DOWNTOWN

Downtowns play a vital role in economic development, providing a condensed space where commercial, cultural, and civic activity can coexist, attracting people and businesses together. Downtown's Main Street is on the National Register of Historic Places, containing a series of brick buildings built in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As discussed in the Historic & Cultural Resources Element, the Blackstone River Valley's National Heritage Corridor and Woonsocket's National Historical Park are key amenities that should be preserved. These historic places can spur visitation, economic activity, and provide the base for opportunities for development and a walkable and thriving community Downtown.



Downtown Woonsocket
(Valley Breeze)

Redevelopment of Downtown is a priority of the City, as a thriving Downtown will have positive impacts across the community. Achieving a critical mass of people living and/or working Downtown is a key supporting factor for increased vibrancy. The high commercial tax rate also hinders new development. Residents agree that continuing to focus on economic development Downtown should be a priority, with 72% of community survey respondents saying that it is either important or very important to promote economic development on Main Street. These efforts should build upon the work being done by the Woonsocket Education Center, which is a public-private collaboration that provides credentialing services, as well as skills development courses in technology, management, and the arts. The Woonsocket Education Center also has space available for business needs, including multi-use classrooms.

The City also should continue to partner with the Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative (DWC), which brings Downtown businesses together to collaborate on community projects, encourages investment Downtown, and seeks to increase economic growth in the area. Given the City's limited capacity to do this economic development work alone, working in concert with existing organizations such as the DWC provides a greater ability to develop Woonsocket's economy.

Social District

Intended as a modern or contemporary annex to the historic neighboring Downtown, the Social District was the home to earlier financial institutions such as Marquette Credit Union and Eastland Savings. Already a hub for services like healthcare and home to numerous dining options, the Social District can benefit from higher density and mixed-use development by taking advantage of built-in demand with residential and commercial spaces within the same footprint.



Buildings and parking lot in the Social District (LoopNet)

Zoning to allow for increased density (MU-3) and an initial anchor project to help establish the district's identity would be a way to create a more attractive, walkable, and business-friendly environment. Given its proximity to Woonsocket's downtown corridor, development in the Social District will also have positive spillover effects for businesses and residents located in downtown Woonsocket.

Highland Corporate Park

Highland Corporate Park, which houses the largest employers in Woonsocket, is relatively isolated from the rest of the City. Located on the east side of Woonsocket, it is home to some of the City's major employers, including CVS, Hanna Instruments, and Parkinson Technologies. Woonsocket should continue to support these employers and work to develop the Park so that it is both more attractive to employers and workers and to help connect it with the rest of the City. Woonsocket should consider how it can support repositioning the Park to include more amenities for nearby workers and look into creating smaller spaces, as national trends toward hybrid and remote work continue to reduce demand for large office buildings. Flexibility in zoning will be essential in ensuring that properties within the Park can be quickly adapted or redeveloped for in-demand commercial and residential uses that respond to changing market conditions. Adjusting zoning to allow for the development of workforce housing within the Park will also assist existing businesses with talent attraction and retention.



CVS Headquarters, Highland Corporate Park (Providence Journal)

Residents are supportive of development, with 67% of survey respondents indicating that it is important to encourage industrial uses and manufacturing-related industries to locate in Woonsocket. These large employers provide opportunities for residents and help create economic prosperity that supports other industries in the City and region. Since the Park is located across two communities, Woonsocket should collaborate with Cumberland in supporting efforts of Park ownership at strategic repositioning.

Diamond Hill

Located at Woonsocket's north end on the border with Massachusetts, Diamond Hill Road is home to retail, food, and entertainment businesses. While the current amenities at Diamond Hill Road provide shopping, dining, and recreational options for residents, the City should spearhead efforts around revitalizing the corridor to fill space vacancies and enhance the quality and variety of retail offerings. This might involve investing in aesthetic and transportation improvements to the corridor, working with property owners to identify sites that are appropriate for infill or redevelopment, and actively recruiting commercial tenants. Working with a development partner on a signature large-scale project such as a mixed-use development can also help spur additional private investment in the corridor. Flexibility in zoning will be required to allow for a variety of uses that respond to market demand, including both commercial and residential uses.



Diamond Hill Road (WJAR)

Facilitate Creation of More Community Amenities

As part of developing Woonsocket's economy, the City should continue to focus on ways to increase quality of life not just through direct support of businesses but also by working to maintain a high quality of life and attractive amenities, including through music and culture. Engagement with community members and stakeholders indicated that the following were limitations in attracting businesses and workers to Woonsocket:

- Nearby communities tend to have better schools which make relocating there (versus Woonsocket) a trend.
- The older housing stock is less appealing to higher income households.
- For lower-waged workers, the affordable housing need is substantial.
- Because there is no direct route to Boston and routes into/out of the City are not easily accessible, we heard from interviewees that Woonsocket is relatively isolated.



Celebrating and building upon Woonsocket's amenities and historic quality will help enhance economic vibrancy and livability. Left: Aerial view of Blackstone River and Downtown Woonsocket (World Atlas). Right: Woonsocket's historic City Hall (Kenneth C. Zirkel, Wikipedia).

Building Redevelopment

The City of Woonsocket is almost entirely built out, with limited space remaining for new greenfield development activity. To ensure that the City can adapt to changing needs in the future, Woonsocket should work to maintain flexibility in its zoning and land use policies and update buildings to meet current needs as appropriate. There are a lot of old mill and other buildings in the City, some of which have redevelopment potential and some that are better to be demolished. The number of buildings presents so much opportunity that prioritization of projects is needed as a first step. The City should work to identify the most prime candidates for development and redevelopment, and support development as appropriate. Woonsocket's older mill and industrial buildings in particular are prime candidates potentially building off the City's active Brownfields Program. The City will need to play an active support role in redevelopment largely due to high construction costs; new development will rarely "pencil out," financially, precluding developers from making a sufficient profit without public support. Focusing efforts on one or two transformational projects could serve as a catalyst to draw additional development.

Attracting Workers

Employers have a hard time selling Woonsocket to potential employees. This will become a bigger issue as the current workforce reaches retirement age. Young people want to be able to pursue other interests and feedback to the community survey included responses saying that Woonsocket does not offer a range of activities for people to participate in. There is a tremendous need for things to do in Woonsocket, to keep employees there after work, at lunch, and to align with residential market trends that demand a suite of amenities and high quality of life. This has led to a situation where higher waged workers tend to not live in Woonsocket. Engagement with stakeholders and businesses offered that this is because of a lack of amenities and better school systems in surrounding areas. They also believed that Woonsocket currently also lacks a "cool" factor, which is difficult to define directly but is related to the lack of entertainment options in the City for younger workers. A number of respondents to the community survey conducted as part of the comprehensive planning process expressed support for the development of entertainment options in Woonsocket that would appeal to youth. It should be noted, however, that most respondents were older adults making assumptions about what younger people want, as opposed to many young people expressing preferences for themselves. The City should work to understand the kinds of amenities that will bring in the next generation of residents and workers and work to provide the kinds of amenities that will help them work and stay in Woonsocket.

As part of Woonsocket's worker attraction efforts, the City should consider efforts in particular to bring in remote workers. Given Woonsocket's relatively lower cost of housing compared to nearby communities and efforts to upgrade its broadband infrastructure, Woonsocket is well positioned to make a pitch to remote workers in the region. While commuting to Boston on a regular basis would not be desirable, with the Franklin Commuter Rail line just 20 minutes from the City, a hybrid employee working for a firm based in Boston and living in Woonsocket could commute 1-2 days a week and otherwise work remotely.

Community Assets

Woonsocket's limited grocery options and lack of accessible quality food options, particularly near Downtown and for those without access to cars, poses a challenge to many residents' quality of life and can hinder opportunities for growth and economic development. With the potential of a vertical farming project, a Local Foods Local Places EPA Technical Assistance Grant awarded to NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley, and the City examining the feasibility of a Downtown food cooperative, there is much buzz around the potential for developing the economy of food. Supporting the food economy will increase the quality of life (green spaces and community gardens), contribute to community health (better access to healthy food), and add meaningful work within the City. Engagement efforts indicated public support for these efforts, with a number of community survey respondents emphasizing that the City should prioritize adding a grocery store that is centrally located in response to the open-ended economic development question.

The City would like to explore the economic benefits of the National Heritage Corridor. Heritage areas are known for stabilizing property values, offering creatives places to work, and drawing tourism. With the historic Stadium Theatre and musical history, there are ample ways to build off what already exists to develop the tourism industry in Woonsocket. Part of this effort could include an update of the Woonsocket statewide historical preservation report. Though the City should look into redevelopment or new construction as appropriate, where feasible the City can prioritize and seek funding to preserve at-risk properties, as well as reactivate structures that are vacant, but do not have significant hurdles to reuse.



Museum of Work & Culture (RI Historical Society)



AutumnFest Parade (Valley Breeze)



Woonsocket HS Graduates (Valley Breeze)



Woonsocket Farmers Market (The Patch)

GETTING IT DONE

GOAL I-1: Stabilize Woonsocket's economic base.

POLICY I-1.1: Retain and ensure the health of Woonsocket's existing businesses.

ACTION I-1.1.a: Designate a point person for business development in the City.

ACTION I-1.1.b: Hold regular meetings with the City's business community to understand their needs and concerns.

POLICY I-1.2: Explore the cost/benefit of lowering the City's tax rate.

ACTION I-1.2.a: Conduct a review of the City's tax rates as compared to similar and surrounding communities, assess economic and community impacts of tax rate changes.

GOAL I-2: Grow Woonsocket's economy in a balanced and beneficial manner.

POLICY I-2.1: Retain current businesses and attract new businesses to the City.

ACTION I-2.1.a: Work with the Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative, Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce, the RI Economic Development Corporation, and other business alliances to explore economic development incentives for retaining existing businesses, advertising available options to the business community, and attracting new businesses.

POLICY I-2.2: Expand existing commercial corridors, where appropriate, in the city.

ACTION I-2.2.a: Identify and prioritize high impact sites (like gateways or in strategic locations) just outside of existing commercial corridors based on access to site infrastructure, and where appropriate, conduct feasibility analysis to determine best use of properties.

ACTION I-2.2.b: As appropriate, market Woonsocket's commercial corridors to businesses appropriate to the area.

POLICY I-2.3: Examine and make substantial modifications to the regulations within the Woonsocket Zoning Ordinance for the mixed-use, commercial, and industrial zones so as to further encourage economic development.

ACTION I-2.3.a: Create a prioritized inventory of which commercial buildings should be saved, which should be demolished, and what potential preferred uses/reuses might be.

ACTION I-2.3.b: Review zoning regulations and modify as appropriate, particularly within areas of Park Avenue, Mendon Road, and Cumberland Hill Road to allow for greater opportunities for commercial activity.

GOAL I-3: Diversify Woonsocket's economy.

POLICY I-3.1: Transition the City from its former history as a manufacturing center.

ACTION I-3.1.a: Identify uses for former manufacturing sites, including but not limited to:

- Business incubator opportunities
- Shared workspaces
- Retail
- Entertainment
- Recreation
- Mixed-use development incorporating housing

POLICY I-3.2: Redevelop the City's mill resources for modern uses.

ACTION I-3.2.a: Inventory mill sites and conduct a space analysis of each property to identify which should be saved, which should be demolished, and what potential preferred uses/reuses might be.

ACTION I-3.2.b: For developable sites, actively market to developers.

POLICY I-3.3: Promote light industry and small-scale manufacturing in appropriate areas in the city.

ACTION I-3.3.a: As part of site inventory process, identify sites most appropriate for light industry/small-scale manufacturing and market to businesses. Look into opportunities to support small businesses and entrepreneurs who are interested in scaling up operations.

GOAL I-4: Develop a well-trained workforce.

POLICY I-4.1: Expand employment opportunities with competitive wages and safe quality working environments.

POLICY I-4.2: Encourage communication and working relationships between educational institutions and the business community regarding critical skills development and work force readiness.

ACTION I-4.2.a: Reach out to educational institutions and business community to understand needs; partner and take action as appropriate.

GOAL I-5: Identify Woonsocket as a “business-friendly” community.

POLICY I-5.1: Provide a variety of local economic development programs to support business development.

ACTION I-5.1.a: Review existing development programs and identify gaps in uptake and opportunities to support new and existing businesses in Woonsocket.

ACTION I-5.1.b: Work with the business community and other business alliances to conduct an attitude survey of businesses to identify priorities, needs, and concerns of the business community.

POLICY I-5.2: Work in partnership with the business community on regional and local economic development initiatives.

POLICY I-5.3: Build positive relationships between City Hall and the business community.

ACTION I-5.3.a: Create a volunteer economic development committee composed of business, nonprofit, and tourism leaders, workforce providers, real estate professionals, and other key stakeholders that meets at least monthly to discuss economic issues and advise City staff on economic development approaches in order to enhance Woonsocket’s economic development capacity.

GOAL I-6: Support Woonsocket’s Main Street as the economic heart of the City.

POLICY I-6.1: Encourage and try to guide new economic activities to the City’s historic Main Street area.

ACTION I-6.1.a: Assess what is working, what is not, and what works elsewhere to spur residential on main street upper floors and refine policies accordingly.

ACTION I-6.1.b: Support the development of commercial activity for street level buildings on Main Street and support business growth opportunities and attraction efforts to fill space as appropriate.

POLICY I-6.2: Main Street is a key Special Planning Area, and the City should look into ways to partner further with the Downtown Woonsocket Collaborative and others to support development Downtown.

ACTION I-6.2.a: Update and continue to maintain the Main Street Inventory database to assist with spurring economic development along Main Street.

POLICY I-6.3: Utilize heritage tourism and the arts as economic development tools in the Main Street area.

ACTION I-6.3.a: Convene leaders in the arts and tourism industry to develop a marketing plan for Woonsocket's heritage tourism and arts industries.

POLICY I-6.4: Support tourism activities in Woonsocket that strengthen Woonsocket's role in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

ACTION I-6.4.a: Work with the State of Rhode Island and other partners to identify sources of grants, funding, and support for the development of businesses and cultural events in the City.

ACTION I-6.4.b: Use Woonsocket's cultural and artistic events and institutions, including Autumnfest, the Museum of Work and Culture, the Stadium Theatre, and the St. Ann Arts and Cultural Center to draw visitors, generate economic activity, and celebrate and sell Woonsocket.

GOAL I-7: Support appropriate development of Woonsocket's Special Planning Areas.

POLICY I-7.1: Encourage development in Highland Corporate Park.

ACTION I-7.1.a: Review zoning in and around Highland Corporate Park and update as necessary to maintain flexibility in the Park, including the development of workforce housing to attract and retain the workforce.

ACTION I-7.1.b: Pursue aesthetic and needed infrastructure improvements in the Park to facilitate business attraction.

ACTION I-7.1.c: Collaborate with the Town of Cumberland to maintain and enhance the quality of Highland Corporate Park.

POLICY I-7.2: Encourage development and redevelopment along Diamond Hill Road.

ACTION I-7.2.a: Support attraction efforts to bring new businesses to Diamond Hill Road.

ACTION I-7.2.b: Pursue aesthetic and needed infrastructure improvements in the corridor to facilitate business attraction.

ACTION I-7.2.c: Work with property owners to pursue strategic redevelopment of underutilized parcels.

GOAL I-8: The City will integrate the implied and overt value of economic development into all goals and policies within the Comprehensive Plan.

POLICY I-8.1: Assign the highest priority in the City's municipal capital budgeting and the preparation and submission of grants for state and federal funding for future economic development projects.

ACTION I-8.1.a: Hire a dedicated economic development staff person at the City in the Planning and Development Department to interface with businesses, connect with resources, and head business attraction and retention efforts.

POLICY I-8.2: Assign top priority and provide existing City staffing required to identify, develop, and pursue all options and opportunities in future economic development.

[Note: this list was developed last year – are there any updates or new projects to include?]

Development Project Examples

The following projects were mentioned by stakeholders as examples of development activity in the City and can be used as examples in the Plan.

- Proposed redevelopment of 122 North Main Street (Johnston Building) for 17 residential units and 2 commercial spaces with a microbrewery and business center.
- Millrace Kitchen completed by NeighborWorks provides an event space and incubator for food businesses.
- The development of a Family Dollar and O'Reilly Auto Parts was granted approval at 1099 & 1139 Social Street.
- A solar energy system was proposed and approved on Park East Drive but has not yet begun construction.
- The light-manufacturing facility on Park East Drive (RESH) has received approval and construction has begun.
- The mixed-use development at 43 Railroad Street has received approval for building renovation and is currently occupied.