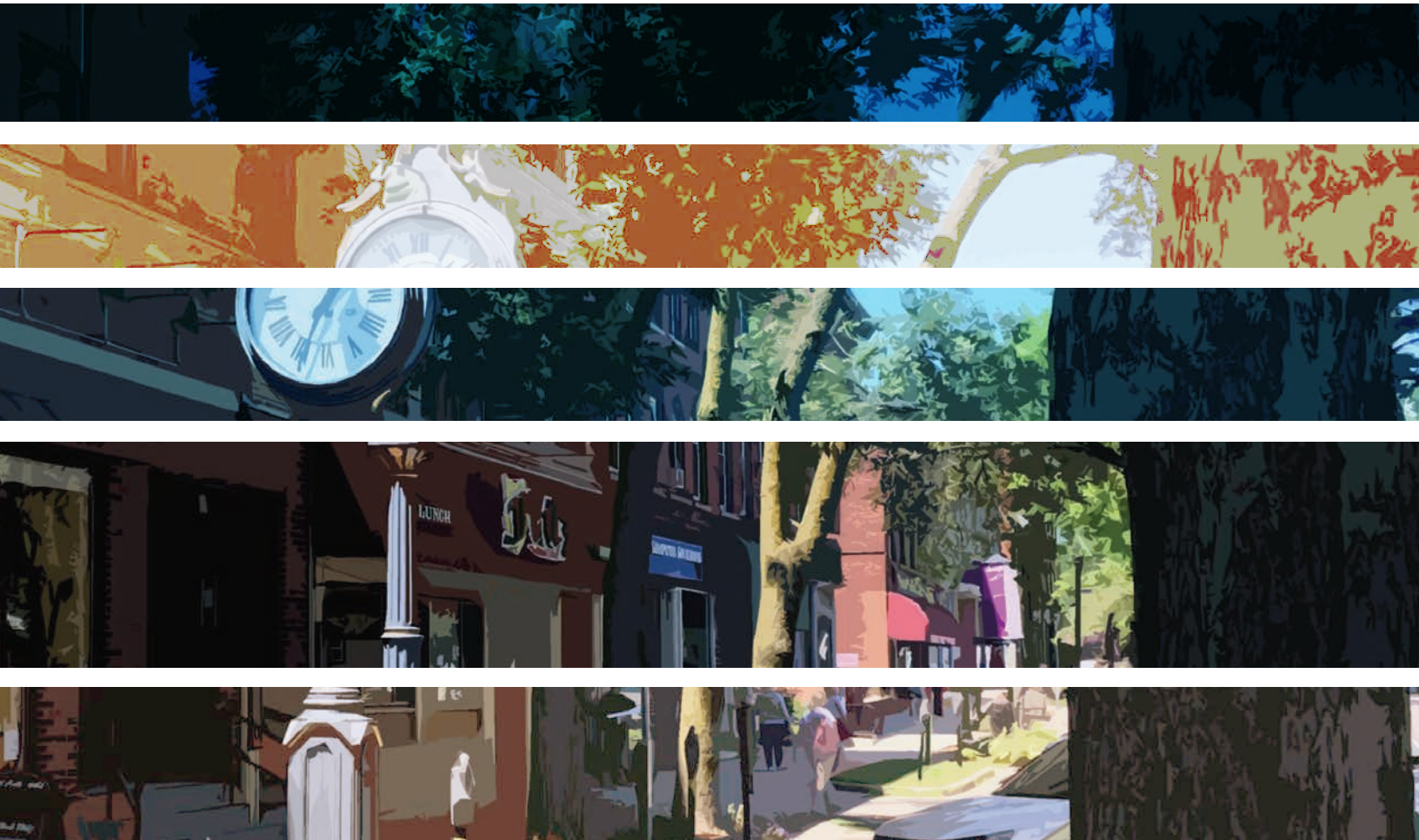




Keene, NH | Downtown Zoning Initiative

Technical Review

+ Approaches Report



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Introduction:

About This Project.

Since the most recent comprehensive update of Keene's development regulations nearly 50 years ago, there have been numerous efforts to accommodate the specific needs of downtown through amendments and multiple overlays reacting to new forms of development and changing market conditions. Over time, this patchwork technique of amendments and overlays can become something of a maze of overlapping, inconsistent regulation, resulting in confusion on both the side of the development community trying to interpret the regulations, and the City trying to administer them.

Recognizing the important role that downtown Keene occupies within the community and the larger region, as well as the opportunity that the downtown area presents to accommodate increased density and new mixed-use development, the City has undertaken the process of evaluating and enhancing the zoning regulations established for this area. It was recognized by the City Council, following an initial analysis of the City's land use regulations conducted by a consultant in 2016, that there is a need to update the zoning in Keene's downtown areas to guide growth and development / redevelopment in a manner that is more aligned with the City's Comprehensive Master Plan and community goals.

In 2017, the City Council voted to pursue the development of form-based zoning, also referred to as form-based code, to address the fabric of the built environment in downtown Keene as part of *Building Better Together: The City of Keene Land Use Code Update*. A form-based code is intended to provide both a flexible regulatory environment that can facilitate new development, and a series of specific standards that ensure any new development is complementary to the unique cultural and historic context of Keene's downtown. Communities across the country are adopting form based codes as they place greater emphasis on character, building features, and public spaces compared to traditional zoning's emphasis on what uses are allowed.

The City has hired Camiros to work with staff to conduct an update of the downtown zoning districts using a form-based code approach. Camiros is also providing review and guidance as needed for the City's effort to develop a Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), which will combine and organize all of Keene's land use regulations, currently spread throughout various chapters of the City code, as well as other documents, into one unified code that eliminates inconsistencies, eases administration, and brings Keene's development environment up to speed with modern best practices.

To ensure clarity and consistency in both purpose and administration, this form-based approach is being developed concurrently with the City's larger effort, allowing for the creation of standards and regulatory techniques that do not conflict or complicate the overall ordinance, but rather supplement the UDO with a specific, tailored, proactive approach to downtown. This is fortuitous timing, as this concurrent effort is an opportunity for the City to ensure that as both of these projects move forward, there is alignment between the approaches, requirements and standards of the form-based code and the larger ordinance update.

What is a Form-Based Code?

In contrast to traditional—or Euclidean—zoning codes, which prioritize the regulation of uses as a means to mitigate conflicts and ensure compatibility, form-based codes first prioritize the built form of the community, ensuring that new development complements and reinforces the established character of a place. While form-based regulation may not be appropriate for the entirety of the City, it is a particularly smart approach for a dynamic area like downtown Keene, where maintaining the character and sense of place is critically important, and a heterogeneous mixing of uses, including retail, restaurants, office, open space, and residential, is desired. **It is important to note two key items when discussing a form-based code for downtown Keene:**

Form Does Not Mean Uniform.

Regulation of form is intended to ensure harmony and compatibility in the built environment, reinforcing the walkable, pedestrian friendly character of downtown. Form, in this context, addresses items such as building height, ground floor entry design and location, façade transparency, and building siting including required setbacks or build-to zones. It does not require or promote a particular architectural style, and is not intended to encourage architectural uniformity or monotony within downtown. There is a desire within the City to ensure that downtown Keene can continue to evolve as a dynamic, exciting regional center that is capable of embracing and adapting to change, while maintaining a physical disposition that respects and reinforces the historic legacy embodied within the built environment downtown. A form-based code can help to achieve this goal.

Uses Will Continue to Be Regulated.

It is important to note that uses are still regulated under a form-based approach, so as to ensure an attractive, safe and comfortable environment for all visitors, residents, and other downtown users. As opposed to an approach that may prioritize the separation of incompatible uses to prevent conflict, however, use controls for downtown may be oriented toward minimizing negative external impacts, such as dust, noise, and air pollution. A robust and diverse mix of uses is anticipated to be permitted in downtown Keene.



Form-based Code Elements:

Form-based codes typically consist of a series of elements that work together to guide new development. For downtown Keene, these may include:

Sub-District Map.

It is anticipated that Downtown Keene will be categorized into different “place types,” or sub-districts, with standards tailored to the varied physical characteristics of each place. In form-based codes, a sub-district map distinguishes the boundaries of these places, and clarifies the extents to which each set of standards may be applicable.

Sub-District Purpose Statements.

Purpose statements are used to elucidate the key characteristics of each place, and how the regulations work to reinforce those characteristics. These statements are accompanied by illustrative graphics that demonstrate the unique form and character of each individual sub-district.

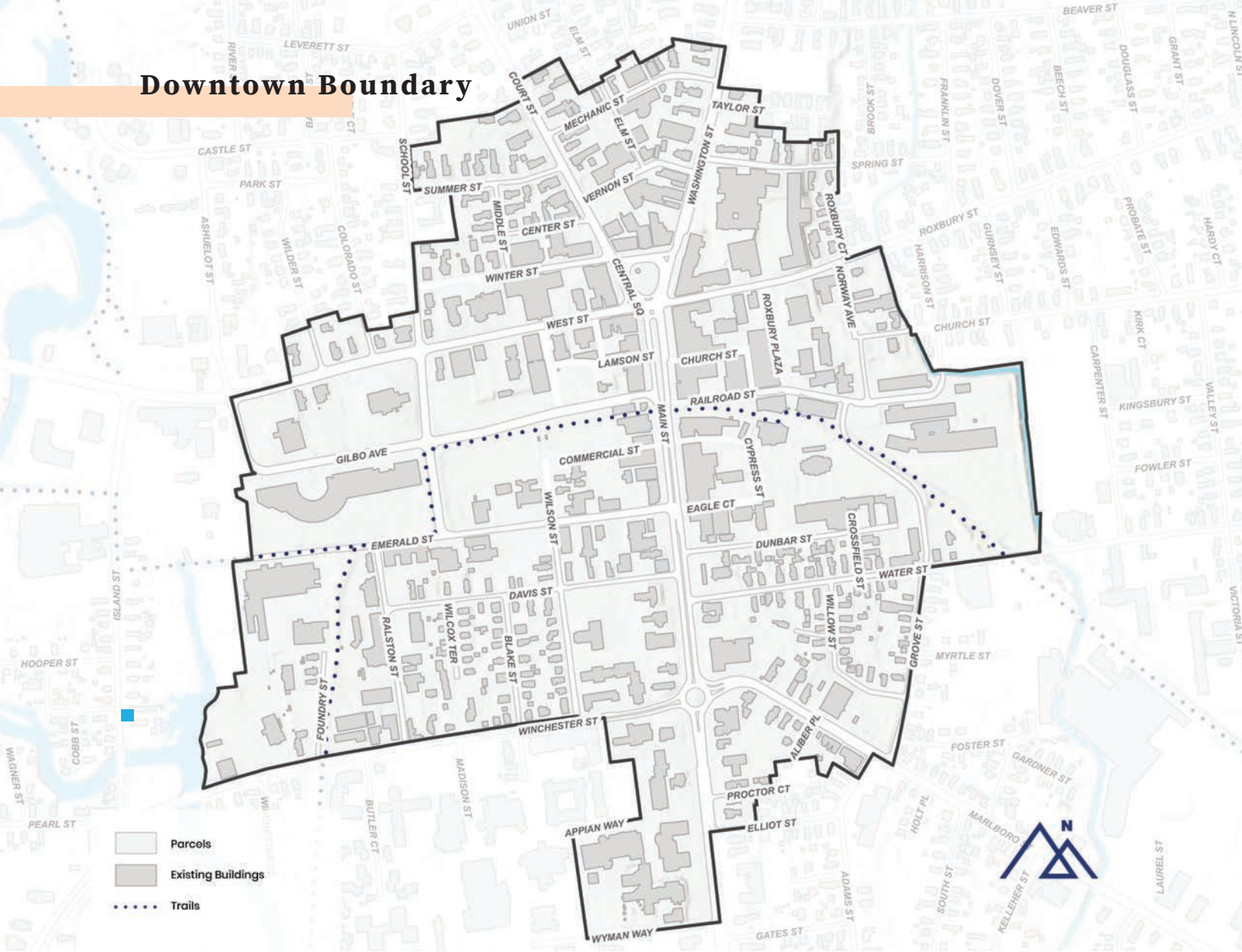
Building Form Standards + Illustrations.

These standards typically address the physical characteristics of buildings, such as their disposition on the lot, their bulk and height, and the manner in which they interact with and contribute to the pedestrian environment. A series of detailed accompanying illustrations ensure both the intent and applicability of the standards is clear.

Clear Administrative Procedures.

A form-based code is a new approach to development regulations in many communities. As such, it is critical to ensure that all administrative procedures related to the application of the form-based regulations are communicated and explained through clear text and accompanying diagrams where needed.

Downtown Boundary



Project Boundary

To determine an appropriate boundary for the extents of the downtown form-based code, the City’s current “Central Business” and “Central Business Limited” districts were used as an initial guide. The boundary was then refined and broadened, extended to the north, south, east and west based upon a physical analysis of the built condition, conducted via multiple tours and a detailed walking survey of the entire downtown area. The boundary was further refined through discussions with the City’s Joint Committee of the Planning Board and the City Council’s Planning, Licenses and Development Committee. The extents of the downtown boundary are described below.

To the north of the Central Business District, the area around Mechanic Street is clearly appropriate for inclusion in the new downtown form-based code. The historic structures here, and the built form (approximately 10’-15’ setbacks and an established rhythm at the street frontage) are clearly distinguished

from those areas further to the north, which take on a predominantly residential character, with larger setbacks and single-family structures.

Approaching Central Square from the north on Washington Street, there is a perceptible narrowing of the built form, pinching in closer to the street and creating a more defined space as we begin to enter downtown. The buildings on the west side of Washington move up to the sidewalk just south of Vernon Street and that build-to continues through to the core of downtown in Central Square.

To the west, the boundary is fitted to the character of the built structures, becoming slightly more articulated as it weaves to incorporate particular buildings or frontages. The transitions into predominantly residential areas to the west are more gradual, therefore they require a high level of attention to the extents of the boundary to ensure that adequate transitions can be accommodated where needed. Parcels to the west of Court Street, from approximately Mechanic Street down through Central Square, are strong candidates for inclusion, representing a mix of older home/office structures, as well as rowhouse residential at the corner of Court Street and Center Street.

The boundary incorporates both frontages of Summer Street and Winter Street moving west approximately to School Street, including the Keene Public Library as well as a number of historic home/office structures. It then continues much further to the west along West Street, Gilbo Avenue, Emerald Street, and Winchester Street to incorporate a series of larger parcels, roughly bounded by Hickey-Desilets Park and the course of the Ashuelot River.

To the south, the downtown boundary incorporates all parcels to the north of Winchester Street, and then continues down Main Street, incorporating a portion of the Keene State campus bounded to the south by Wyman Way.

To the east, the boundary incorporates a number of parcels along Marlboro Street, to Grove Street where it moves north to Water Street, and then follows the course of Beaver Brook north to Roxbury Street, incorporating areas currently within the Downtown Railroad Property Redevelopment District. It includes the southern frontage of Roxbury Street, and then continues north to incorporate the new residential development (“The Spot”) and parcels to the east between Spring Street and Roxbury Street. Finally, the boundary includes the parcels on the northern frontage of Spring Street west back to Washington Street.



Approaching Central Square from the north on Washington Street. The buildings come closer to the street, right up to the back of sidewalk, creating a distinctly more “urban” feel.

The Beaver Brook Mill building on Railroad Street, at the eastern edge of the downtown boundary.

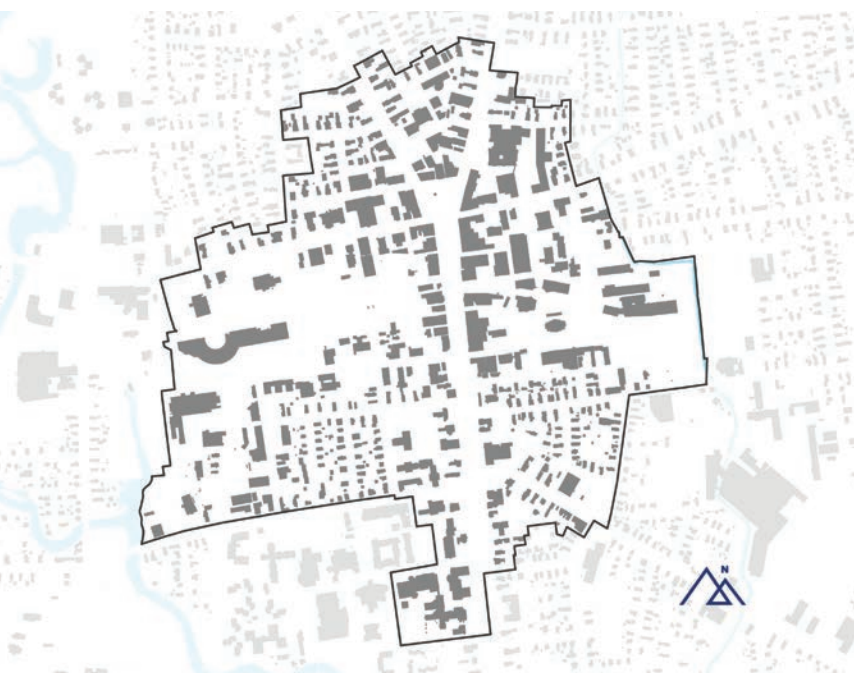




Physical Analysis:

Downtown Keene comprises a series of building blocks, or layers, that work together to create the area's strong sense of place, and to establish a pattern of development that can inform the creation of new development regulations. Looking at each of these layers individually allows us to pull apart the various systems at work, and gain valuable insights into how new development regulations addressing the physical disposition of buildings downtown may impact the area's established form and pattern.

Figure/Ground: Buildings



The pattern of development in downtown Keene is most easily observable through a figure/ground study. Here, we can clearly see delineation between the residential areas outside of the downtown boundary, and the more urban pattern of structures moving closer to the street and each other to define the downtown core. This is most easily observed around Central Square, where buildings are constructed at the back of the sidewalk, with no side setbacks to create a continuous street wall. This pattern continues south down Main Street, where the built form gradually spreads apart approaching Winchester Street. To the east and west of this main axis, the built form spreads out relatively quicker, creating more interstitial space as the type of buildings transition from two to five story mixed-use structures to more single-use buildings such as residential homes, converted homes used as office facilities, larger office structures, large residential structures, retail buildings, and civic buildings such as the public library.

It is worth noting that key streets, such as Court, Washington, Main, West, and Roxbury are apparent as the inverse of this built form, suggesting a tight pattern of development along these main corridors. Contrastingly, other streets, such as Gilbo Avenue are not able to be identified via any pattern of built form.

Figure/Ground: Blocks



Downtown Keene is composed of a series of mostly small, irregular blocks defined by a somewhat circuitous network of streets. This is likely due to a combination of the need to respond to various site constraints downtown, and the City’s historical development patterns, with radial and grid streets constructed to connect outlying parts of the community to its heart – Central Square. Many older cities such as Keene possess this type of eccentric block patterning due to historic trends related to land use and ownership, and a high amount of development in advance of any sort of subdivision regulations to unify or standardize elements such as block lengths or right-of-way widths. This eccentricity is a boon to Keene’s downtown, however, as the small block sizes and multiple frontages help to create a dynamic, easily walkable pedestrian environment that presents opportunities for exploration and discovery.

Figure/Ground: Parking



A figure/ground study of surface parking areas helps to illustrate the amount of land devoted to vehicle parking within downtown Keene. Currently, the Central Business District is exempt from parking requirements – this makes sense considering there appears to be ample parking both on-street and to the rear of buildings. Looking at the figure/ground study, it appears as though the surface parking areas largely represent the inverse of the building figure/ground; Keene is fortunate that downtown was able to develop in a manner that prioritized the placement of buildings at the street frontage, and the placement of parking to the side or the rear of structures.

Parking, Cont'd.

This map also reveals that the more recently built areas within the downtown boundary present a more “modern” condition, with large surface parking lots fronting on the street, diminishing pedestrian comfort and walkability. Importantly, areas such as Gilbo Avenue, appearing empty on the building figure/ground study, are suddenly distinguishable on this study of parking areas. A new form-based code can help to correct this condition as redevelopment occurs over time, prioritizing the placement of buildings at the street, and the provision of parking to the rear of structures or on-street, serving both as a traffic calming device, and as a key design element linking redevelopment to the downtown core.

Additionally, though there seems to be a perception of inadequate parking supply within downtown, the City’s 2010 Downtown Parking analysis concluded that the parking supply within downtown was sufficient to accommodate daily usage. The study also highlighted the development of structured parking as something that Keene should consider a priority moving into the future. A form-based code can help to ensure that the disposition and design of future structures works to complement and reinforce the walkable, pedestrian-oriented character of downtown.

Finally, a key consideration for downtown Keene is that many of the buildings fronting on Main Street and Central Square are provided with minimal on-street parking in front, but with ample lots or structures located to the rear. This is critical, in that a code addressing new development in these areas must respect that there is a high level of activity on both sides of these buildings, with people entering and exiting at both the front and the rear. New standards must acknowledge this dual nature.

Building Height:

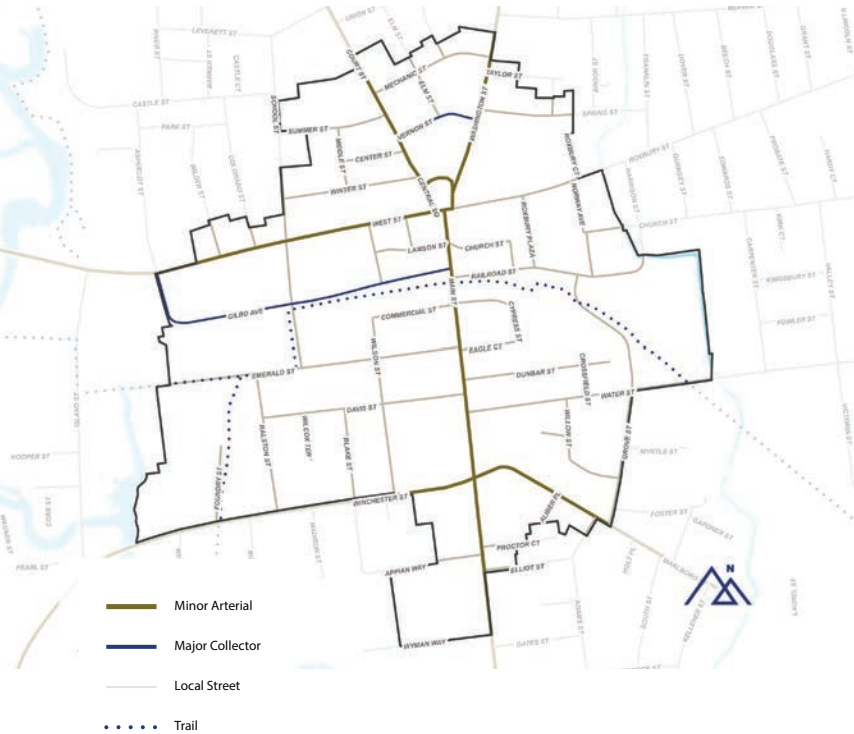
Building heights in downtown Keene currently range from one to six stories, with heights surrounding Central Square predominantly in the one to four story range. Building heights around Central Square are relatively higher, diminishing as we move south down the Main Street corridor. Additionally, areas north of Central Square are characterized predominantly by one to two story structures, serving as a transition into primarily smaller scale residential uses.

New construction downtown, including development along Community Way, and residential buildings along Roxbury Street and Emerald Street are coming in with moderately taller building heights, at four to five stories. A pattern can be observed, with a slightly higher building height defining Central Square, transitioning to lower heights on both the north and south ends of downtown, with areas of greater height occurring behind the defined Main Street corridor, and near the edges of downtown. This pattern should be reinforced through permitted or required building heights as place types or sub-districts are established as part of a form-based approach.

Transportation Network

The City of Keene lies at the intersection of a number of important regional transportation assets, including State Routes 9, 10, 12, and 101. These routes converge in the City, allowing through traffic to circulate and largely bypass the downtown core. However, downtown is highly accessible, with easy regional access by automobile to the north, south, east, and west via a system of minor arterials (Court, Washington, and Main Streets) and major collector streets that move traffic in and out of downtown. Additionally, the Cheshire Rail Trail connects directly through the downtown core, providing access to a regional trail network including the Ashuelot River Trail and the Jonathan Daniels Trail.

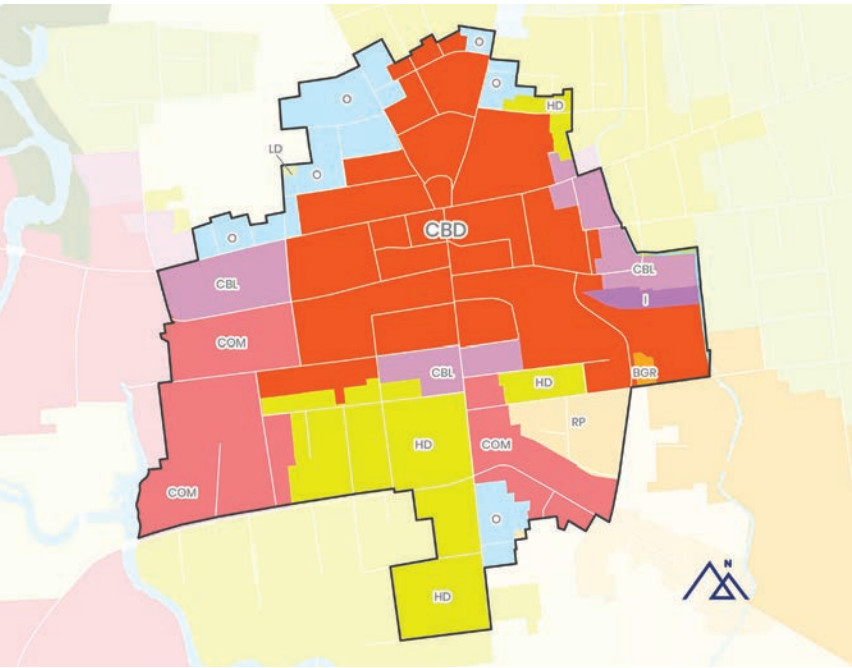
The majority of the streets within downtown are designated as “slow streets” in the City’s 2015 Complete Streets Design Guidelines, bringing focus to this area as a pedestrian-oriented, multimodal hub within the City, and placing emphasis on pedestrian and vehicular safety throughout downtown. The defining feature of this “slow street” transportation network is the traffic circle at Central square, which slows traffic as it converges from five different directions, and creates a central green space framed by the built form, and punctuated by the picturesque steeple atop the United Church of Christ, or the “Head of the Square.”



Existing Zoning

Currently, downtown Keene consists of a variety of different zoning districts from High Density Residential, to Office, to Central Business. Each of these current zoning districts serves a different purpose, and permits development of a different character, size, and intensity.

With the creation of a downtown form-based code, the City has an opportunity to craft a much more focused set of standards, drawing distinctions where necessary to maintain character and compatibility, but allowing flexibility to accommodate a greater mix of uses and forms of development as detailed in the City’s Comprehensive Plan.



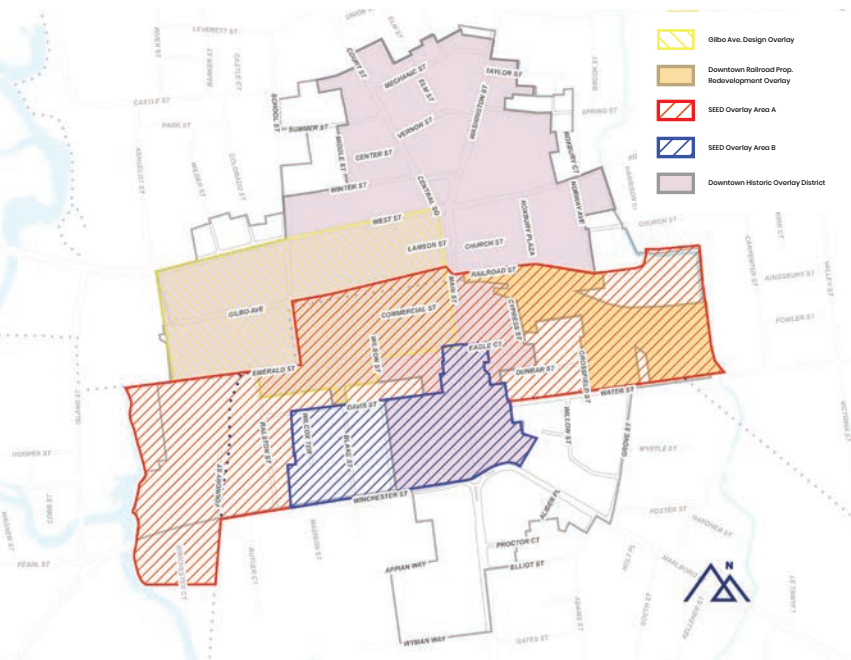
The base districts currently falling within the established boundary for downtown include:

<p>High Density (HD)</p>	<p>This district accommodates high density/high intensity residential development, with very limited additional uses, such as neighborhood grocery stores through a special exception process.</p>
<p>Residential Preservation (RP)</p>	<p>This district is intended to prioritize the preservation of single-family neighborhoods with an established, walkable character. No additional nonresidential uses are permitted.</p>
<p>Business Growth + Reuse (BGR)</p>	<p>The Business Growth and Reuse District accommodates a mix of uses including light industrial and technology uses, mixed-use, and residential development. It is intended to promote adaptive reuse and to leverage access to existing infrastructure and services to incentivize redevelopment adjacent to the City’s downtown core, and to enhance the economic viability of the area by allowing a greater mix of uses within a walkable environment.</p>
<p>Industrial (I)</p>	<p>The Industrial district provides for a variety of industrial uses such as manufacturing, processing, assembling, and warehousing of goods. Other uses, such as office facilities, are permitted only as accessory uses to the primary industrial activities.</p>

<p>Office (O)</p>	<p>The Office District accommodates low intensity office development within easy walking distance of Keene’s downtown core, serving as a transition or buffer between the surrounding residential areas, and the more intensely developed commercial areas downtown. A limited range of low intensity uses, such as professional offices are permitted, along with a range of residential uses. Development within the O District is subject to a series of special conditions design to ensure it maintains a neighborhood residential character, and that impacts on adjacent residential uses are minimized.</p>
<p>Commerce (COM)</p>	<p>The Commerce District is intended to accommodate higher intensity commercial development of a predominantly auto-oriented character, including shopping centers and larger footprint commercial uses. A variety of commercial uses are permitted in the district.</p>
<p>Central Business (CB)</p>	<p>The Central Business District accommodates a variety of uses, and is intended to create a richness of activity that fits the character of downtown Keene as the center of the community. Commercial, residential (multi-family) and institutional uses are all permitted, and mixed-use development – both horizontal and vertical – is encouraged.</p>
<p>Central Business Limited (CBL)</p>	<p>The Central Business Limited District accommodates the edges of Keene’s city center, and is intended to transition from the highly walkable pedestrian oriented environment within downtown to a more auto-oriented character, reflecting a different mixture of uses as a result. Uses such as motor vehicle dealerships and service stations are permitted, and uses such as live/work or arts center are removed from the “Central Business” mix.</p>

Overlay Districts

In addition to base zoning districts, the City of Keene has adopted numerous overlay zoning districts, each aimed at addressing a particular set of development issues, or achieving specific development or redevelopment goals within particular geographies. In downtown Keene, a number of these overlay districts are present, overlapping with the base districts above, as well as with each other in certain instances, creating a web of regulation, which makes both interpreting and administering the regulations a challenging proposition. With the development of a form-based code for downtown comes the



opportunity to evaluate these overlay zoning districts and incorporate their intent and/or specific techniques into the base zoning district or sub-districts. This approach can greatly clarify the City’s intended development outcomes within these areas, and can simplify their administration as well. There are currently four overlay districts on the map within the established downtown area.

The overlay districts currently falling within the established boundary for downtown include:

**Gilbo Avenue Design
Overlay District**

The Gilbo Avenue Design Overlay District, as one of the City’s newer overlay districts, contains a detailed series of regulations that deal with both the dimensional and design characteristics of development along the Gilbo Avenue corridor. In addition to placemaking design characteristics such as minimum building height and the inclusion of a build-to zone, the district also contains regulations related to establishing transitions between the Gilbo Avenue area and adjacent neighborhood areas.

The adopted regulations currently in place in the overlay district, including established minimum heights, setbacks, permitted parking locations, and design requirements such as building articulation at regular intervals, serve as good guidance for the direction the community envisions for new development along the corridor. As such, it is anticipated that these existing regulations will become the basis for the new form-based approach to Gilbo Avenue as the downtown form-based code is developed.

**Downtown
Railroad Property
Redevelopment
District**

The Downtown Railroad Property Redevelopment District is intended to assist with the redevelopment of property within the southeastern portion of downtown Keene, bounded by Beaver Brook and incorporating the former railroad area, in a manner that extends the existing development pattern of downtown, including its focus on walkability and a mix of uses. As such, the district defers to the underlying minimum standards of the Central Business District, but accommodates an expanded mix of uses, permitting larger institutional uses such as museums and art centers, as well as research and development and processing/packaging uses.

The overlay is designed to achieve a mixture of uses that continue the form and pattern of downtown, but which may be more appropriate to the existing character of the area. It is recommended that this range of uses may be expanded further, to include light industrial uses or manufacturing uses conducted entirely indoors. Such a mixture of uses could encourage the redevelopment of this part of downtown into an “industrial mixed-use” area, encouraging redevelopment as well as preservation and continued operation of existing structures.

**Sustainable Energy
Efficient Design
Overlay District**

The SEED Overlay District is an incentive-based overlay, intended to encourage green building design in compliance with a specified green building certification system. In return for achievement of minimum specified levels of certification under one of the

SEED (Cont'd.)

allowable green building systems, a series of incentives are presented, including an expanded palette of uses permitted and dimensional standards that permit additional height and reduced setbacks. Site development standards, such as parking and screening are also modified by the SEED Overlay, intended to promote retrofitting of historical buildings, and new walkable, mixed-use development that reflects the city's unique character.

The additional permitted mix of uses, as well as the heights, setbacks, and parking reductions may serve as a guide to new development standards that can be incorporated into a form-based sub-district for Downtown Keene, as they reflect a modern approach, and are intended to achieve a number of the goals articulated within the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Downtown Historic Overlay District

The majority of land within the area established as downtown falls within the City's Downtown Historic Overlay District. The goals of the Historic Overlay District are laudable, in seeking to ensure the integrity and continuation of the scale, character, and pattern of development that makes Keene's downtown unique.

It is somewhat uncommon, however, to see historic district regulations that are so wide reaching in terms of their review of a range of conditions, including issuance of certificates of appropriateness for new construction. Typically, historic district regulations deal primarily with actions such as alterations or additions to existing structures, or demolition of historic structures. Requiring new construction to undergo review by the HDC and obtain a certificate of appropriateness is not common procedure. The adoption of a form-based code for Downtown Keene may enable the goals of this review to be carried forward in a manner which reduces the need for detailed review and issuance of a COA, but that ensures new development is compatible with the City's existing historic character. Two approaches may be taken to marrying a form-based approach with the City's existing Historic Overlay District:

Standards can be created within the form-based code that address only the dimensional characteristics of new development, including setbacks or build-to zones, entry spacing requirements, required ground floor and upper story transparency, and minimum and maximum heights. Under this approach, any design consideration would defer to the existing historic district regulations and the planning board development standards.

Alternatively, standards related to new construction could be moved out of the HDC regulations and into the form-based code for downtown, where they would be coupled with the dimensional characteristics noted above, and the requirement for new construction to obtain a COA would be eliminated. Guidance in the creation of these design standards would be taken from those currently contained within the HDC regulations and the Planning Board Development Standards. We recommend the City pursue this approach, as it is a more typical, modern solution to maintaining a compatible form and design character, while providing a clearer, more predictable path for new development within Keene's downtown.

What We've Learned So Far:

Project Kick-Off

Intensive study of existing conditions via mapping and analysis, and review of the City's relevant policy and regulatory documents has provided a solid understanding for the current conditions within Keene. Time spent "on the ground" in the community, however, is where the most useful learning happens, particularly when considering the unique qualities of a downtown built environment like that in Keene.

Beginning in June, the consultant participated in initial "kick-off" conversations with staff, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the current regulatory and development issues facing the community. These conversations provided valuable initial direction for further study of particular issues relevant to the downtown form-based code. They also allowed the consultant insight into not just the technical detail of particular issues with the current regulations, but how those issues have arisen, how the code has been interpreted, and practical considerations that may not be immediately obvious upon a read-through of the existing regulatory and policy documents. As staff is heir to numerous details of application and interpretation, and they (hopefully not literally) "know where the bodies are buried," these initial conversations are a critical component in gaining the full working knowledge necessary to engage in drafting a new code for the community.

Following the kick-off meeting, the consultant was taken on a tour of the City, focusing not just on downtown, but on the overall community, to gain a holistic understanding of the fabric of Keene, and how development downtown relates to the character and form of the community overall. This tour also allowed the consultant team to translate the policy goals and technical details of the City's Comprehensive Plan and existing development regulations from words on a page, to physical, place-based, examples. Further, it allowed the consultant team to get an understanding of the physical character created by the City's current districts, how the existing districts relate to one another, and how downtown functions as the core of the community and the region. Finally, this initial kick-off and tour afforded the consultants a valuable opportunity to get an overview of current development projects within the City, fleshing out the initial picture presented by the GIS mapping and data analysis with a fuller understanding of the type of development that the City is seeing in the present moment.

Key-Person Interviews

In addition to conversations with staff, and gathering and reviewing various data and background documents, the consultants conducted a series of key-person interviews to gain further information on current issues from the perspective of current ordinance users and administrators. These interviews were conducted over a three day period during July of 2018, and included individuals from a variety of organizations and with a variety of interests including architects, entrepreneurs, city officials and board members, and owners of property in downtown Keene. Through these interviews – conducted as informal conversations, and held one-on-one or in small groups – the consultant team was able to speak to stakeholders about the form-based approach and process, explore their issues with the current regulations, discuss ideas and wishes for the future of downtown, and distill some key themes. These key themes largely reinforce the vision established in the City's 2010 Comprehensive Plan, and will serve as valuable guidance for the direction of the form-based code.

Key Themes Identified:

Maintain the Unique Character of Downtown Keene.

- ⚙️ Downtown Keene is a unique built-environment within the region. Ensure that this character is maintained.
- ⚙️ Maintain room for creativity in new standards. A variety of architectural styles is important to the identity of downtown. Don't make Keene a cookie cutter community.
- ⚙️ Ensure that new regulations reflect the existing on-the-ground patterns of development within downtown Keene, and allow for those patterns to continue.
- ⚙️ Loosen regulations where necessary to ensure that existing buildings are able to be adapted and reused easily.
- ⚙️ Don't encourage overbuilding, ensure that open spaces are maintained.

Encourage a mix of residential dwelling types, as well as more walkable mixed-use development downtown.

- ⚙️ Provide more opportunities for people to live downtown, and allow for the development of amenities that can serve those people.
- ⚙️ The identity of downtown is changing – it's not a sleepy place. Regulations should acknowledge this and create opportunities for development that matches the ways in which people want to experience downtown Keene.

Focus density on downtown.

- ⚙️ Implement the vision in the comprehensive plan, more mixed-use and intensity downtown.
- ⚙️ Allow taller building heights downtown, within the range of six to seven stories or taller. "Taller building heights create a sense of enclosure and intimacy."
- ⚙️ Ensure that new development in areas such as Gilbo Avenue matches the scale and character of the downtown core; capitalize on the opportunities for growth where possible.
- ⚙️ Think about regional growth; how can Keene absorb more growth for the Monadnock region?

Key Themes, Cont'd.

Modernize the regulations, and align them with community interests and priorities.

- ☀ To the extent possible, align policies and processes across City departments (planning, building, fire, etc.)
- ☀ Ease permitting processes to ensure they reflect a dynamic downtown environment; consider processes for things like public art, pop-up shops, and other downtown events.
- ☀ Streamline processes for things like change of use, ensuring existing buildings can be easily reused.
- ☀ Ensure that permitted intensities are mitigated through careful consideration of elements such as landscape buffers, and adequate transitions between downtown and adjacent residential areas.

Ensure clarity and consistency are prioritized in the new regulations.

- ☀ Current regulations are confusing; this lack of clarity can lead to inconsistencies in interpretation and administration.
- ☀ User friendly language and illustrations can help to explain intent, as well as to ensure consistency in application of the regulations.
- ☀ Reduce the need for interpretation by staff.



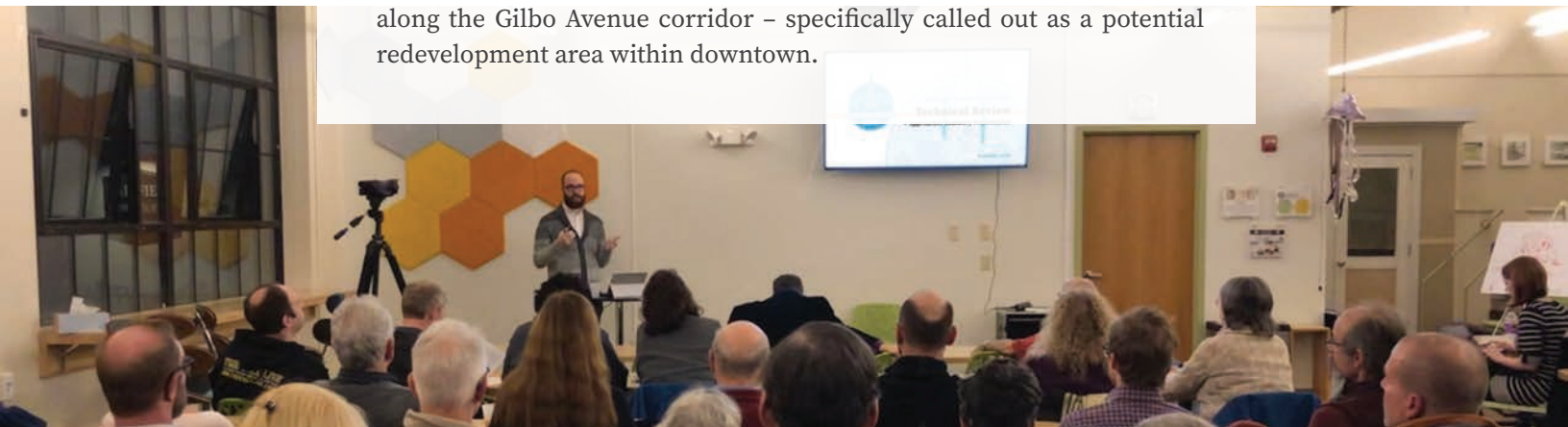
Public Presentation

On the evening of Wednesday, November 14, about 50 Keene residents joined City staff and the consultant team at a public meeting at “the Hive” co-working space in the Hannah Grimes Center downtown. This meeting was held as an introduction to the Downtown Zoning Initiative for the community at large, to provide an opportunity for interested residents and business owners to learn about the project, ask questions, and provide feedback at the outset of the process.

The presentation focused on a review of existing conditions, as well as the City’s current downtown zoning – including preliminary approaches for how it might be updated. The consultant team introduced form-based coding as a potential approach for downtown Keene, discussing how it differs from conventional zoning, and how form-based techniques may be appropriate and effective in addressing the specific conditions within downtown Keene.

Initial concepts for “place types,” or sub-districts to regulate the form of development within downtown Keene were presented for early feedback, and opportunity was given for members of the public to ask questions and comment on the presentation and process.

Before and after the presentation, members of the public had the opportunity to view a series of analysis maps, and to participate in a visual preference survey indicating their favored forms of development for residential buildings, commercial buildings, and open space along the Gilbo Avenue corridor – specifically called out as a potential redevelopment area within downtown.



Downtown Open Studio

A temporary presentation space and design studio was created in the storefront at 84 Main Street in downtown Keene on Thursday, November 15th. The studio served as a workspace for City staff and consultants, and was open to the public all day on Thursday, allowing ample opportunity for folks to drop in and review project materials, participate in the visual preference survey, sit down and work through concepts with staff and consultants, or to view the presentation if they had been unable to attend on Wednesday evening.

The “drop-in” flexibility of the open studio allowed members of the public to participate on their own schedule and at their own pace. Undeterred by the frigid conditions outside throughout the course of the day, around 50-60 interested residents, business owners, students, and City officials came through the open studio to discuss the Downtown Zoning Initiative. Some stayed and chatted for just a few minutes, others were able to sit down with a coffee and have lengthier conversations with staff and consultants about their ideas, comments, and concerns.



Above: The Open Studio workspace at 84 Main Street Downtown.



Left and Below: Interested citizens and business owners viewing project materials, and speaking with City staff and consultants.



Gilbo Avenue Visual Preference Survey

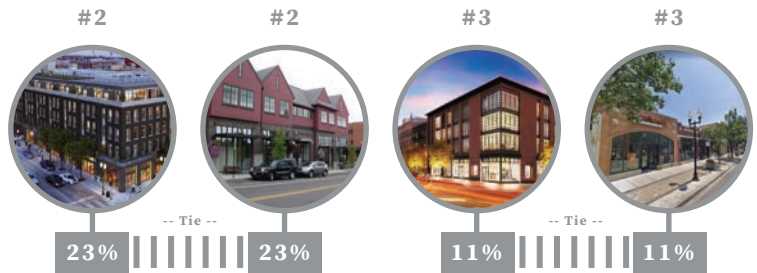
A visual preference survey was conducted at the public meeting and the open studio, wherein participants indicated their favored forms of development in three categories: commercial, residential, and open space. A series of development forms were presented in each category, and participants were able to indicate their preferred image for each of the three categories.

This survey was specifically targeted toward gauging the community's preferred development form for the Gilbo Avenue corridor, as the area represents a key portion of downtown in which redevelopment is likely to occur, and which will likely have an impact on the visual character of Keene's downtown overall. The current Gilbo Avenue Design Overlay district contains some guidance in terms of the placement of buildings and their character, and the survey largely confirms this guidance. The results overall affirm the community's desire for what may be described as a more urban development pattern in this area. Results of the survey are indicated below.

Commercial + Mixed Use Development

31%

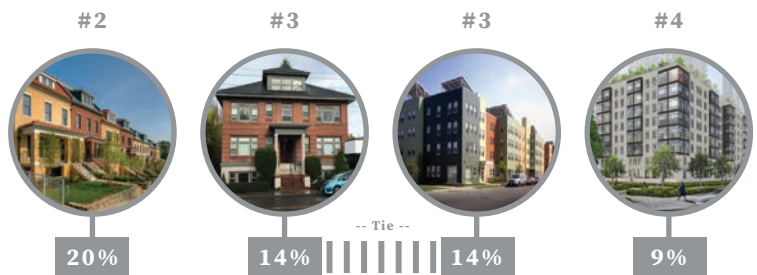
#1 Preferred



Residential Development

43%

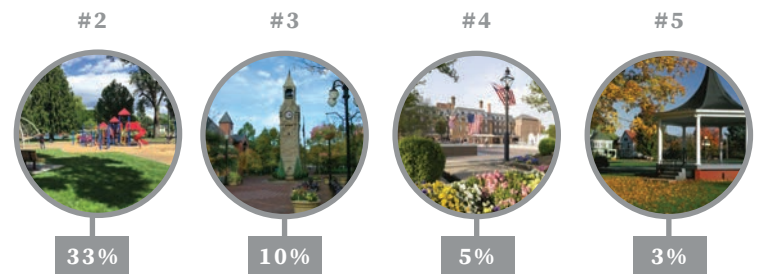
#1 Preferred



Open Space

49%

#1 Preferred



A conceptual approach to form-based coding for downtown Keene:

What Does Keene Need?

A new form-based code for downtown Keene must address the key development issues downtown, as well as the key themes identified through interviews and in the Comprehensive Plan, to ensure that new regulations serve to move the City closer to the vision identified in the Comprehensive Plan. As such, the code will need to specifically address the physical, or form, characteristics of development, as well as the uses permitted, and how the regulations are administered.

In order to achieve the City's goals as articulated through the Comprehensive Plan, and discussions with staff and key stakeholders, it is anticipated that the following key areas will be addressed in the new zoning for downtown Keene.

Uses:

The current zoning districts that are mapped within the established downtown boundary represent a variety of development intensities, as well as certain mixtures of uses established to prioritize geographically complementary development within certain parts of the City, which may or may not include downtown Keene. Further, the current uses permitted are often unclear or phrased slightly differently from district to district, an example being the four types of office uses listed within the districts: office, offices including incidental warehousing, wholesaling, or retailing, offices for corporate, business, or professional purposes, and office, small scale corporate, business or professional purposes. The list of uses will need to be cleaned up and simplified moving forward into the downtown Form-Based Code, and the overall UDO process.

The current uses permitted in each of the downtown districts are listed on the following pages, for comparison. A "P" in a column indicates that the specified use is permitted in that district. A "C" specifies a conditional use, and an "S" specifies a special exception.

Use Comparison - Zoning Districts

Use	CB	CBL	COM	O	I	BGR	RP	HD
Accessory Dwelling Unit				C			C	C
Art Center	P							
Asphalt Plant, smelter, forge, tannery, brewery, rendering plant, explosives manufacturing					S			
Assembling					P			
Banking or Lending Institution	P	P	P					
Bed and breakfast Inn/Tourist Home		P		P		P	P	
Bed and breakfast with meeting/dining facilities						P	S	S
Boardinghouse/Lodging house		P						
Bulk Storage and Distribution of goods, including flammable materials					P	C/S		
Clinic	P	P	P					
College					C	C/S		
Drive-in Uses	S	P	P					
Dwelling, duplex				P				P
Dwelling, multifamily	P	C		P				P
Dwelling, single-family				P			P	P
Funeral parlor	P	P	P	P				
Garage, business	P	P	P		P			
Greenhouse, nursery			P			P		
Group Home								P
Health and fitness center	S	S	S		S	S		
Historic site open to the public	P	P	P	P	P	P		
Home offices of insurance companies, publishing companies, and manufacturing firms, including incidental warehousing, wholesaling, or retailing					P	P		
Hotel	P	P	P					
Institutional use	P	P	P	S	S			S
Manufacturing					P	C/S		
Mixed-use development						P		
Motel / Motel Apartment		P	P					
Motor Vehicle Dealership		C	P					
Motor Vehicle Repair garage, paint shop, vehicle body shop			C					
Motor Vehicle Service Station/ Filling Station		C	C					
Multi-dwelling structure						C		
Live/work space	P					P		
Neighborhood Grocery Store						C		
Noncommercial outdoor recreational activity					P			
Noncommercial raising of farm animals							P	
Nursery or child care facility	P	P	P	S	S		C	



Use	CB	CBL	COM	O	I	BGR	RP	HD
<i>Nursing Home, Sanitarium, Convalescent home, home for the aged</i>		P						
<i>Office</i>		P		P				
<i>Offices, including incidental warehousing, wholesaling or retailing</i>	P		P					
<i>Offices for corporate, business or professional purposes (minimum 10,000sf)</i>					S			
<i>Office, small scale corporate, business or professional purposes</i>						C/S		
<i>Parking area (lot)</i>	P	P	P	P				
<i>Place of worship</i>	P	P						
<i>Private club, lodge or fraternal activity where function is indoors</i>	P	P	P	S				
<i>Private school</i>	P	P	P					
<i>Processing</i>					P	C/S		
<i>Publishing/printing</i>			P					
<i>Recreational activity as a business</i>	S	S	P					
<i>Recycling Plant</i>					P			
<i>Repair Garage</i>						C		
<i>Research and development</i>	P	P	P		P			
<i>Research and development laboratory</i>						C/S		
<i>Restaurants</i>	P	P	P			C		
<i>Retail sales and services</i>		P	P					
<i>Retail sales/service and/or rental including indoor salesroom where motor vehicles are kept for sale</i>	P							
<i>Storage facility, self-service</i>					P			
<i>Senior Center</i>		P		P				
<i>Warehousing</i>					P	C/S		
<i>Wholesaling</i>					P	C/S		

As can be seen in the table, there are particular use limitations and flexibilities unique to each of these districts: live/work space is currently seen as appropriate for the Central Business District, but not Central Business Limited; duplex dwellings are only permitted within the Office and High Density Residential districts. The intent of creating a form-based code for downtown Keene is to simplify the sets of uses that will be permitted downtown, and to ensure that there is flexibility for a wide range of commercial, residential, and other uses as may be appropriate within downtown. The approach here is not to micromanage uses, but rather to establish a basic set of uses for downtown that encourage a compatible environment where people can live, work, and enjoy the lively, walkable center of town day or night.

As stated above, this simplification or “clean-up” of uses will need to be reflected within the Unified Development Ordinance, as the downtown form-based code will need to pull from the range of uses established within the overall ordinance to create its specific set of permissions. It is worth noting that this

approach, listing the particular uses permitted within the district, is generally uncommon practice when creating a form-based code. As many older form-based codes heavily prioritized the importance of form standards above use-based regulation, the common practice became to list only those uses which would be prohibited within the district. This can be hazardous, however, as new uses may emerge that would be considered inappropriate within downtown, but by virtue of not being specifically prohibited, could potentially locate within downtown. The approach of listing the permitted uses is both more protective of downtown, and more intentional in ensuring that we continue to reinforce the area's established character.

Dimensional Characteristics:

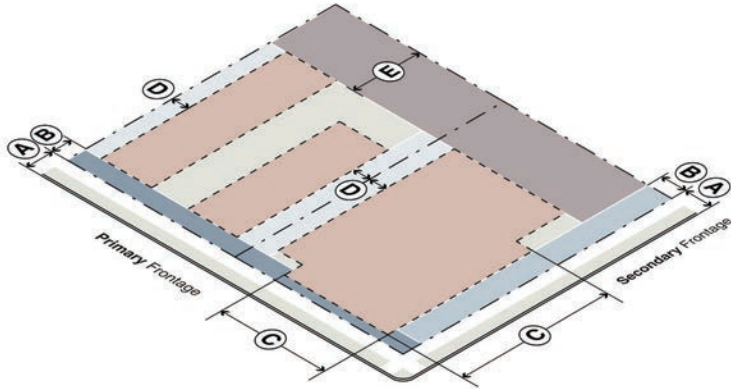
Cities with a unique downtown character such as that seen in Keene are often confronted by conflicts between a set of post-war or mid-century auto-oriented dimensional standards, and the traditionally urban, walkable character of their existing development. In contrast to many communities, Keene has done an admirable job of ensuring that the standards for development in the Central Business District, particularly, are more geared toward accommodating the City's downtown development pattern. Further evaluation and refinement may be necessary, however, to ensure that specific characteristics are tailored toward ensuring that this pattern is not only accommodated, but encouraged or required as new development, infill development, or redevelopment occurs downtown. These characteristics include:

Lot Sizes

Within the downtown boundary, the median lot size is just over 13,000 square feet. This median size moves to almost 14,000 square feet when looking just at parcels zoned Central Business, to 16,000 square feet in Central Business Limited, all the way up to over 25,000 square feet in the Commerce District (though there are only four COM lots within the boundary), and down to just below 9,000 square feet in the office district. The Central Business District doesn't require a minimum lot area, but the rest of these medians suggest that lot sizes are in line with the required minimums for the CBL District (10,000sf minimum), the COM District (15,000sf minimum), and the O District (8,000sf minimum). There are so few parcels zoned HD, RP, BGR, and I within the boundary that this analysis was not conducted for these districts.

When evaluating the creation of form-based sub-districts for downtown Keene, one potential approach would be to maintain the minimum lot areas that predominate within certain areas of downtown, to ensure the established pattern of development may continue. However, if there is a desire to facilitate redevelopment at a more granular level than some current areas within the COM District, for instance, it may be beneficial to extend the lack of a minimum required lot area to the entire downtown.

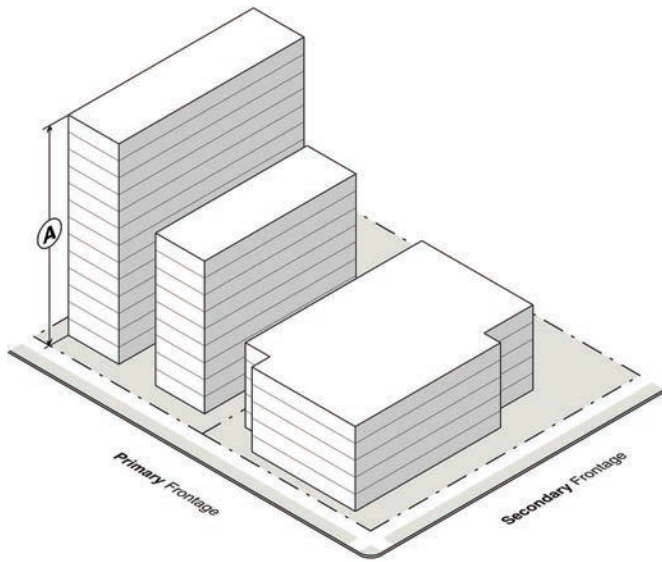
Building Location/ Required Setbacks



Example of an illustration showing building location standards and required setbacks/build-to zones/lines. A form-based code for downtown Keene would likely include similar illustrations to clearly communicate the requirements of the code relative to the disposition of buildings on a lot. *The image above is an example graphic, as no graphics have yet been created for the City of Keene.*

Setbacks within downtown Keene vary from 20 to 30 feet in depth in certain areas, to a consistent zero foot setback around Central Square and along the majority of the Main Street corridor. The Central Business District does not currently require any setback, but certain districts within the downtown boundary, such as the Commerce District (COM) or the Office District, require the establishment of a significant front setback, ranging from 15 to 20 feet. While the predominant visual character of downtown Keene along Main Street is that of a continuous street wall, maintaining a comfortable, walkable, urban environment, there may be need to consider that in other areas downtown, a larger setback is maintained to ensure continued compatibility as new development or redevelopment occurs.

New standards should be drafted as part of the creation of a downtown form-based code, to acknowledge the existing patterns downtown, and to facilitate new development that compliments those patterns. For certain areas, this standard may largely be a continuation of a required minimum setback, while in other areas it may take the form of a required build-to zone. Currently, only one district downtown—BGR—contains a maximum setback, or a build to zone. Establishing a build-to zone can help to ensure that new development is required to meet a more contextually established standard, not just a minimum which may be exceeded. Further, for certain areas of downtown, such as Central Square, the City may want to consider establishing a zero foot build-to line, requiring that the historic street-wall continues in the case of any infill or redevelopment that may occur.



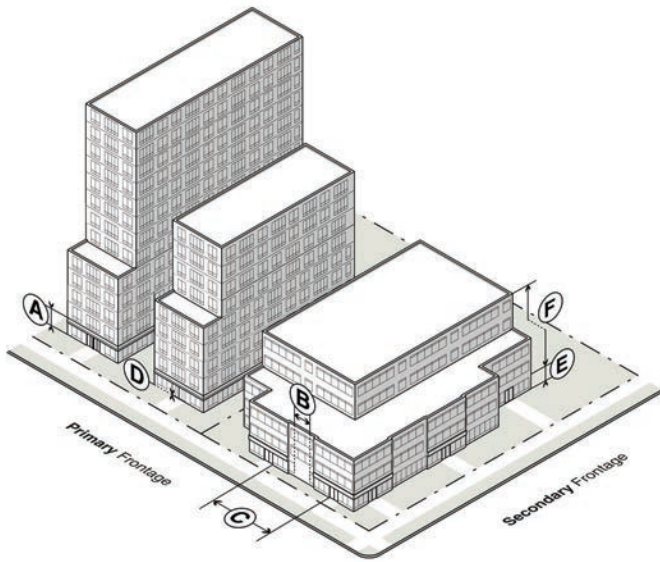
Example of an illustration showing building height standards. A form-based code for downtown Keene would likely include similar illustrations, including both minimum and maximum building heights, where applicable. *The image above is an example graphic, as no graphics have yet been created for the City of Keene.*

Building Heights

Similar to lot sizes and required setbacks, permitted building heights should be tailored to the established pattern of downtown on a granular level. In certain areas, such as around Central Square, this may mean the establishment of a minimum building height, such as 24 feet or two stories, to ensure that the unique sense of enclosure within Central Square isn't diminished should redevelopment occur. It may also mean the establishment of increased permitted heights within certain areas of downtown, such as Community Way or Roxbury Street, where additional height up to seven stories may be appropriate and consistent with the recommendations of Keene's adopted Comprehensive Plan. Where greater heights are permitted, special attention should be paid to the creation of standards that respect the scale and character of adjacent neighborhoods, and provide for adequate transitions between different types of development.

Building height standards will need to respect and compliment the established character of downtown Keene, while allowing new or infill development to attain greater heights where they may be appropriate, in accordance with the goals expressed within the City's Comprehensive Plan. Allowing taller building heights and greater densities of development within downtown will also necessitate the consideration of standards that facilitate adequate transitions from the more intensely developed downtown to residential areas nearby.

Building Activation / Development Character



Example of an illustration showing building activation standards, including required ground floor heights, building entry spacing, blank wall restrictions, etc. Such standards are typically included in form-based coding to ensure existing building forms are complemented as redevelopment occurs. *The image above is an example graphic, as no graphics have yet been created for the City of Keene.*

Development within downtown Keene generally exhibits a walkable form characterized by high levels of ground floor transparency, frequent building entries, variable ground floor heights, and limited blank wall areas. These basic elements of building activation should be regulated through the downtown form-based code, to ensure that new development or redevelopment compliments the key physical characteristics of existing structures and blocks within downtown Keene. These regulations will address elements such as minimum ground floor heights, limitations on blank wall area to maintain visual interest and activity in the pedestrian realm, minimum building entry spacing standards to reinforce the sense of visual and physical permeability between public and private space, minimum transparency requirements on the ground floor and upper stories of buildings, and maximum building entry elevations (or minimum building entry elevations for certain residential building types).

These standards should acknowledge the predominant development character of the sub-districts within Keene's downtown, with the intent of ensuring that new development is permitted architectural and design flexibility, while being subject to a basic set of standards that help to ensure the bulk and form of new structures remains in character with their established context.

Public Realm

The form-based code for downtown Keene is not intended to address downtown's streetscape elements, or to recommend changes to the existing streetscape. However, development standards for downtown may need to include how buildings address the street, to reinforce existing patterns or encourage change where needed.

Main Street in downtown Keene is currently characterized by a generous public realm – 30 to 40 feet in width from moving traffic to the front building face. This depth is able to accommodate a variety of pedestrian elements including wide sidewalks, planted buffer areas with seating, carriage walks, and angle-in parking that provides an effective buffer between pedestrians and traffic as it moves through downtown. However, a number of side-streets branching off of Main Street contain a much more narrow public realm, in some cases six to eight feet from moving vehicles to the front building face. This serves to create a significantly less pedestrian-friendly environment than along Main Street. As such, the City may want to consider the establishment of standards to facilitate the creation of a more generous public realm on these streets. If desired, standards can be incorporated on a sub-district or street-by-street level to require a minimum setback from back-of-curb to the front building face of a structure as redevelopment occurs. Such a standard would allow for incremental change and establishment of a more generous public realm over time as redevelopment may occur. Again, these standards would not directly address the streetscape within downtown, but may allow for incremental change in the configuration of the public realm over time.

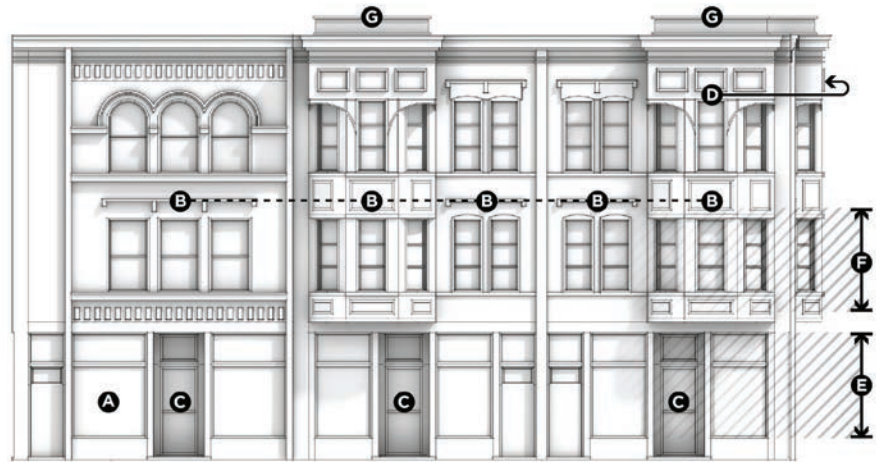
Design Standards

In order to ensure quality infill development and redevelopment in downtown Keene is it recommended that the form-based code incorporate a series of basic design standards. Good design standards for downtown Keene can help to protect the City's valuable physical resources from inappropriate alterations, and maintain the flexibility needed to solve difficult design issues while allowing for creative architecture and innovative new development.

Coupled with tailored dimensional standards, good design standards will result in infill development or redevelopment that maintains City character and reinforces downtown's unique scale and pattern. In downtown, multi-family and townhouse developments (where permitted), as well as commercial development (including mixed-use), should incorporate design standards. Currently, Keene's design standards and guidelines are spread throughout a number of places in the City's Code of Ordinances. It is recommended that the overall UDO rewrite consolidate these standards, and that the downtown form-based code contain its own set of standards, unique to downtown.

These standards would incorporate elements from those already within the Historic District Commission Regulations and the Planning Board Development Standards, but would be specifically tailored to downtown and its sub-districts. The intent is not to control the architecture of new development but rather to address basic building design as it relates to the established character of downtown Keene: façade articulation, fenestration, public entrance design and similar elements. Design standards should also be created to address the "two-front doors" nature of many places within

■ Illustrative graphics can be created to communicate the intent of the design standards, as well as their ease of applicability to a range of architectural styles from classic mixed-use shopfront buildings to more modern structures. *The image to the right is an example graphic, as no graphics have yet been created for the City of Keene.*



downtown that accommodate activity at both the street-facing side of the building, as well as a façade to the rear. Additionally, the City's current design standards and guidelines trend toward subjectivity in evaluation, which can slow down review processes and create unpredictable outcomes for both the City and the development community. New standards should be written so that they are more objective in nature, encouraging quality design while facilitating a streamlined, simpler review process.

Site Development Standards

In addition to the dimensional and design characteristics discussed above, there are numerous additional elements of downtown development that will require consideration in process of creating a new form-based code for downtown Keene. Site development regulations such as parking, landscape, signs, and permitted encroachments will all be addressed within the City's new Unified Development Ordinance, but special attention should be paid to ensuring they work in both the context of the overall UDO for the City, and for the unique conditions downtown.

Preliminary Downtown Parking Recommendations

A number of the existing districts mapped within the new downtown boundary currently contain minimum parking requirements. These areas of downtown should be evaluated to ensure that such parking requirements don't present a disincentive to the reuse of buildings. As a holistic strategy, it is recommended that such minimums be reduced or eliminated within downtown to encourage a continued pattern of dense urban development. If parking minimums are to be maintained, it is recommended that exemptions be evaluated and expanded where possible, and that the shared parking provisions contained within the SEED Overlay be refined and expanded to include the entire downtown area.



Preliminary Downtown Sub-districts

Downtown Keene comprises a series of character areas, or place-types, each possessing a unique development character, scale, and pedestrian orientation. As such, a new form-based code for downtown must acknowledge these places, and build in standards that reinforce or enhance the character of each place. In the form-based code, the places within downtown Keene will become a series of sub-districts, allowing for the regulation of new development at a scale that complements the fine-grained development patterns present within the City of Keene, and downtown in particular.

Based upon initial physical analysis of downtown, and review of the City’s Comprehensive Plan, a series of preliminary subdistricts were identified in advance of the public workshops held in November of 2018. Some of the proposed subdistricts reflected existing development conditions within downtown, and others were more oriented toward implementing the vision for new development in the City’s adopted Comprehensive Plan.

Following the public workshops held in conjunction with Camiros in November of 2018, staff from the Community Development Department worked closely with the City’s Joint Committee of the Planning Board and the City Council’s Planning, Licenses and Development Committee to evaluate and edit the proposed downtown boundary and subdistricts. The Joint Committee dedicated time at its December, January, February and March monthly meetings to discussion on the downtown boundary and subdistricts. These meetings were advertised and open to the public, and a record of meeting minutes is available on the City’s website. The Committee’s work resulted in revised boundaries and names for the subdistricts within the proposed Form Based Zoning District for the Downtown. The seven districts included below, and the map on the following page, reflect the recommendations of the Joint Committee. As the project moves forward into drafting, it is anticipated that these subdistricts will continue to be refined through staff, committee, and public review of the form-based code.

Downtown Core

The heart of downtown Keene. Accommodates the most intense development within downtown, including commercial, residential, civic, cultural and open space uses in a highly walkable, vertically and horizontally mixed-use environment.

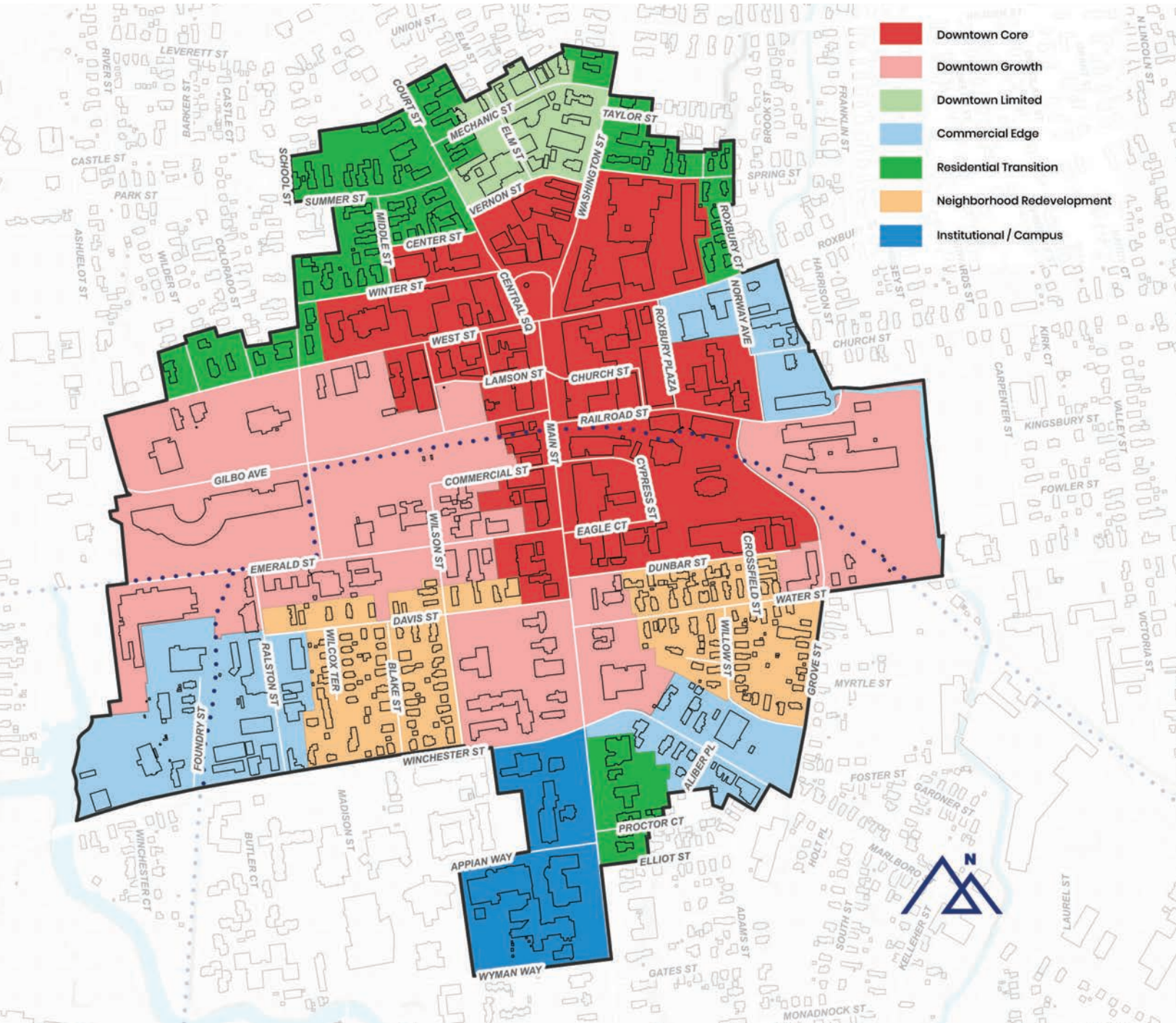
Downtown Growth

Accommodates the reuse of existing structures, as well as new construction of significant size, providing flexibility in both physical form and permitted uses to facilitate the creation of a mixed-use environment that encourages both growth and infill that complements the walkable, urban form of the Downtown Core.

Setbacks	Height (Stories)	Parking Location	Current Zoning Districts Included (as mapped)	Proposed Mix of Uses Permitted
0-5'	Min. 2 Max. 7	Rear	Central Business Central Business Limited	Multi-Family Commercial + Mixed Use (Retail/Service/ Restaurant/Office)
0-15'	Min. 2 Max. 7	Rear	Central Business Central Business Limited Commerce High Density Industrial	Multi-Family Commercial + Mixed Use (Retail/Service/ Restaurant/Office) Light Industrial

	Setbacks	Height (Stories)	Parking Location	Current Zoning Districts Included (as mapped)	Proposed Mix of Uses Permitted
<p>Commercial Edge</p> <p><i>Accommodates a variety of moderately intense commercial development at the edges of downtown Keene, transitioning into lower intensity commercial or residential development. Such development may be more auto-oriented in nature.</i></p>	0-15'	Max. 3	Rear	Central Business Central Business Limited Commerce High Density	Single-Family Multi-Family General Commercial (Retail/Service/ Restaurant/Office)
<p>Residential Transition</p> <p><i>Accommodates a variety of residential, open space, and low intensity commercial uses in a mixed-use environment of attached and detached structures that complement and transition into adjacent existing neighborhoods.</i></p>	10-20'	Max. 3	Rear	Office High Density Residential Preservation Central Business (3 Parcels)	Single-Family Multi-Family Low Intensity Commercial (Office, Limited Retail, Limited Service)
<p>Downtown Limited</p> <p><i>Accommodates areas north of Central Square, allowing for a low-intensity, limited mixture of uses in lower structures, close to the street transitioning northward.</i></p>	5-15'	Max. 4	Rear, Side	Central Business Office	Multi-Family Low Intensity Commercial (Office, Limited Retail, Limited Service)
<p>Neighborhood Redevelopment</p> <p><i>Accommodates a mixture of uses and development forms in line with the City's vision for neighborhoods tucked-in near KSC (Blake Street, Willow Street), including higher-density multi-family redevelopment.</i></p>	15' Min.	Max. 4	Rear, Side	High Density Residential Preservation	Single-Family Multi-Family Mixed-Use (Office, limited retail, limited service)
<p>Institutional/Campus</p> <p><i>Accommodates the unique form of Keene State College, allowing for incorporation into the downtown zoning in a manner acknowledging the Campus' relationship to the remainder of the downtown.</i></p>	30' Min.	Max. 5	Rear, Side, Front	High Density	Institutional

Downtown Subdistricts



Intentionally Blank

From Concepts to Zoning: Next Steps

The preliminary approaches and subdistricts presented in this Technical Review and Approaches Report will be used to establish a basic set of physical and use-based parameters that will be used to create the regulations of the form-based code. These approaches will be edited and refined, and will be expanded into draft code language with further development of dimensional, design, and use standards that address both current development conditions as well as the community's desires for the future of downtown Keene.

A first draft of the form-based code will then be prepared, incorporating many of these initial approaches as well as refined concepts and new ideas brought forth during public review of the Technical Review and Approaches Report. This draft will include a full set of dimensional, design, and use standards, as well as regulations or references to the Unified Development Ordinance tying to site development issues such as parking, landscaping and signage. Special attention will be paid to ensure coordination and alignment between the approaches being employed by the overall UDO rewrite process and the form-based code process as it relates to issues of use and site development.

Following the first draft of the form-based code, there will be additional opportunities for public review and feedback, as the draft is edited and refined, moving through a public process in coordination with the City's Unified Development Ordinance. Further information will be provided as these two efforts progress.



Keene, NH | Downtown Zoning Initiative

Technical Review

+ Approaches Report