

THE USE OF COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING IN BARRE AND BENNINGTON  
REVITALIZATION PROJECTS

by

Erica Rumball-Petre

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the economic, physical, social, and stakeholder engagement strategies used during revitalization projects in Barre and Bennington, Vermont. Revitalization projects are used to reinvigorate communities whose economies, infrastructure, and quality of life have deteriorated (Morckel, 2014). Revitalization projects differ significantly from community to community. However, the literature asserts that city planners and engaged citizens must address the same critical components if the revitalization project is to have a lasting impact (Morckel, 2014, Rupp et al., 2019). The use of economic, physical, social, and stakeholder engagement strategies is termed “comprehensive planning.” Planners who neglect to address these critical areas risk investing time and energy into a project that does not truly meet citizens’ needs. The research questions asked 1.) How are planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington using economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts? 2.) How are planners and citizens combining social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts in Barre and Bennington?

Using the case study method, the experiences of revitalization participants in each community as well as city planning documents revealed the ways in which planners and citizens used comprehensive planning methods in Barre and Bennington, Vermont.

*Keywords:* revitalization, comprehensive planning, stakeholder engagement

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated first to the Lord Jesus Christ. Finishing this degree has truly been an act of God. Several times throughout this process, I wondered if continuing my education was the right decision. However, after each course, grade, or phase in my dissertation research, I was always grateful, and slightly relieved, to find that God had once again brought me through to the next stage in the journey. I am thankful for the divine guidance and protection that I have encountered in my life and humbly acknowledge that, without Christ, all the milestones that we chase are meaningless. I pray that I will always remember this time as an example of God's strength and guidance in my life.

Secondly, this dissertation is dedicated to my family. When I was very young, my mother, Charlotte, made a commitment to give me and my brothers the best education possible. Homeschooling us despite opposition and the extra work it required of her, my mother encouraged us to pursue our education to the fullest and to avoid distractions that would derail us from our goals. For anything I accomplish, I am indebted to her. My father and brothers have provided their insights throughout this process and have patiently listened to my grumblings over the various challenges I have encountered. My father, Bruce, encouraged me to consider community revitalization as the topic of my research, and my brothers, Jonah and Matthew, have been Liberty University students alongside me. Over the last several years, we have sacrificed leisure time and put aside other interests in pursuit of our education. Once we are all finished, I hope that we can spend some quality time together...finally! Jonah and Matthew are brothers, and young men, of the highest quality. I am thankful for their encouragement and support.

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I would like to take the time to appreciate Dr. Ronald Hy and Dr. Michael Collins. They have both spent countless hours reading and critiquing my work and, at this point, have probably read my dissertation more times than any sane person should have to do. Early in my public administration coursework, I had courses with both Dr. Hy and Dr. Collins. I was impressed by their dedication to students and their expertise in the field and knew that they would be excellent advisers and resources as I began the dissertation process.

Throughout the dissertation process, both Dr. Hy and Dr. Collins supported me with the various challenges I encountered. They also encouraged me to make my work the very best that it could be. I have benefited from their commitment to excellence and from their ability to provide support while allowing me to think through the process for myself. I could not have asked for a more supportive and expert committee.

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## CHAPTER I

### **Background and Context of the Study**

#### **Historical Context**

Vermont community revitalization has the potential to reinvigorate towns that have deteriorated economically, socially, and physically. Since the initial establishment of the Urban Renewal Program as a part of the Title I Housing Act of 1949, community revitalization has existed in communities under a variety of titles and has assumed a wide range of meanings. In 1949, after industrialization created tenement neighborhoods that were unsafe, unsightly, and unsanitary, revitalization became a way to improve slum neighborhoods (Zhang & Fang, 2004). However, since that period, the meaning of the term “community revitalization” has broadened beyond its original connotation. Hashim et al. (2017, 121) describes the community, or urban, revitalization process as “restoring the culture of the prestigious past while improving the lifestyle of its present and future population.” The restoration of historic cultural sites, the rehabilitation of failing infrastructure, and the planning for future growth are all crucial elements of the revitalization process. These strategies add value to a community and can increase residents’ pride and sense of place.

Revitalization efforts are valuable because they have the potential to impact the economic, physical, and social aspects of a community. For example, communities that have invested in historic preservation or in the conversion of historic buildings into functional spaces have noted an increase in property values, positive social change, and the establishment of new neighborhoods (Jayantha & Yung, 2018). Revitalization’s effects manifest in multiple ways:



economic, physical, and social. Indeed, it is the combination of efforts in each of these areas that makes revitalization powerful.

This revitalization of the “downtown” section of American cities and towns is worth the investment. Birch (2005), as cited in Ryeborg-Webster & Kinahan (2014), states that “between 1970 and 2000, downtowns benefited from an 8 percent increase in households, a doubling of the homeownership rate, an increase in racial and ethnic diversity, and an influx of young professionals and residents with high educational attainment.” This phenomenon, termed the “New American City,” connects to revitalization efforts that emphasize both the preservation of historic buildings and the establishment of usable public spaces and amenities (Ryeborg-Webster & Kinahan, 2014). As observed by Ryu et al. (2018), the strong link between social capital and physical and economic growth highlights the need to implement revitalization efforts from three fronts: the economic, the social, and the physical. A triangulated approach, according to Jacobus and Hickey (n.d.), can lead to revitalization projects that result in enduring change. For the study, “comprehensive planning” is the name for approaching revitalization from economic, social, and physical standpoints. Comprehensive planning includes the essential elements for a high-functioning community revitalization project.

### **Social Context**

The implementation of community revitalization projects has the potential to positively affect the lives and livelihoods of Vermonters. At the present time, Vermont towns face significant challenges in terms of economic decline, social well-being, and aging infrastructure. Revitalization can support Vermont as it strives to compete locally and globally. Schramm (2020, 63) writes, “To survive and thrive in modern market democracies, cities must be resilient. Above all, they must be able to respond to transformational changes in the structure of the

economy, to the creative destruction of technological innovation, to evolving labor markets, and to the competition of a globalized economy.” Currently, Vermont is falling behind in terms of technological innovation, infrastructure, and workforce development. Growth in these areas is critical for Vermont to be an attractive state in which to reside and work. According to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development and the Vermont Comprehensive Economic and Development Strategy Committee (2016), the state faces significant economic, physical, and social challenges that interfere with its ability to compete locally and globally. Vermont communities must use revitalization to build resiliency and to respond to technological and economic changes. Current infrastructure, for example, needs revitalization because it is outdated and served the needs of the previous generations. It is now inadequate for modern demands. If Vermont is to have the technological flexibility to meet changing workforces and economic demands, its communities must revitalize.

In addition to failing infrastructure, Vermont also faces economic and quality of life concerns. The state’s lagging population growth rate and increase in the percentage of aging citizens presents an economic hardship to the citizens who remain in Vermont. According to the University of Vermont (2021), “Vermont's aging population and declining or flat population growth in most of the state's 14 counties is one of the top challenges facing the state.” Also, Vermont struggles to retain younger workers who, though educated through Vermont’s public education system, often choose to reside in places with more opportunities. The state, therefore, has a small tax base in comparison with other states and does not have the capacity to raise sufficient funds to initiate the needed upgrades in infrastructure. In addition, a deficiency in affordable housing, a growing substance abuse climate, and struggles with equitable access to

healthcare are spurring a deterioration in the quality of life for Vermonters (Agency of Commerce and Community Development, 2016).

As Vermonters face difficulties in terms of physical infrastructure and social well-being, Vermont businesses are also experiencing strains. This issue stems, in part, from the business attraction and retention strategies offered by nearby states. For example, New Hampshire does not collect income or sales tax, and New York offers significant tax incentives to businesses willing to open in the state (Agency of Commerce and Community Development, 2016). According to Bartholomae and Schoenberg (2019, 15), “a reduced fiscal base and financial bottlenecks that slow down the investment in local infrastructure necessary for the improvement of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in urban areas” is a dilemma faced by rural communities and cities. This is evident in the condition of Vermont communities. The process is cyclical. A reduced tax base diminishes the capacity for infrastructure and economic investment which causes businesses to go elsewhere. This results in a shrinking fiscal foundation. Revitalization can help break this cycle in Vermont communities.

In response to these economic, social, and physical challenges, Vermont communities have implemented revitalization projects. These projects have addressed preservation of historic sites, construction of affordable housing, and attraction of new businesses to the downtown areas. However, for revitalization to be successful, planners and citizens need to complete revitalization work on three fronts: economic, social, and physical. The strategic plan that a community develops must simultaneously address the economic, social, and physical concerns that Vermont towns face. Revitalization plans must also include internal and external stakeholders in the revitalization process. The descriptive case study examines how planners and

citizens have used comprehensive planning in revitalization projects in Barre and Bennington, Vermont, and considers generalizations that can arise from the use of comprehensive planning.

As a result of this research, Vermont towns that are considering revitalization will have information about the worth, usefulness, and utility of comprehensive planning. They may use this information to evaluate their own revitalization plans to ensure that they have addressed economic, social, and physical concerns simultaneously and have included all stakeholders. Understanding the utility of the comprehensive approach can support planners at the outset of their work because they will be able to initiate a plan with a framework for designing the revitalization. Beginning revitalization with a comprehensive foundation can save planners time and funds and can support them in engaging stakeholders in the right direction. Having a clear concept of the revitalization project supports smooth implementation.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem addressed by the study is the value of the comprehensive planning methods used in Barre and Bennington, Vermont, and the use of Morckel's four essential components and six essential pairings in revitalization. This study considers how planners and citizens can plan for economic development and combine social, physical and stakeholder engagement strategies. The study exists to further refine the link amongst economic, social, physical, and stakeholder elements in the revitalization process.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the study is to describe the comprehensive revitalization strategies that planners and citizens are using in Vermont. Comprehensive planning is defined as planning that addresses the physical, social, and economic needs of a community and includes stakeholders in the process. The theory guiding this study is Morckel's Four Components and Six Essential

Pairings (2014) which identifies the elements necessary for lasting and successful community change. Morckel's concepts (2014) are instrumental to this study because she advocates the need for the comprehensive approach as opposed to revitalization plans that only address one critical area or lack clear goals.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is significant to the literature on and the field of revitalization because it investigates the utility of the comprehensive planning approach in Vermont communities. The comprehensive planning approach described by the study appears in theoretical constructs for revitalization. Morckel (2014) lays the foundation for the comprehensive planning approach. The four components of this framework are the physical component, the social component, the internal component, and the external component. The model includes these essential components as well as the six ways to combine these components. Morckel's (2014) framework asserts that planners cannot address these components in isolation. Rather, if any of the components are to be successful, planners must combine revitalization strategies; thus, she establishes the need for a comprehensive approach. The six essential pairings of these components establish that revitalization is process with opportunity for overlapping strategies. Addressing one project often means that planners must address other areas as well.

To result in lasting change, Morckel (2014) recommends pairing

- Physical and social elements
- Physical elements and internal stakeholders
- Physical elements and external stakeholders
- Social elements and internal stakeholders
- Social elements and external stakeholders; and,
- Internal and external stakeholders (p. 277).

The use of the pairings is valuable to the framework because the planner and other stakeholders can ensure that internal and external stakeholders are both included and that they have addressed

the four essential elements. Morckel (2014) notes that a deficiency in the number of strategies for a given pairing could cause problems later in the revitalization process. She also asserts that planners can often trace unsatisfactory outcomes in revitalization back to a deficiency in the strategies used for one or more pairings.

The study builds on the existing theoretical framework by investigating how the Vermont planners and citizens are using the comprehensive approach. In addition to Morckel's four essential components, this study considers economic planning within the framework of the comprehensive approach. Although Morckel does not include economics as one of her essential components, it is integrally related to revitalization (Birch, 2005). Thus, the study contributes conclusions on the value of considering economic, social, and physical issues during planning.

### **Research Questions**

1. How are planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington using economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts?
2. How are planners and citizens combining social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts in Barre and Bennington?

These research questions investigate how Vermont citizens and planners are addressing revitalization in their communities. The theoretical bedrock for comprehensive planning lies in Morckel's (2014) work with revitalization components and the pairings of those components. Although Morckel does not specifically address economic components, other theories, such as Community Economic Development theory, justify its inclusion in this research.

### Definitions of Terms

**Community:** a village or city bound by physical space and local government that makes decisions together and shares common economic, social, and physical hardships and opportunities

- Indicators: How will one know that an area qualifies as a community?

High Level (3)	Medium Level (2)	Low Level (1)
A village or city bound by physical space and local government	An area that may share space but is not organized into a local municipality	An unincorporated area
A village or city that shares decision-making and experiences common economic, social, and physical hardships and opportunities	An area that has some common social, physical, and economic connections but does not actively come together for decision making purposes	An area that does not share decision-making, hardships, or opportunities

**Comprehensive Planning:** planning that addresses the physical, social, and economic needs of a community. Comprehensive planning must address all three areas and include both internal and external stakeholders.

- Indicators: How will one know that comprehensive planning is being implemented?

High Level (3)	Medium Level (2)	Low Level (1)
Planning that addresses the physical, social, and economic needs of a community.	Planning that addresses two of the critical areas.	Planning that only addresses one of the three critical areas.
Planning that includes both internal and external stakeholders.	Planning that includes one group of stakeholders.	Planning that includes no or limited access for stakeholders.

**Physical Component:** “refers to the provision and maintenance of traditional physical planning elements such as infrastructure and housing” (Morckel, 2014, p. 277). The physical component is either/both infrastructural and aesthetic. Neighborhoods that have decided to revitalize must consider this element because aging or dilapidated infrastructure has the potential to stifle growth. Current residents may relocate, while prospective residents may decide to settle in a community with pleasing aesthetics and updated housing (Morckel, 2014).

- Indicators: How will one know that a particular revitalization goal addresses a physical component?

High Level (3)	Medium Level (2)	Low Level (1)
Change that addresses infrastructure, aesthetic, or housing needs.	Change that addresses two critical areas.	Change that addresses one critical area.

**Revitalization:** the restoration of a public space or infrastructure (i.e., a park or library) or the establishment/restoration of private property or infrastructure (i.e., a business) that in some way contributes to the social, physical, or economic well-being of a community and its members

- Indicators: How will one know that revitalization has occurred?

High Level (3)	Medium Level (2)	Low Level (1)
A public or privately owned space is being improved to such a degree that it benefits the social, physical, and economic well-being of a community and its members.	A public or privately owned space is being improved to such a degree that it benefits two of the three critical areas (i.e., social, and physical well-being but not economic)	A public or privately owned space is being improved to such a degree that it benefits only one of the three critical areas.

**Revitalization Plan:** the document specifying the goals of the project, those responsible for fulfilling those goals, and the anticipated impact shared with all stakeholders

High Level (3)	Medium Level (2)	Low Level (1)
Document specifies goals, actors, and impact of the project	Document only specifies two elements	Document specifies one or zero elements
Shared with all stakeholders (internal and external) in a user-friendly format.	Shared with only one group of stakeholders or with both groups in an unfriendly format	Not shared with stakeholders

**Social Component:** considers “aspects such as increasing wellness, family-ties, community pride, place attachments, and entrepreneurial spirit in a neighborhood” (Morckel, 2014, p. 276). The social component is crucial to the revitalization process. If revitalization attempts do not consider citizen well-being and attitude, the revitalization of the physical component will not translate to long-lasting change. Pervasive issues such as inequitable educational opportunities and crime will persist (Morckel, 2014).

- Indicators: How will one know that a particular revitalization goal addresses a social component?



High Level (3)	Medium Level (2)	Low Level (1)
A revitalization goal or target that addresses wellness, family ties, community pride, place attachments, and entrepreneurial spirit.	A revitalization goal or target that addresses wellness, community pride, and entrepreneurship.	A revitalization goal or target that addresses one of the three critical areas (i.e., wellness).

### **Stakeholder**

- **Internal:** an individual or a business entity that resides in the designated community. Internal stakeholders are residents, business owners, or local government figures (select board, town manager or mayor etc.) affected by potential changes during revitalization. They are stakeholders with a direct connection (Morckel, 2014). Morckel (2014) emphasized the critical role that these direct stakeholders must play in the process. If stakeholder input is not solicited, the revitalization efforts may encounter significant opposition from stakeholders who believe the process is being forced on them. The internal component must be considered not only to ensure the influx of diverse ideas but also to establish a base of support for the proposed changes (Morckel, 2014).
  - Indicators: How will one establish that a person or entity qualifies as an internal stakeholder?

High Level (3)	Medium Level (2)	Low Level (1)
Individual or business entity that resides in designated community and are connected economically, socially, and physically to the revitalization.	Individual or business entity that resides in designated community and is connected to the revitalization in at least one of the critical areas.	Individual or business entity that does not reside in designated community or does reside but is not connected to the revitalization.

- **External:** “refers to entities such as governments, charities, financial institutions, and foundations that are not internal to the neighborhood” (Morckel, 2014, p. 277). These groups are essential to the support and maintenance of revitalization projects because they bring in both outside expertise and financial resources. Although citizens and business owners can make valuable contributions to revitalization efforts, they need institutions in the external component to bolster their efforts (Morckel, 2014).
  - Indicators: How will one establish that a person or entity qualifies as an external stakeholder?

High Level (3)	Medium Level (2)	Low Level (1)
A government, charity, or financial entity that does not fall under the category of internal stakeholder but contributes expertise and resources.	A government, charity, or financial entity that does not fall under the category of internal stakeholder but contributes either expertise or resources.	A government, charity, or financial entity that is an internal stakeholder OR does not contribute expertise or resources.

## **Summary**

The study builds upon revitalization literature to explore the potential of comprehensive planning. Drawing from foundational revitalization theories such as Busy Streets Theory, Morckel's Pairings and Components, Community Economic Development Theory, and research on historic preservation, the study examines Vermont revitalization practices in two Vermont case studies. These cases highlight strategies that can help Vermont planners be purposeful and successful during the planning and implementation phases of revitalization.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

The chapter reviews literature related to community revitalization and comprehensive planning. The study's central research question focuses on how citizens and planners in Barre and Bennington are using comprehensive planning during revitalization. Comprehensive planning is planning that addresses the physical, social, and economic needs of a community and includes both internal and external stakeholders. The studies reviewed in this chapter focus on physical, social, and economic elements of revitalization as well as on stakeholder engagement. The current study builds upon the literature by investigating how Vermont communities are using these elements of revitalization. It also considers how combining strategies can affect revitalization outcomes.

To investigate the elements of comprehensive planning that appear in the literature, Morckel's (2014) theoretical framework presents as a foundational illustration of comprehensive planning. Busy Streets Theory, because of its emphasis on the deep connections between physical and social revitalization, also connects to Vermont revitalization. Out of interest in the contributions that improvements in infrastructure and aesthetics make in revitalization, the study explores the physical element of Morckel's (2014) framework and the relationship between historic preservation and urban development. The dichotomy between preservation and development is of particular importance to Vermont communities because Vermont possesses a rich physical heritage that is rapidly deteriorating.

In addition, because Morckel's (2014) framework lacks information about economic revitalization, the study considers economic strategies such as Community Economic

Development (CED). Because comprehensive planning necessitates the inclusion of stakeholders, the study also investigates Soen's (1981) research on citizen participation in comprehensive planning. Research of the literature began with searches for scholarly sources using keywords: revitalization, urban renewal, community development, and comprehensive planning. The review begins with an exploration of community revitalization through Morckel's Theoretical Framework.

### **Morckel's Theoretical Framework**

According to Morckel (2014), there are four essential elements of comprehensive planning in revitalization: social improvements, physical improvements, and internal and external stakeholders' participation. Morckel (2014) posits that it is the comprehensive combination of these elements in six essential pairings that leads to enduring change after revitalization. She also notes that failed projects have their roots in a neglected pairing. Morckel does not address economic development but instead assumes that economic development will be the natural result of progress made by the following four components.

#### **The Social Component**

Morckel describes the social element of revitalization as "planning for human needs and emotions. The social component includes aspects such as increasing wellness, family-ties, community pride, place attachments, and entrepreneurial spirit in a neighborhood," (2014, 76). In remediating social problems in a neighborhood, the coordination of activities in the town center or downtown district is a popular starting point. Morckel (2014) notes that failing to consider the social component in downtown revitalization can result in plans that do not achieve the desired impact.

In addition, according to Hospers (2017), the revitalization of the downtown area must be more than simply inventing and coordinating activities for citizens to enjoy. Instead, it must arise from a deep understanding of the social needs and behaviors of residents and visitors. This is an important distinction that Morckel fails to clarify in her discussion on the social component. Although she emphasizes the importance of stakeholder participation in her discussion of internal and external elements, the process for gathering a deep understanding of citizen needs does not appear. Morckel does list strategies for combining the social element with internal and external stakeholders. These strategies include forming a neighborhood watch group, planting a community garden, and the institution of community potluck suppers. These activities could be of interest. However, Morckel does not discuss how she would explore whether citizens wanted or needed these activities. Even if there were a community event every night, they could be useless if citizens are not interested in attending.

If planners do not take time to study the social component of their community and do not base their work on citizen-driven data, they will have ignored the element that will make their project meaningful. Community spaces may be aesthetically appealing, and activities may be planned in excess; however, the underlying issues will remain unless they are specifically addressed, and activities are of no effect if citizens are not interested. Evaluating Morckel's social component demonstrates that, if the changes do not align with the social needs and behaviors of citizens, the impact of the project will be short-lived.

Investigating Vermont communities that have engaged in this work is instructive to other communities seeking to revitalize and contributes to the literature that emphasizes the need to do so. Morckel's work on the social component impacts this study because it gives clear parameters for the definition of the "social component." Having a clear understanding of what the social

component is and how it functions in a community is essential to being able to describe its reform during the revitalization process. In addition, Morckel's description of the social component impacts this study in terms of its establishment as one of the elements of comprehensive planning. Morckel lends authority to the role that the social element plays in the lives of citizens and gives it a platform amidst the priorities of revitalization. Her justification of its importance ensures that planners cannot ignore the impact that social revitalization has on citizens.

### **The Physical Component**

According to Morckel (2014, 76), "the physical component of the framework refers to the provision and maintenance of traditional physical planning elements such as infrastructure and housing." Certainly, this is a cornerstone of revitalization and an essential element in the comprehensive planning process. This study considers the physical element and the barriers that appear in revitalizing infrastructure. Morckel includes strategies for physical improvements such as installing new sewer lines and creating parks and cultural art spaces. However, what is absent from her discussion is a specific discussion on the origin of the needed funding. In her pairing of the physical with the external, Morckel lists city home improvement grants and federal money for demolishing old buildings. However, cities often struggle to find funding to distribute improvement grants, and federal money has its attendant mandates and regulations. Morckel does not discuss how planners can motivate citizens to fund their own improvements, if indeed citizens have the means to do so. This framework is lacking specific and actionable steps that real communities can take to pay for their initiatives. Investigating Vermont communities' actions regarding the maintenance of the physical component is valuable because it provides concrete steps that make sense to communities who experience comparable financial difficulties.

Morckel's description of the physical component impacts this study because it establishes the need for pairing physical improvements with all other components. It is Morckel's work that establishes the value of integrating physical improvements in every layer of revitalization. This study uses Morckel's work to explore how Barre and Bennington are using physical improvements and to investigate how physical changes are paired with the social, internal, and external elements.

### **Internal Stakeholders**

Morckel describes the internal component as "residents, business owners, and other persons who have a direct stake in the success or failure of the neighborhood in question," (2014, 77). Although Morckel (2014) lists a variety of means by which internal support might manifest (painting property, adopting vacant lots, opening a soup kitchen), she does not explore how to solicit this support, particularly when stakeholders bring a diverse array of perspectives to the planning process. Funding, again, is a concern. Even though Morckel decries the negative reception of revitalization that city leadership forces on citizens, many of the suggestions made in her work seem "top down" because they do not include systems for accessing stakeholder views. In contrast, Soen (1981, 105) writes that planners should not plan "for" citizens but rather "by them and with them." This idea is not new; however, it is more difficult to implement in practice than in theory.

In the study of Vermont community sites, it is important to note whether revitalization is happening "with or for" citizens. Morckel's work on internal stakeholders clearly identifies relevant parties and establishes their roles and rights during the process. Morckel's work helps determine whether the input of all internal stakeholders is solicited and then used. It can also

frame an exploration of the ways in which internal stakeholders are contributing to the revitalization process in Vermont.

### **External Stakeholders**

According to Morckel (2014, 77), the external component “refers to entities such as governments, charities, financial institutions, and foundations that are not internal to the neighborhood.” External stakeholders are necessary because they typically bring legal and financial resources that support the success of the revitalization. However, such aid may come with undesirable or cumbersome mandates and regulations. One strength of Morckel’s (2014) work with the external component is her recognition of the comparative powerlessness that citizens experience when faced with issues that necessitate a substantial level of funding to solve. This powerlessness leads to decreased engagement in the revitalization process.

Morckel’s work concerning external stakeholders is useful to this study because it defines the external stakeholder and then provides avenues through which external stakeholders can offer support. It also considers the wide range of ways in which external stakeholders combine with internal, physical, and social components. Morckel’s description of external stakeholders supports Vermont revitalization goals by justifying the inclusion of external stakeholders in revitalization plans. She also includes a variety of ideas for including external stakeholders in the process. Her work supports an evaluation of whether Vermont communities are accessing all their available resources as they plan to revitalize.

### **Evaluation of Morckel’s Framework**

Morckel (2014) does a creditable job of describing in detail the elements that revitalizations must consider if they are to be successful. In her six essential pairings of the four elements, she has included a plethora of potential community projects to empower citizens in



their revitalization journey. Her basic recognition that revitalization must happen with attention to all these elements is an important contribution to the literature because it reinforces the idea that revitalization in one area is simply insufficient to spur lasting change.

However, one major weakness of Morckel's work that the study addresses is the absence of attention to the economic element of comprehensive revitalization. Morckel notes the absence of an economic component in her work; however, she justifies this by stating that "Economic development is not included as a separate component because economic development could result from the usage of the framework," (Morckel, 2014, 278). Leaving economic development to chance, unfortunately, is not enough to ensure that a revitalization plan will work. Since plans can be costly and time-consuming to develop, it is essential that the plan include strategies for economic development at the outset of the project.

The significance of Morckel's (2014) work is that she combines the four essential components and six essential pairings into one comprehensive package. However, the economic element during revitalization needs further exploration. To expand Morckel's work, the study specifically examines economic revitalization strategies in Vermont towns. Interviews conducted and documents analyzed focus on how planners are spurring economic revitalization. The information gathered about economic strategies contributes valuable information to existing theory. It answers the question: How can Vermont communities ensure economic development in their revitalization efforts?

The study further builds upon Morckel's work because it investigates how citizens and planners use the four components and six essential pairings in real-world situations. A significant limitation of Morckel's work is that it explores the four components solely in a theoretical sense. Although initial theory is important, Morckel's work needs further study in real locations to gain

credence with planners. Through investigating how the four components operate in Vermont communities, the study supports Morckel's assertions and lays the groundwork for future research on revitalization strategies.

In addition to exploring economic strategies and the four components in real-world scenarios, the study also investigates how planners determined the changes most useful to residents and business owners. This is one area that Morckel (2014) does not address. Although she establishes the importance of planning for citizens, she does not delve into how citizens communicate their needs. Through interviews and community planning documents, the study investigates how planners solicit input for changes that are in the best interest of citizens.

### **Connection to the Current Study**

The crux of Morckel's argument is that the four components must occur together to result in lasting change. Therefore, this study also explores whether Vermont communities are using the components in conjunction with each other. Morckel's work provides an evaluative framework for the comprehensive implementation of revitalization plans. Interview data and planning documents in Barre and Bennington can align with Morckel's work to see whether they are using comprehensive planning. Morckel argues that it is more than the presence of these elements that makes revitalization successful. Instead, it is the pairing of these elements that contributes to the project's success. Morckel (2014) also states that planners can trace failures in the implementation of a revitalization plan to a deficiency in the pairing phase and can remedy issues by bolstering the strategies supporting the pairing. Although Morckel does not include economic development, the four components and six pairings can show the strengths and weaknesses in Barre's and Bennington's planning initiatives.

### **Busy Streets Theory**

According to Rupp et al. (2019), “Busy streets theory focuses on the process of creating safe and empowering social contexts that are characterized by observable activity and social features of neighborhoods... Social features of busy streets include the positive neighborhood perceptions, social and organizational linkages, and behaviors that residents need to promote neighborhood connectedness and improve neighborhood conditions.” The converse of Busy Streets Theory is Broken Windows Theory, the perception that vacant lots and dilapidated buildings decrease social activity and increase the likelihood of crime (Aiyer, 2015). Busy Streets Theory posits that “busy streets” generate a mutually beneficial social environment where residents feel a sense of safety, connection, and common purpose (Aiyer, 2015). When asked about potential improvements that would encourage them to engage in downtown interactions more frequently, residents in Flint, Michigan, stated that reducing crime and increasing the number of things to do were their highest priorities (Morckel & Rybarczyk, 2015). Both responses are social concerns that Busy Streets theory attempts to address to meet citizens’ needs during the revitalization process.

Rupp et al. (2019, 90) state that, “Busy Streets theory predicts that engaging residents in physical revitalization of neighborhoods will facilitate community empowerment through the development of sense of community, social cohesion, collective efficacy, social capital, and behavioral action. Establishing safe environments fosters positive street activity, which reinforces neighborhood social relationships.” The citizen empowerment aspect of Busy Streets theory connects to Morckel’s (2014) emphasis on the social element of revitalization. Rupp et al. (2019) establish that residents must drive revitalization because they have a direct connection to the results of the project.

## **Evaluation of Busy Streets Theory**

The literature affirms the value of including citizens in the revitalization process (Rupp et al., 2019) (Aiyer, 2015) (Morckel, 2014). However, Rupp et al.'s (2019) discussion about citizen empowerment theory elevates the role of the citizen to the most significant element of revitalization. This contrasts with Morckel's work because Morckel (2014) posits that all the components are of equal importance. Indeed, since the study explores planning as a comprehensive process, it is logical that the economic, social, and physical components are each necessary to the success of the project without one element dominating the others. Rupp et al. (2019) acknowledge that citizen empowerment alone cannot necessarily overcome structural issues such as concentrated poverty and access to resources. It is therefore the responsibility of urban planners to consider potential connections to external stakeholders that can contribute the capital needed for revitalization.

A second concern regarding Busy Streets theory is the equitable access to participation. Since citizens, according to this theory, are the fundamental drivers of the revitalization process, it is important to ensure that all citizens have access to the ability to contribute their perspectives. Busy Streets theory does not include a discussion of strategies or series of indicators that show that planners have included all stakeholders in the process. It also does not discuss ways to engage stakeholders that are reluctant to participate. Certainly, revitalization must consider citizen needs in a meaningful way (Hosper, 2017). Plans must build on a thorough understanding of which changes will be most useful to citizens. However, if planners create "busy streets" using only the ideas from citizens most inclined to participate, the resulting revitalization will not reflect true citizen empowerment.

Rupp et al. (2019) do acknowledge that deteriorating buildings and abandoned public spaces are not the only predictors of high neighborhood crime rates. In fact, crime rates increase when the area has significant outsider traffic. Restoring buildings, coordinating neighborhood activities, and empowering citizens may not be enough to ensure lasting change. Economic strategies and funding sources must be integrated into the process to address socioeconomic status issues that may be at the core of deteriorating public spaces. The exploration of comprehensive planning provides important insights into the benefits of combining economic, social, and physical improvements.

Busy Streets Theory (Rupp et al., 2019) posits that physical improvements spur social development. At each site, the study considers physical improvement in each community and shows the theoretical connection between physical and social improvements. Information from these cases is used to consider how effective physical improvements were at furthering social and economic development.

### **Connection to the Current Study**

Busy Streets Theory focuses on the connection between physical and social improvements. In terms of the study's research questions, Busy Streets Theory provides a lens through which to examine physical and social improvements. It impacts the study because it corroborates Morckel's work and establishes the necessity of physical improvements in the revitalization process. Since one of the research questions asks about how Morckel's pairings are being used, this theory can be used to identify physical and social pairings in real projects. This theory is pertinent to the Vermont revitalization investigation because Vermont towns struggle significantly with aging infrastructure and historic, but deteriorating, buildings. Busy Streets

Theory contributes an understanding of the physical challenges that towns face and offers strategies for improving communities physically.

### **Historic Preservation and Comprehensive Planning**

Of particular interest to Vermont communities is the connection between historic preservation and comprehensive planning. Historic preservation falls under Morckel's definition of the physical or infrastructural components of her revitalization framework but also has strong ties to economic and social development. Vermont possesses potential economic resources in terms of historic buildings and sites. A review of the literature concerning historic preservation provides insights into how preservation as a physical element addresses the social and economic elements of comprehensive planning in Vermont.

According to Ryeborg-Webster & Kinahan (2013), preservation and urban renewal have historically been at odds. Urban renewal was antagonistic toward the preservation of the nation's historic places. However, after the publication of *With Heritage So Rich* in 1965, which discussed the negative aspects of destruction of historic buildings, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act. This act spurred a shift in the way planners viewed historic spaces and established guidelines for future historic preservation. With federal support of preservation through tax incentives and the establishment of local historic districts, historic buildings became resources rather than liabilities. In 1978, the Supreme Court supported historic districts in *Penn Central Transportation Co. v. New York City*. This reframing of preservation as an asset-building strategy has important implications for Vermont.

According to Ryeborg-Webster & Kinahan (2013, 124), "Studies about downtown revitalization and heritage tourism demonstrate that preservation is being used to support urban economic and community development, while calling for more conscious integration that

considers issues of sustainability and equity.” The use of historic preservation is an example of comprehensive planning because it includes physical, economic, and social elements. It is concerned with using restoration of the physical infrastructure to spur economic and social (community) development. According to Zahirovic-Herbert and Chatterjee (2011, 369), “Obtaining an official historic designation to further preservation can generate a wide range of economic benefits through the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic properties, the attraction of heritage tourism visits and improvement of a neighborhood’s character.” As such, the social, economic, and physical benefits of preservation can have a significant effect on Vermont revitalization efforts.

One criticism of historic preservation as a comprehensive planning approach is the risk of gentrification of a neighborhood. Gentrification is the process of removing residents of lower socioeconomic status as a neighborhood improves in terms of infrastructure (Ammon, 2018). This displacement occurs as property values and costs rise in the improved area. Certainly, this process is in opposition to the inclusion of all stakeholders as Morckel (2014) advocates. A study completed by Coulson and Leichenko (2004), however, found that there was no evidence supporting historical designations as a cause of gentrification.

In terms of comprehensive planning for revitalization, planners must not shy away from using historical preservation as a means for spurring revitalization. Although planners might see historic preservation as displacing low-income residents, it behooves planners to investigate the facts behind these claims. Historic preservation has the potential to impact economic, social, and physical elements in Vermont communities, and planners must consider preservation on a case-by-case basis. have examined the facts on a case-by-case basis. This study considers historic

preservation based on its usefulness as a comprehensive planning strategy. More research can show the extent, if any, to which historic preservation is to blame for gentrification.

Historic preservation as a revitalization strategy has important implications for Vermont due to the number of historic buildings and spaces available. The restoration of these areas could be a means of community marketing, as discussed by Eversole (2003), impacting tourism, community pride, and aesthetic appeal.

### **Connection to the Current Study**

The study investigates how Vermont has used historic preservation as a revitalization strategy. It also investigates whether historic preservation has affected physical development in the community. Research on historic preservation is critical for the study because it provides information on the use of historic spaces. Revitalization planners in Vermont have a choice between building the new and restoring the old. Research on historic preservation is important to the discussion on physical improvements in Vermont, particularly because Vermont has an abundance of historic spaces. For the purposes of the study, it is valuable to understand all that historic preservation has to offer to assess its efficacy and appropriateness as a strategy in Barre and Bennington.

### **Community Economic Development**

In 1995, the Community Economic Development Centre, as cited in Eversole (2003, 75) defined Community Economic Development as, “A process by which communities can initiate and generate their own solutions to their common economic problems and thereby build long-term community capacity and foster the integration of economic, social, and environmental



objectives.” Eversole studied revitalization efforts and Community Economic Development in rural Australia. As in Vermont, the continent, particularly rural areas, struggles with shifting industries and loss of jobs and services. Communities seek new means of attracting residents and then keeping them. Eversole (2003), however, considers “economic” development a misnomer and instead posits that it is not feasible to separate economic development from social development, nor is it proper to attempt to measure every perceived benefit of development. There is no price, for example, on clean, safe, and sustainable neighborhoods. Instead, economic development must be a social development if it is to last (Eversole, 2003).

Eversole (2003) notes that the economic issues are usually obvious and revolve around livelihoods, or the lack thereof. However, she advocates that citizen-led approaches should be the normal route instead of top-down development models. Her work reflects the information about citizen participation found in Busy Streets Theory (Rupp et al., 2019) and in Morckel’s (2014) framework. However, Eversole (2003) also recognizes that community members may require outside support, particularly for initiation of revitalization, and can access this support by inviting in the external stakeholders needed to make progress (Morckel, 2014). “Local people do not work in isolation: they need access to external resources—via institutions, that do not place them at a disadvantage,” (Eversole, 2003, 78). The social capital that a community possesses has been shown to support economic development (Eversole, 2003). Marketing its assets to potential residents and visitors is essential. Marketing techniques that Eversole suggests are town festivals and creating a shared identity or town image. Eversole notes, however, that marketing a town image or commodity can sometimes interfere with a community’s plan to assess and address their internal needs.

In conjunction with Eversole's work, Shaffer et al. (2006) assert that Community Economic Development must be a comprehensive approach rather than a strategy that focuses just on economic concerns. Shaffer et al. (2006) use a five-point star as a visual for their model. The points of the star symbolize elements of community economic development that planners should consider as towns revitalize. The five elements of the framework are: resources, markets, rules/institutions, society/culture, and decision-making. Shaffer's essential components, though differing in name, are consistent with this study's focus on comprehensive planning's physical, economic, and social elements.

### **Shaffer's Elements Defined**

Shaffer et al. (2006) define "resources" as land, labor, capital, innovation, technology, amenities, and public goods. This definition aligns with the physical element, or infrastructure, of a community and can also represent social and economic resources. Shaffer et al. (2006) argue that community planners need to broaden their conception of the term resources to include those elements beyond land and capital. Innovation and technology are of particular importance since technology has the power to redefine traditional "community" boundaries.

In terms of markets, Shaffer et al. (2006) move beyond the typical concepts of internal businesses selling to households and to each other and instead considers the concept of business clusters as a means for providing goods and services within the community rather than forcing residents to travel outside the community to meet their needs. In considering stabilizing economic measures, Shaffer et al. (2006) ask planners to consider establishing or attracting connected businesses as a cluster by supply and demand.

Rules, institutions, society, and culture are all deeply intertwined with the social aspect of Morckel's framework. Shaffer et al. (2006, 66) define rules as the elements that "govern what

can be done with markets, resources, and space...the rights and responsibilities of ownership and their respective enforcement.” Internal and external institutions should include churches, civic groups, schools etc. (Shaffer et al., 2006). Built upon rules and institutions is the society and culture of a community. With particular attention to economic development is the business climate of the society. Shaffer et al. (2006, 68) define business climate as the “social capital of the community, the ability of the public and private sectors to work together, and the flexibility of rules, both formal and informal, to be adjusted when economic opportunities present themselves.”

Finally, in terms of decision-making, Shaffer et al. (2006) highlight the need for a community to accurately diagnose underlying problems and then act on potential solutions. The decisions that a community makes reflect what the community values or prioritizes. The social capital of a community is an important predictor of success in the decision-making process. The degree of social capital within a community translates into the engagement of citizens, trust amongst groups, and relationships. Each element is important to spur positive change in a community.

### **Evaluating Shaffer and Eversole**

Shaffer et al. (2006) and Eversole (2003) argue throughout their work that, if a community seeks to spur economic revitalization, then there are certain physical and social elements that planners must address in the process. Both researchers recognize that economic development cannot exist in a vacuum, nor can it originate from the top tiers and trickle down to the majority. Their works are powerful voices in support of approaching revitalization through a three-pronged method: social, economic, and physical. Shaffer et al. (2006, 69) assert that this development is the “blending of economic development and community development...a holistic

approach to community problem-solving...a three-legged stool.” Both works emphasize the importance of engaging a community on all levels.

In terms of the study, Shaffer et al. (2006) and Eversole (2003) lend their support for community revitalization as an exercise in comprehensive planning. Their work also provides a litmus test for whether Vermont communities are utilizing comprehensive planning. Comparing the revitalization efforts of the communities in this case study to the work of Shaffer et al., for example, can establish whether comprehensive planning is present. If there are elements that are lacking, Shaffer’s work can identify areas in which Vermont communities might improve or redirect their efforts. More importantly, Shaffer and Eversole support the claim that revitalization cannot happen when revitalization addresses only one critical area. This assertion contradicts the plethora of piecemeal revitalization efforts that have taken place within the state.

A limitation of Shaffer et al. (2006) and Eversole (2003) is that both researchers cannot definitively establish the source of funding for economic, social, and physical developments. Shaffer et al. (2006) does offer strategies such as increasing the dollars in circulation in a community and recirculating those dollars; however, the origin of those funds is obscure. The sad reality for Vermont communities is that they may only have funding to address one critical area. For example, a city may receive a grant for sidewalk repair. However, if planners do not coordinate community events to attract tourists, or if traffic lights are not installed to protect pedestrians, then the benefits of the sidewalk repair cannot be fully appreciated. Since the literature supports that revitalization is to be a concerted effort that includes economic, social, and physical strategies, the sources of funding available are important to establish. Community Economic Development Theory, through the work of Shaffer et al. (2006), and Eversole (2003), establishes the importance of economic development as a revitalization component. Contrary to

Morckel's (2014) work, which posits that economic development will derive from social and physical improvements, these theorists assert that communities seeking to revitalize must intentionally include economic components in their comprehensive plan.

The study builds on the work of prior theorists by investigating how economic planning strategies occur in two Vermont communities. Due to lack of personnel and resources, planners have not studied economic revitalization strategies in Vermont. The study examines communities under the lens of Community Economic Development Theory to ascertain whether these works occur in the revitalization process. The interviews conducted and documents analyzed investigate the resources available to Vermonters, the markets to which they have access, public sentiment, and the decision-making process as it relates to economic development.

In addition, the work of Eversole (2003) shows the importance of investigating if and how Vermont communities are developing a town brand and supports the investigation of Vermont strategies for community marketing. Community marketing is a powerful tool for attracting businesses and tourism. Given the extensive natural and historical resources available in Vermont towns, marketing the town under an image or brand has enormous potential, a potential that communities have taken advantage of in their revitalization projects.

### **Connection to the Current Study**

Community Economic Development theory impacts the study because it fills in a gap in Morckel's work and establishes economic development as a revitalization component. It frames economic development as a viable strategy and then offers means by which economic development can support revitalization. In consideration of the study's research questions, the study considers economic development strategies in both Barre and Bennington. Community Economic Development theory is of value to this study because it incorporates physical and

social components, as well as internal and external stakeholders, into the revitalization discussion.

### **Comprehensive Planning and Citizen Participation**

Soen (1981, 105) writes that “Urban planning has become much more comprehensive in scope, adding to its basic concern with the built environment, economic, political, and social policies.” The inclusion of stakeholder perspectives, he states, is a fundamental element of any revitalization project that seeks to bring about lasting change. Citizen engagement must appear in each aspect, the revitalization of the physical, the economic, and the social problems that a community is facing. Soen (1981) cites Arnstein’s (1969) ladder model for citizen participation in these elements. The ladder ranges from evidence of non-participation (manipulation and therapy) to elevated levels of citizen participation (partnership, delegated power, and citizen control). Soen notes the presence of a gap in the participation habits of stakeholders. Stakeholders are sometimes the objects of various revitalization schemes and do not participate in the process while others are the originators of the revitalization. Soen asserts that planners must bridge this divide for planning to be meaningful.

Soen (1981) writes that a significant limitation regarding citizen participation is communication. In the interactions between professional urban planners and citizens engaged in the revitalization process, there is a fundamental disconnect. Professionals tend to speak using terms not understood by the average citizen, and the average citizen may present oversimplification of the issues at hand due to a lack of technical knowledge. Soen provides strategies by which planners can address these communication issues including the use of the Charrette discussion protocol and the development of formal policies guiding how citizens are able to contribute their opinions. Developing a means for citizens to communicate is essential

because, for the project to be successful, they must have the opportunity to contribute to each aspect of the revitalization: the economic, the physical and the social.

The study contributes to the existing theory on community planning and revitalization because it explores if and how comprehensive planning is present as a strategy in rural Vermont. A crucial element that the literature lacks is information on how communities fund revitalization in the physical, economic, and social spheres. The case studies address the practicality of comprehensive planning in real communities and seek justification for the use of comprehensive planning despite funding challenges.

Soen's (1981) work focuses on the communication gap between professionals and citizens. Soen (1981) acknowledges that, while citizens may have the best information on community needs, communicating with professionals who use jargon created communication issues in the planning process resulting in frustration for both parties. Soen's work is valuable to this study because it points out the need to consider if and how Vermont planners communicated with citizens and whether planners used protocols in those conversations.

### **Related Literature**

According to the Knight Foundation (2020, 3), "Revitalization should be measured comprehensively looking at trends in employment, poverty, demographics, the cost of doing business, the resident experiences, the health of the business and housing markets, with an eye toward whether benefits are distributed equitably." This comprehensive assessment is important in an assessment of the available literature. Thus far, the literature has established key tenets.

First, Morckel (2014) has laid a framework for comprehensive planning. This framework establishes that, for revitalization to be successful, it must include four key elements: internal and external stakeholders, physical improvements, and social strategies.

Busy Streets Theory (Rupp et al., 2019) furthers Morckel's work by further establishing the importance of citizen empowerment in the process. However, since this theory exalts the position of the stakeholder above all other components, it does not qualify as an example of comprehensive planning. Furthermore, the theory does not guarantee the equitable participation of citizen groups which could lead to a completed but inadequate revitalization project.

Since both Morckel (2014) and Rupp et al. (2019) fail to address the economic component of revitalization, it is imperative to consider Community Economic Development Theory. This theory more accurately establishes community revitalization and development as a process that combines physical, social, and economic elements. It establishes community marketing as a potential means of bringing in revenue and encourages communities to establish a unique reputation or brand name. This strategy is comprehensive rather than solely economic because it addresses the social, physical, and economic assets and needs of a community. It also connects to the literature that exists on historic preservation. This strategy is of particular use to Vermont because Vermont has an abundance of historic buildings and spaces to convert into revenue attractions for the community.

### **Summary**

Although an abundance of information exists on various social, economic, and physical strategies throughout revitalization projects, the current study investigates if and how these elements are being used in conjunction with one another. It is known that the physical, social, and economic elements are important to the success of revitalization. What remains under-appreciated is how the combination of these elements impacts revitalization. In addition, research on Vermont revitalization projects in any regard is almost nonexistent. The specific investigation



of comprehensive planning in Vermont communities can establish what Vermont planners are doing well and what needs improvement to allow revitalization to result in meaningful change.

The literature reviewed in Chapter II has laid the groundwork for the proposed study. It has established that communities need certain essential elements if they are to thrive. Furthermore, if communities are to revitalize, they require change in the social, economic, and physical sectors. They also require input and support from external and internal stakeholders. However, theorists such as Morckel (2014), Rupp et al. (2019), and Eversole (2003) have established that revitalization cannot be successful unless it targets all the essential elements simultaneously or comprehensively.

With this understanding, the study proceeds under the assumption that successful revitalizations must address each essential element. Conversely, revitalizations that address only one or two areas may fall short of meeting citizens' needs. Work done by prior theorists has defined the essential elements, offered examples for improvement, and given evidence that they are most successful when addressed together. This information will frame the study of Vermont revitalizations and will assess these projects for strengths and weaknesses.

## CHAPTER III

### **Methods Overview**

The purpose of the case study is to analyze (1) How are planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington using economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts, and (2) How are planners and citizens combining social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts in Barre and Bennington?

The study analyzes the economic, social, and physical elements in revitalization projects in Barre and Bennington, Vermont. This chapter reviews the research questions and delineates the design of the study, its settings and participants, the procedures followed and their appropriateness for the research questions, and data collection and analysis process. Finally, the chapter discusses the researcher's role in the study and the steps taken to ensure ethical methods in the data collection and reporting processes.

### **Design**

A qualitative research design is appropriate for the study for several reasons. First, qualitative research emphasizes the importance of rich description of a natural setting. According to Zikmund et al. (2013), qualitative research is useful when “the research objective is to develop a detailed and in-depth understanding of some phenomena,” and when “the research objective is to learn how a phenomenon occurs in its natural setting,” or when the phenomena is “context dependent.” The current study examines the reality of revitalization projects in Vermont as those realities present themselves in two cities. Apart from their use in community settings, revitalization strategies lack substance. The setting is necessary to understand their efficiency and effectiveness. To divorce the data from the context would not provide worthwhile information. Instead, the qualitative design is appropriate because revitalization, in its natural setting, provides deep descriptions of the economic, social, and physical climates in which the revitalization is occurring.

Secondly, a qualitative approach is suited to explore the “what” and “how” questions in a setting (Lune & Berg, 2017). Park & Park (2016, 4) write that the purpose of qualitative research is to “gain an understanding of underlying reasons and motivations; to provide insights into the setting of a problem, generating ideas and/or hypotheses for later quantitative research to uncover prevalent trends in thought and opinion.” A qualitative design is appropriate, therefore, because the phenomenon of revitalization is heavily dependent on the how and what questions regarding the economic, social, and physical contexts of each community. Although each community selected is in Vermont, each has its own specific strengths and challenges that must play a role in revitalization.

Finally, a qualitative approach is appropriate to investigate revitalization phenomena because the semi-structured interviews used as part of the data collection instruments allow the researcher to probe participants for perspectives and ideas that might not be effectively communicated in a closed questionnaire. Qualitative research seeks to gather description and diverse ideas (Park & Park, 2016). The goal of this study is not to discover that all communities are following a prescription for revitalization; rather, the goal is to uncover the nuances of each community’s approach as well as generalizations regarding revitalization projects.

Qualitative research methods employed in this study include purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and thematic coding.

From among the qualitative methods available, the researcher selected the case study as the research design. The three primary case study methodologists are Robert K. Yin, Sharan Merriam, and Robert E. Stake. According to Park & Park (2016, 5), when conducting a case study, “researchers try to understand and report the uniqueness of individual cases...and is based on understanding the intricate complexity and idiosyncrasy of particular cases.” Furthermore,

Yin (2002), as cited by Yazan (2015, 138) writes that “the case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates the case of cases...by addressing the ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions concerning the phenomenon of interest.” This research design is asking “how” planners and citizens are using comprehensive planning in Barre and Bennington and analyzing the economic, social, and physical aspects of revitalization.

Merriam (1998, xiii), the primary methodologist referenced in this study, defines the qualitative case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit.” In the present study, the process of revitalization in specific communities is the phenomenon of interest. Merriam’s case study approach has three defining characteristics: “it is particularistic (focusing on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon); descriptive (yielding a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study); and heuristic (illuminating the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study),” (Merriam, 1998 as cited in Yazan, 2015, 148). The current study is particularistic because it focuses on a phenomenon (revitalization) in two specific areas. It is descriptive because the interview data, photographs, and document analysis yield rich, thick descriptions. Finally, it is heuristic because it deepens the reader’s understanding of the revitalization phenomenon.

Merriam’s research design has five components that are utilized in this study: conducting a literature review, constructing a theoretical framework, identifying a research problem, crafting and sharpening research questions, and purposive sampling (Merriam, 1998, as cited in Yazan, 2015). In terms of gathering data, Merriam (1998) identifies interviews, document analysis, and observations as the three sources needed to triangulate data and views the data analysis process as a matter of making meaning out of the information. This study adheres to Merriam’s research

design and utilizes the three sources of data needed for triangulation. The study addresses the following research questions:

### **Research Questions**

1. How are planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington using economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts?
2. How are planners and citizens combining social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts in Barre and Bennington?

### **Sites**

The two Vermont communities chosen as sites for this study are Barre and Bennington. These sites each completed a revitalization initiative that addressed economic, social, and physical concerns in the community. Selecting communities that worked to address each of these three areas was important because, as noted by Morckel (2014) and Eversole (2003), the implementation of revitalization projects must consider each of these elements if it is to result in meaningful change.

### **Barre**

The community of Barre was once a thriving granite town and is still known as the self-proclaimed “granite capital of the world.” Barre’s stately homes and historic city buildings are evidence of the once booming granite and rail economies that once contributed to Barre’s prosperity. However, with the decrease of the granite industry and the departure of the railroad, Barre’s economy, infrastructure, and quality of life have deteriorated. In the initial phases of the revitalization, several interview participants noted that Barre had a negative reputation. The fact that Barre houses the county courthouse that supervises parolees did not help Barre’s reputation.

Community morale was at an all-time low when construction began on the Big Dig project on Main Street. Federal money for failing infrastructure was the impetus for the project. However, it would take citizen groups and planners working together to improve Barre's image and make it an attractive place for visitors and residents.

### **Bennington**

The community of Bennington was once an important manufacturing town. As times have changed, Bennington's access to jobs that paid a livable wage has decreased, and the vitality of its downtown has deteriorated. Bennington holds a unique, hub-like position in Vermont. Its proximity to Boston, Manchester, the Berkshires, and New York state means that people often stop in Bennington on their travels. Bennington also has a hospital with connections to Dartmouth and is home to Bennington College which provides a range of cultural opportunities. Prior to the revitalization of the downtown, Bennington's anchor institutions—the bank, the hospital, the colleges, the Arts Center—came together to problem-solve. Recognizing that they needed to make the best of a deteriorating situation and wanting to have a way to attract talented professionals to the area, they assessed the citizens for revitalization needs. The information gathered was overwhelmingly in favor of a redevelopment of the Putnam Block, a downtown anchor building that had fallen on challenging times. Bennington's efforts to revitalize the downtown was an undertaking that involved multiple stakeholders and high levels of trust amongst participants.

### **Participants**

Purposive sampling supported the selection of the two cases in the study. According to Maxwell (2005, 235), purposive sampling is used when “particular settings, persons, or events

are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices...and can be used to achieve representativeness of the settings...capture heterogeneity in the population...for the examination of cases that are critical for the theories that the study began with...and...can be used to establish particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings...” For the current study, it was essential that each site selected had engaged in a revitalization project that addressed the economic, social, and physical concerns in a community. A site that had only addressed one of these areas through revitalization would have been inadequate because the purpose of the study is to investigate comprehensive planning.

After the researcher selected Barre and Bennington as sites for the study, it was necessary to select interview participants within those communities. Again, the researcher used purposive sampling. To gather the heterogeneity of responses needed (Maxwell, 2005), participants came from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. Each participant needed to have been involved with the revitalization project during the planning and implementation phases to possess the information needed to answer the interview questions. One limitation of this study is that it does not consider the perspectives of those who were not involved in the process.

## **Procedures**

### **The Researcher’s Role**

The researcher has resided in Vermont for fifteen years and has worked in education for seven years. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and Liberal Studies as well as a Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction. The researcher is currently a doctoral student in the Public Administration Program at Liberty University. No participant in this study is related personally or professionally to the researcher. The researcher chose not to select her

own community as a site to avoid bias and conflict of interest. The researcher is responsible for interviewing participants at each site, gathering and analyzing relevant documents, coding interview transcripts for analysis, and ensuring that she upheld ethical standards throughout the study.

### **Data Collection**

According to Yin (2002), as cited in Yazan (2015, 142), “Case study research should rest upon multiple sources of evidence...in a triangulating fashion.” Yin advocates the following six sources: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Merriam (1998) however, as cited in Yazan (2015, 143), pares this list down to three elements: “conducting effective interviews, being a careful observer, and mining data from documents.” These three data collection techniques are employed in this study. Merriam (1998) details the steps needed to conduct effective interviews, gather information from documents, and make observations. Triangulation of data is a way for the researcher to ensure that he can capture the context and phenomena as faithfully to life as possible. In view of this goal, the study uses interview data primarily and augments the interview data with photographs and document analysis.

### **Interview Data.**

As advocated by Merriam (1998), interview data is one element of this study’s data collection techniques. Interactive personal interviews allow the researcher to flexibly add to the interview questions when needed to further probe complex issues. According to Merriam (1998, 72) “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, how people interpret the world around them...or are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate.” Interviews are an ideal means of gathering information about revitalization practices because, in



addition to providing information about past events, informants can also include their reflections and feelings. Although lack of anonymity is a downside to personal interviews (Zikmund, 2013), the interview content is not of a sensitive or personal nature. The interview questions use the funnel technique. To avoid eliciting biased responses, broad questions come first (Zikmund, 2013). The semi-structured interview provides a medium for flexibly following up on responses to probe at any complex information that required additional clarification. The questions were open-ended and designed to gather demographic information on the participant, background/contextual information on the site, and thick descriptions of the economic, social, and physical strategies used, barriers to, and impacts of revitalization.

Each interview, except for one, happened virtually using the Google Meet platform or via phone. Although face-to-face interviews are ideal, conducting the interviews virtually or by phone saved travel time and expense and aligned with Covid-19 safety protocols. Each interviewee signed an informed consent form and was aware that the interviewer was recording the interview. In addition, the researcher made reflective notes during the interview as a means of gathering first impressions.

### **Interview Questions.**

- 1) Could you please describe your role in the community (business owner, resident, public servant, town government)?
- 2) Your community is a part of this study because it has invested in revitalization. How did your community start with revitalization? What were the reasons you revitalized?
- 3) Were there assets already in the community that supported the revitalization work? If so, how were those assets useful?

- 4) What did your community do to address economic, physical, and social issues through the revitalization process?
- 5) Who became involved with the revitalization process?
- 6) What sources funded the revitalization?
- 7) Were there unforeseen challenges that arose during the revitalization process? If so, please describe.
- 8) How do you think revitalization has impacted your community (positively or negatively)?

Question 1 is a general question that establishes the participant's role in the process. Questions 2 and 3 discuss the state of the community prior to the revitalization and the reasons for revitalization. Question 4 investigates how comprehensive planning appeared in Barre and Bennington. Some participants were not able to speak to all elements. However, a sense of each element emerged through all the interview data combined. Question 5 considers which stakeholders became involved with the process. Question 6 investigates a practical aspect of revitalization: funding. This question is vital because the literature lacks information about specific funding strategies. Question 7 considers challenges that planners and citizens faced. This question allows participants to speak about their lived experiences during revitalization. Finally, question 8 considers the impact of revitalization on the community. Assessing the final effect of revitalization on the community is vital because it establishes the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the comprehensive planning approach.

### **Document/content Analysis.**

Merriam (1998, 123) describes content analysis of documents as “a systematic procedure for describing the content of communications.” According to Bowen (2009, 30), document analysis is valuable because it can “provide data on the context...., suggest questions that need to be asked and situations that need to be observed...., provide supplementary research data, provide a means of tracking change and development, and can be analyzed...to verify evidence or corroborate findings.” A specific list of documents used for this study is in Chapter 4, Tables 3 and 4.

These documents were selected because each one provides information about the context of the site and the strategies employed during the revitalization process. It is the strategies used that are of paramount importance. City planning and community outreach documents speak to the issues associated with revitalization as well as the prevailing attitudes and ideas. The town’s revitalization plan establishes the initial priorities for the project and compare with what was accomplished. These documents are valuable in terms of balancing the interview data since it is possible that the memories of participants may not be entirely accurate.

The data gathered through the documents will be used in conjunction with interviews and photographs as a means of data triangulation. Bowen (2009) further notes that it is the responsibility of the researcher to be objective throughout the analysis process to enhance the credibility of the study. However, Merriam (1998) asserts that stability, or the inability of the observer to alter the content, is one of the great advantages of document content analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

This study uses three types of data: interview data, photographic data, and content analysis of documents. Merriam (1998, 178) defines data analysis as “the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and

interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning.” Merriam also advocates for a simultaneous data collection and analysis process because the course that the analysis takes may shape the steps of the data collection process as it continues. All methodologists concur on the importance of triangulation. Indeed, the triangulation of at least three sources is integral to the design of the case study (Merriam, 1998, as cited by Yazan, 2015). Merriam’s (1998) levels of analysis are as follows: 1) The creation of a descriptive account, 2) The construction and naming of categories based on the data, 3) The comparison of the current data gathered to previous data gathered, and 4) The development of inferences based on the data. Furthermore, since the collective case study uses cross-case analysis, categories established appeared in the analysis of the others.

In keeping with Merriam’s process, the first step in the analysis process was to read the transcripts of each interview and the content of each document several times and create a descriptive account. Gathering a sense of the grand picture of the data is essential (Creswell, 2009). During the familiarization process, the researcher made reflective notes alongside the text. Next, based on the notes made, the researcher established preliminary codes or categories. Creswell (2009, 184) writes that coding “represents the heart of qualitative data analysis....” Coding allows “researchers to build detailed descriptions, develop themes...and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature.” Furthermore, coding “involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in the study, and then assigning a label to the code,” (Creswell, 2009, 185). Creswell advocates the development of no more than 25-30 categories that consolidate into 5 or 6 themes. Creswell (2009) does not advocate counting codes

because counting accepts all codes as equally important and lends a quantitative element to the study.

The interviews, documents, and observations were coded line by line. The researcher coded the interviews in order from the first to the last. The documents were coded site by site, and, finally, the researcher viewed the photograph data. The researcher developed codes for analysis as she read and analyzed the data. The researcher coded the interviews manually through notes made on the transcripts. The coding used in this case study was valuable because it allowed the researcher to establish categories or codes at the outset of the analysis process.

### **Research Steps.**

- 1) The researcher contacted participants via email to request an interview and informed them of the study's purpose and potential risks.
- 2) The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews virtually and via phone and recorded them using otter.ai software for later transcription.
- 3) The researcher transcribed interviews within 24 hours of completion.
- 4) The researcher gave each participant a copy of his/her interview transcript for member checking.
- 5) The researcher examined revitalization documents from each site. These documents came from public and nonprofit websites.
- 6) The researcher coded the documents for emergent themes.
- 7) The researcher compared codes generated across cases and developed a written report of themes and subthemes that emerged in Barre and Bennington.

## Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a study is dependent upon its credibility, dependability and confirmability, its transferability, and its adherence to ethical methods. The researcher establishes these elements through the process of the data collection, analysis, and reporting. In this research design, the researcher took several steps to ensure the study's trustworthiness. According to Merriam (1998), "Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality" and uses tools such as triangulation, member checks, and intercoder reliability. To establish external validity, Merriam advocates for the use of multiple cases as done in this study.

To support the credibility of the research process, the research design is based upon a triangulation of data. The interviews, document analyses, and photographs, when examined together, produce themes that address the economic, social, and physical aspects of the revitalization. The triangulation of the data produces thick description of the situation and can also result in crystallization, or the discovery of new areas for research (Tracy, 2010). In addition, Tracy (2010) notes that multivocality is vital to the production of thick description. Therefore, the researcher has included interviewees from a variety of sectors (public, private, and nonprofit). The use of thick description as a part of the research design also contributes to the reliability or confirmability of the study as it is a rich description that, according to Merriam (1998), "provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author's conclusion 'makes sense,'" (Merriam, 1998, as cited in Yazan, 2015).

The following methods, advocated by Merriam (2009), were employed to support the trustworthiness of the study:

- Triangulation
- Member Checks

- Saturation
- Thick description
- Multi-site design

In terms of trustworthiness, Merriam (1998) notes that triangulation is useful even if data reports contradictory information because the disparate information enables the researcher and reader to gather a holistic picture of the case. Member checks allow participants to ensure that the researcher has not misrepresented their statements and has accurately communicated their perspectives to the best of her ability. The researcher sent participants back their transcripts once for review. Saturation is the point at which the data does not return new categories and ensures that the researcher has mined for the data information. In addition to triangulation and saturation, thick description is at the heart of case study research. Providing a thick description shows that the generalizations make sense in the context of the study. In a similar vein, multi-site design lends validity to the study when related categories come from separate locations.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study approaches ethics in terms of procedural, relational, and exiting ethics (Tracy, 2010). The researcher submitted the study proposal to the Liberty University IRB for approval. Furthermore, the researcher stored copies of the documents, interview transcripts, and observational notes in a locked drawer in her home office. The researcher stored digital recordings and notes on a password-protected personal computer in a password-protected folder. Due to the nature of the study, the names of businesses and historic spaces were an important part of the data collection process and, thus, appeared in the findings. However, the names of citizens and business owners were confidential. The researcher ensured that she used relationally ethical practices, respecting subjects, and choosing sites to which she had no personal or

professional relationship. Finally, in terms of ethics which concern the accurate presentation of information, this study is used for the fulfillment of the requirements for the Liberty University doctoral program and was presented to a dissertation committee.

### **Summary**

This chapter detailed research design, the setting of each case study, as well as the data collection instruments and methods for analysis used to answer the research questions. The interview questions and rationale demonstrate how the interview process would address the research questions. The participants in the study, the documents analyzed, and the photographs established the context of and perspectives regarding community revitalization in Barre and Bennington, Vermont. Chapter 4 will provide the results of the study in accordance with the research design of Chapter 3.



## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

### Overview

The findings described in this chapter result from virtual and phone interviews with 16 participants in Barre and Bennington, Vermont, as well as 23 city planning and public information documents from these two cities. The purpose of the study is to investigate the economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies used to conduct revitalization efforts in Barre and Bennington. These elements appear in the revitalization literature describing comprehensive planning (Morckel, 2014) and Community Economic Development (Eversole, 2003). Morckel and Eversole underscore the importance of planning purposefully for economic, social, physical and stakeholder engagement opportunities during the revitalization process.

The following research questions have guided this study:

1. How are planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington using economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts?
2. How are planners and citizens combining social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts in Barre and Bennington?

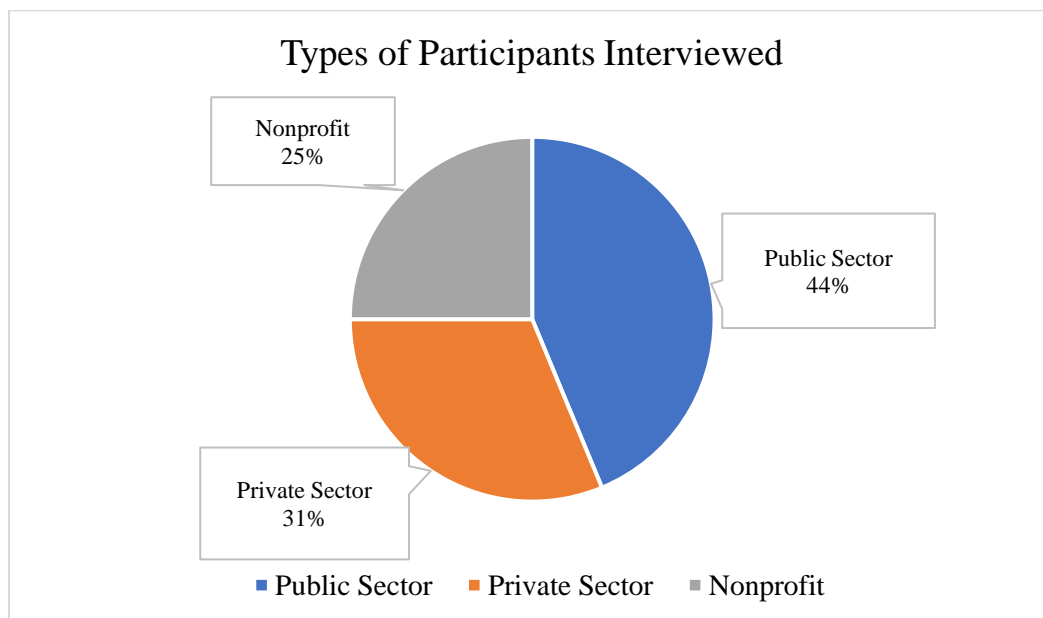
This organization of the chapter uses a comparison approach. After a description of the participants, and documents for each community, the researcher addresses each research question for both communities and concludes each question with a section comparing the data gathered at each site. The chapter concludes with a summary of relevant findings.

### Participants

In the fall of 2021, the researcher recruited participants from Bennington and Barre. The researcher used purposeful sampling to ensure that all participants were knowledgeable enough to speak to the interview questions. Because the literature (Morckel, 2014) (Rupp et al., 2019)

(Eversole, 2003) identified multiple types of stakeholders needed during the community revitalization process, the researcher also sought to include participants from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Public sector participants were members of city governments or regional development groups. Private sector participants were business owners or held business leadership positions. Nonprofit sector participants were members of either citizen-driven or nonprofit municipal groups. Figure 1 shows a schematic representation of the types of participants interviewed in Barre and Bennington. Tables 1 and 2 provide the official title, years of experience, sector, and area of expertise for each participant.

*Figure 1: Types of Participants Interviewed in Barre and Bennington*



**Table 1**  
*Interview Participants in Barre, Vermont*

Participant Number	Participant Title	Years of Involvement with Community	Sector	Area of expertise
1	City Manager	Lifelong resident	Public	Municipal government
2	City Mayor	4 years as mayor, 7 on city council	Public	Municipal government
3	Regional Planning Executive Director	unknown	Nonprofit	Economic and social planning
4	Former Director of Planning, Permitting, and Assessing	6 years	Public	Planning and zoning
5	Barre Area Development, Inc.	2 years	Nonprofit	Economic planning
6	Barre Partnership Executive Director	Unknown	Nonprofit	Economic planning
7	Business owner: 1	Lifelong resident	Private	Merchant
8	Business owner: 2	Lifelong resident	Private	Merchant

**Participant 1: City Manager.** At the time of the study, the city manager of Barre had held his position for 11 years. Prior to his position as city manager, he was employed as a city infrastructure consultant and worked directly with select boards, city councils and city managers. He applied for the position of city manager while he was a member of the city council. Being born and raised in Barre, he stated that he “had a comfort level with the community that, had I not had that, I might not have stepped up, but I knew the community I was stepping up to

manage so that made a big difference.” Participant 1 was influential in the “Big Dig” redevelopment construction in downtown Barre and was instrumental in accessing state and federal funding to cover the costs of revitalization efforts.

***Participant 2: City Mayor.*** At the time of the study, Participant 2, the city mayor, had been the mayor of Barre City for 4 years. Prior to becoming mayor, Participant 2 served on the city council for 7 years and also served on the school board, the Granite Museum Board, and the Barre Partnership. Participant 2 stated that, to continue to bring vitality to downtown Barre, “We have to embrace those who want to come in and make some developments in our downtown,” (Brown, 2018). During his interview, Participant 2 emphasized the need to engage community members in the revitalization process and discussed ways in which he had tried to involve citizens. He believed that citizen engagement was one of his strengths. Participant 2 also discussed the social strategies that Barre was implementing for citizens living below the poverty line. He expects that the impact of these programs will lift future generations out of poverty, thus creating positive outcomes for Barre City.

***Participant 3: Regional Planning Executive Director.*** At the time of the study, Participant 3 was the Regional Planning Executive Director of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission. Participant 3 worked with Barre to address hazardous brownfield areas resulting from old downtown dry cleaners, to develop infrastructure to mitigate flooding, and to plan for economic development. Participant 3 discussed at length the measures taken to reuse dilapidated buildings, assess citizen’s needs, and support citizens living below the poverty line. Participant 3 also emphasized the need to have a public-private partnership in making revitalization plans a reality.

***Participant 4: Former Director of Planning, Permitting, and Assessing.*** At the time of the study, Participant 4 served as the Director of Planning Permitting and Assessing between 2008 and 2014. Participant 4 was most involved with bringing jobs to Barre and with the construction of City Place, a building that has become an anchor for the downtown. Participant 4 discussed the challenges of working to satisfy federal regulations tied to funding during the revitalization process.

***Participant 5: Barre Area Development Director.*** At the time of the study, Participant 5 had been the Executive Director of the Barre Area Development for 2 years. The Barre Area Development is a nonprofit economic development corporation serving the area. Participant 5's responsibilities include working with business recruitment, business retention, community marketing, and infrastructure development. Participant 5 discussed Barre's diverse economy as a strategy for future economic development and emphasized his organization's role in major revitalization projects such as the City Place development and the Blanchard Block project.

***Participant 6: Barre Partnership Executive Director.*** At the time of the study, Participant 6 was the Executive Director of the Barre Partnership. In this capacity, she is involved with promoting businesses, beautifying the downtown, and organizing events to bring people to the downtown.

***Participant 7: Business Owner, Merchant.*** At the time of the study, Participant 7 was a business owner and property owner who had been in Barre for 38 years. Participant 7 had also served for a year as director of the citizen group, the Barre Partnership. Throughout his interview, Participant 7 emphasized the strong level of support that his business received from both city planners, public officials, and citizens. Participant 7's perspective as a business owner during the reconstruction of Main Street is valuable because he had firsthand experience with community incentives to support local businesses.

***Participant 8: Business Owner.*** At the time of the study, Participant 8 had been a lifelong resident of Barre. As a business owner, Participant 8 had a strong perspective on strategies that would help new and existing businesses succeed in the long-term. He also identified barriers to downtown vitality such as his observation that people were unwilling to take risks in opening a small business.

**Table 2**  
*Interview Participants in Bennington, Vermont*

Participant Number	Participant Title	Years of Involvement with Community	Sector	Area of expertise
9	Former director of Citizens for Greater Bennington	20 years	Nonprofit	Historic Preservation
10	Community and Economic Development Specialist	5 years	Public	Economic Development
11	Executive Director Bennington Regional Development Commission	33 years	Public	Transportation, brownfield redevelopment, energy planning and implementation
12	Assistant Director, Bennington County Regional Commission	23 years	Public	Community redevelopment
13	Director of Planning, Bennington County Regional Commission	5 years	Public	Development review, planning and development regulations, public investments in transportation and open space
14	Bank President	unknown	Private	Finance
15	Business owner	Lifelong resident	Private	Merchant
16	Private investor	Lifelong resident	Private	Citizen/Investment

***Participant 9: Former Director of Citizens for Greater Bennington.*** At the time of the study, Participant 9 had served the community of Bennington in a variety of capacities. She had been a resident of Bennington for 20 years, had served on the board of the Preservation Trust of Vermont, and had established a group called Citizens for Greater Bennington, a grassroots organization involved in obtaining grant funding for community projects. As an advocate for the preservation of historic Bennington, Participant 9 discussed the controversy between massive developments such as the expansion of Bennington's Walmart and the negative impact that this had on downtown vitality.

***Participant 10: Community and Economic Development Specialist.*** At the time of the study, Participant 10 had been in his position as Community and Economic Development Specialist for 5 years. He is employed by the Bennington County Regional Commission, an organization designed to support small towns with zoning laws and community planning and development. Participant 10's perspective was valuable to the study because he was intimately familiar with the relationships among stakeholders and was also knowledgeable about the motives behind the downtown revitalization efforts. Participant 10 also described the controversy between the preservation of historic buildings and compliance with federal and state regulations.

***Participant 11: Executive Director Bennington Regional Development Commission.*** At the time of the study, Participant 11 had been involved with the community of Bennington in an official capacity since 1989. He began his career working in wetland use planning, then moved to managing community transportation and energy programs, and finally became the executive director of the Bennington Regional Development Commission (BRDC). He has held this position for 11 years. Participant 11's perspective was valuable to the study because of his long-term involvement with revitalization in Bennington. Having worked as a public official for over



30 years, he had seen Bennington cycle through periods of economic and social vitality followed by significant downturns. In his current role as executive director of the BRDC, he has direct experience with the assets that are, or are not, available to a small community like Bennington and discussed specific strategies that Bennington can use to make itself attractive to citizens and businesses.

***Participant 12: Assistant Director, Bennington County Regional Commission.*** At the time of the study, Participant 12 was the assistant director at the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) and was responsible for overseeing community and economic development projects. His association with the town of Bennington began in 1999 when he assumed the role of Development Director. His long-term involvement with Bennington redevelopment projects, particularly several failed attempts, gave him a unique perspective on the current revitalization project. He had experience working with different types of stakeholders such as property owners, Bennington College, and the Bank of Bennington.

***Participant 13: Director of Planning, Bennington County Regional Commission.*** At the time of the study, Participant 13 had been a Bennington resident for 5 years. She had served the community in several capacities including serving on the Development Review Board, which reviews zoning applications, and serving on the Bennington Library Board of Directors. Participant 13 currently serves as the Director of Planning at the Bennington County Regional Development Commission. Her role involves working with development regulations and public investments in transportation.

***Participant 14: Bank President.*** At the time of the study, Participant 14 was the bank president at the Bank of Bennington, one of the institutions that supported revitalization efforts in Bennington. Because the Bank of Bennington participated in the initial conversations about

revitalization of the downtown, Participant 14 had specific knowledge of the motives behind the revitalization efforts as well as a practical knowledge of the different partners involved in the process.

***Participant 15: Business Owner.*** At the time of the study, Participant 15 owned a business located in the Putnam Building, the primary site for downtown revitalization. Due to his position as a business owner, Participant 15 was able to directly comment on the day-to-day impact that revitalization had on the downtown. He shared positive observations about the newly available parking and daily traffic in his business. His perspective is valuable because he was able to comment on the impact of revitalization.

***Participant 16: Private Investor, Citizen.*** At the time of the study, Participant 16 had invested as a private citizen in the redevelopment of the Putnam Building. He and his wife retired in Bennington and were interested in making the community a better place. Participant 16 had become a part of various boards in Bennington such as the board for the Old Castle Theater. Participant 16's perspective to the study was valuable because he had experience with other stakeholders in the revitalization due to his status as a private investor, and, as a citizen, he was able to describe the day-to-day impact of downtown revitalization.

## **Documents**

Tables 3 and 4 list the documents found in Barre and Bennington, respectively. These documents came from city websites or regional development commission websites and are all publicly available.

**Table 3**  
*Public Revitalization Documents from Barre, Vermont*

<b>Type of Document</b>	<b>Document Title</b>	<b>Document Description</b>
Public Information/Outreach	<i>Barre Case Study</i>	Developed to communicate with the public about public and private investments in Barre revitalization
Planning Document	<i>Barre City Municipal Plan</i>	Developed as a planning document for social and economic wellness in Barre
Planning Document	<i>Barre Summary of Historic Downtown</i>	Developed to describe Barre's historic districts
Funding Application	<i>Barre TIF (Tax Increment Financing)</i>	Developed to apply for special tax increment financing (TIF) to fund revitalization efforts
Planning Document	<i>Regional Stormwater Master Plan</i>	Developed to provide city officials with information about the infrastructure needs for Barre's stormwater management efforts
Planning Document	<i>Barre TIF Plan</i>	Developed to outline the projects scheduled to be completed using the tax increment financing approach
Public Information/Outreach	<i>Barre Historic Designation Benefits</i>	Developed to communicate with the public about the benefits of Barre's status as a "designated downtown"
Public Information/Outreach	<i>Barre City: Our Plan for a Healthy Future</i>	Developed to communicate with the public about social and economic development goals and action steps

**Table 4**  
*Public Revitalization Documents from Bennington, Vermont*

<b>Type of Document</b>	<b>Document Title</b>	<b>Document Description</b>
Public Information/Outreach	<i>Bennington County Mixed Use Development Report</i>	Developed to outline the permitted uses for properties in the downtown and considers how zoning can support the development of a user-friendly downtown area
Planning Document	<i>Bennington Downtown Area-wide Plan</i>	Developed as a guiding document for economic revitalization in vacant or underused areas in the downtown
Planning Document	<i>Bennington Strategic Economic Development Plan</i>	Developed to give planners strategies for increasing economic vitality in Bennington
Planning Document	<i>Bennington County Cultural Plan</i>	Developed to provide planners with strategies for the improvement of Bennington's social wellness using cultural opportunities
Planning Document	<i>Bennington County Regional Plan</i>	Developed to describe the people, land, and infrastructure in Bennington and the surrounding region with future planning in mind
Planning Document	<i>Bennington Town Plan</i>	Developed for planners as a framework for future decisions regarding Bennington's economic, social, and physical growth
Public Information/Outreach	<i>Brownfields Redevelopment Program Overview</i>	Developed to provide citizens with information about the

## **Results**

The researcher reviewed the interview transcripts, photographs, and city documents many times to become deeply familiar with the data. The researcher analyzed the data as described in Chapter III: Methodology and highlighted all statements relevant to the research questions and then grouped similar statements into separate categories. The researcher further condensed those categories into themes that were associated with each research question.

### **Theme Development**

Thematic analysis, according to Nowell et al. (2017, 2) “is a qualitative research method...for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set.” Through multiple readings of the data and time spent listening to audio recordings, the researcher developed a main list of similar ideas. After creating a list of those similar ideas, the researcher revisited the data and, after reviewing all highlighted statements, condensed the related categories into themes.

### **Research Question One Results: Barre**

The four major themes that emerged from the interview and document data shed light on how Barre used economic, physical, social, and stakeholder engagement strategies to complete revitalization projects. The first research question was as follows: How are planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington using economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts? Table 5 lists and defines the major themes that emerged related to Research Question One in Barre. Tables 6 and 7 further categorize the data by showing whether a participant or city document discussed a specific theme.

**Table 5**  
*Major Themes Emerging from Thematic Analysis in Barre*

Theme	Definition
Economic Strategies	Strategies used to support existing businesses, access federal and state support, and market Barre's historic identity as a granite town
Physical Strategies	Strategies used to repair or update downtown infrastructure and create a welcoming, user-friendly appearance for the downtown
Social Strategies	Strategies used to organize community events as well as support citizens in need
Stakeholder Engagement Strategies	Strategies used to create public-private partnerships and provide opportunities for stakeholder input

**Table 6**  
*Major Themes—Types of Revitalization Strategies Identified in Barre by Interview Participants*

Participant	Economic Strategies	Physical Strategies	Social Strategies	Stakeholder Engagement Strategies
Participant 1	XX	XX	XX	XX
Participant 2	XX	XX	XX	XX
Participant 3	XX	XX	XX	XX
Participant 4	X	XX	X	X
Participant 5	XX	X		X
Participant 6	X		X	
Participant 7	XX	X	X	XX
Participant 8	XX	X		

X-mentioned during the interview

XX-mentioned and emphasized during the interview

**Table 7**  
*Major Themes—Types of Revitalization Strategies Identified in Barre Document Analysis*

Document Title	Economic Strategies	Physical Strategies	Social Strategies	Stakeholder Engagement Strategies
<i>Barre Case Study</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX
<i>Barre City Municipal Plan</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX
<i>Barre Summary of Historic Downtown</i>		XX	XX	
<i>Barre TIF</i>	XX	XX		
<i>Stormwater Regional Master Plan</i>		XX	XX	
<i>Barre TIF Plan</i>	XX	XX		
<i>Barre Summary of Historic Designation Benefits</i>	XX	XX		
<i>Barre City: Our Plan for a Healthy Future</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX
<i>North Main Street to Summer Street Master Plan</i>	XX	XX	XX	
<i>Listing of Historic Addresses</i>		X		
<i>Barre Illustrative Plan</i>		X		
<i>Merchant's Row Master Plan</i>	XX	XX	XX	

X-mentioned in the document

XX-mentioned and emphasized in the document

## Major Theme One: Economic Strategies

The first major theme that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts and documents in Barre was Economic Strategies (see tables 6 and 7). Economic strategies are efforts to boost the local economy by creating jobs as well as by retaining and attracting businesses (Eversole, 2003). 100 percent of interview participants in Barre as well as approximately 70 percent of city planning documents identified strategies for economic growth as an important element of Barre revitalization. Based on an analysis of the data, three subthemes emerged under the theme of economic strategies. These include supporting existing business, accessing federal and state support, and marketing the town's identity (see table 8).

### Table 8

#### *Barre: Major Theme One and Subthemes*

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#### Major Theme One: Economic Strategies

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##### Subthemes

1.1 Supporting Existing Businesses

1.2 Accessing Federal and State Support

1.3 Marketing the Town Identity

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Barre's challenges with economic decline stem from the departure of the granite and rail industries. Participant 3, the regional planning executive director, noted that Barre's "history as a granite industry means that they have a workforce but, because the granite industry in the US is generally in decline, they have a workforce that is losing jobs." One of the primary goals of the downtown reconstruction effort was to reverse the employment decline by bringing 500 jobs to Barre. Participant 4, the former director of planning, permitting, and assessing, stated that the revitalization brought at least 500 jobs to Barre despite setbacks such as the Great Recession, Hurricane Irene in 2011, and the long-term demolition of Main Street. The economic turn-around in Barre came about through critical economic decisions made by city planners and citizen groups such as The Barre Partnership. The economic strategies used to support revitalization in



Barre were supporting existing businesses, accessing state and federal support, and marketing Barre as a historic granite town.

***Major Theme One—Subtheme 1.1: Supporting Existing Businesses.*** The subtheme “supporting existing businesses” appeared in 75 percent of interviews and approximately 60 percent of the city planning documents. The presence of vacant and dilapidated buildings in the downtown led planners to prioritize supporting existing businesses so that those businesses could stay open during the two-year demolition of Main Street. Barre’s efforts to keep its current businesses open during construction demonstrated that economic revitalization is not just about attracting business owners to the downtown; instead, it must include strategies for supporting businesses already present in the area. Figure 2 shows the extent of construction on Main Street. Businesses in affected sections suffered financially due to the extent of the closures. Parking and accessing businesses became a major challenge during this time. However, downtown shopping incentives through citizen groups such as the Barre Partnership lessened the impact of the extended construction.

*Figure 2: Extent of the Construction on Main Street*



Photo: Dubois and King Construction

Participant 7, a merchant in downtown Barre who was significantly affected by the construction process, remembered with pride the efforts that planners and citizens took to support his business, even when parking and access to his store became difficult. When asked if he had felt supported during this time, he stated,

Absolutely. It's a really great community anyway but when there are things like this going on, you're always going to have people who are going to say, 'Oh I'm going to avoid where there's construction' but there were a lot of people over the course of those two years, who specifically said, 'I'm here because you are locally owned and we know this is going to affect you and that's why we're here to shop.'

The specific strategies used to support existing businesses during the Main Street reconstruction were using a town game incentive to entice people to shop downtown in exchange for prizes, completing work at night when possible, announcing daily construction zones on local radio stations, and communicating with business owners about construction in their part of the street.

In terms of Research Question One, the support for businesses demonstrates that planners and citizens alike were intentional about aiding local businesses which, in turn, supported the continued economic development of the downtown. The result of supporting existing businesses during this period was that all businesses remained open except for one. Several participants noted that, due to the significant construction happening in the downtown area, planners and citizens worried that revitalization could lead to an economic downturn that could undermine their goal of bringing 500 jobs to the community. The specific action steps taken to support businesses already up and running contributed to the positive outcomes of revitalization and provided evidence of the utilization of economic strategies in Barre.

***Major Theme One—Subtheme 1.2: Accessing Federal and State Support.*** The subtheme “accessing federal and state support” appeared in 75 percent of interviews and over 80 percent of the city planning documents. Federal and state support in the form of grant funding were the

cornerstone for most of the downtown revitalization project. Stemming from Reagan-era infrastructure grants, the funding for the repair of a failing sewer pipe as well as several key infrastructure upgrades was 95 percent federally funded with 2.5 percent funding each from state and municipal sources. In addition to the infrastructure funding, Barre planners also used key economic strategies such as accessing tax increment financing (TIF) opportunities and applying for grant money awarded to Designated Downtowns, a special status given to historic areas. Property owners making improvements could apply for TIF funds accumulated from tax revenue on improved buildings while the Designated Downtown status linked developers with grant funding and planning resources. Without federal and state resources used to kickstart the infrastructure upgrades, it is unlikely that municipal and/or private investors could have amassed the funds needed to complete such an extensive project.

In terms of Research Question One, the planners' access of federal and state supports demonstrates the use of specific economic strategies during the revitalization process. Accessing external stakeholders to fund portions of a revitalization project, applying for TIF district funds, and accessing historic preservation grants are critical steps in moving from planning to implementation. Property values of revitalized buildings or the benefits of an infrastructure upgrade to citizens do not always reflect the massive financial and time commitments made by planners and property owners. The investment does not always equal the profit. Thus, accessing federal and state supports is necessary to make a profit or at least "break even."

***Major Theme One—Subtheme 1.3: Marketing the Town Identity.*** The subtheme "marketing the town identity" appeared in 50 percent of interviews and 50 percent of city planning documents. Marketing a town's identity is an economic strategy that considers how a town's historic character, special resources, or products can support economic development and attract

new businesses and residents (Eversole, 2003). Interview participants and documents focused on how Barre's history as a granite town could create a quintessential New England experience for visitors and citizens alike. To market Barre as a model of the New England Downtown, planners coordinated events to draw consumers to the area. The citizen-led Barre Partnership hired a photographer to capture town events and then compiled a calendar of yearly events with complementing photos to advertise activities in the downtown. Public and private investments in granite sculptures further showcased the town's rich granite history. By marketing Barre's history, planners spurred economic activity by drawing visitors and encouraging residents to shop locally. However, marketing Barre as the New England model for a downtown area also improved negative stereotypes that people held about Barre City.

In terms of Research Question One, planners' and citizens' ability to capitalize on Barre's historic charm and granite history led to increased economic development. Participant 7 noted that Barre quickly became a model to other downtowns seeking to revitalize and emphasized that Barre's inclusion of economic planning in terms of marketing the town's history played a significant role in the improvement of the community's reputation.

### **Major Theme Two: Physical Strategies**

The second major theme that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts and city planning documents in Barre was physical strategies. Physical strategies are those actions taken by citizens and planners to repair or replace infrastructure or to improve the aesthetics of the community (Morckel, 2014). 100 percent of interview participants as well as over 90 percent of city planning documents discussed steps to either revitalize infrastructure or improve the appearance of the downtown. Based on an analysis of the data, one subtheme emerged: revitalizing infrastructure and giving Main Street a facelift (see table 9)

**Table 9***Barre: Major Theme Two and Subthemes*

Major Theme Two: Physical Strategies

Subtheme

2.1 Revitalizing Infrastructure and Giving Main Street a Facelift

Participant 2, the city manager, discussed the Big Dig, the name planners gave to the reconstruction of Main Street and noted that this physical revitalization effort was “almost like flipping a light switch...it was the foundation of the revitalization...Prior to that, community morale was probably about as low as it could have been.” After the infrastructure repairs and the aesthetic improvements (sidewalks, lighting, burying the power lines), he stated that “the morale of the community changed. It was almost palpable...” The physical revitalization strategies were the primary focus of the Barre revitalization and were, in large part, responsible for kickstarting efforts in the economic and social spheres. Barre planners put their efforts into making Barre look like a historic granite town through physical improvements and supported also technological and infrastructure upgrades that were useful to citizens and visitors.

***Major Theme Two—Subtheme 2.1: Revitalizing Infrastructure and Giving Main Street a***

***Facelift.*** Subtheme 2.1 “revitalizing infrastructure and giving Main Street a facelift” appeared in approximately 90 percent of interview transcripts and 100 percent of city planning documents.

Physical strategies were at the core of the entire project. According to Participant 4, former director of planning, permitting, and assessing, though the project eventually pulled in a wide range of funding sources, the starting point for the reconstruction of Main Street was federal money provided for the repair of a failing sewer pipe in the downtown. Because updated infrastructure is a key component of meeting citizen needs (Morckel, 2014), Barre planners recognized that infrastructure was a solid starting point for revitalization. According to

*Renaissance in Barre*, a public information document released to citizens in 2017 to discuss Barre's successes, one of the three primary goals for revitalization was to "bring 500 new workers to Barre over five years by improving the city's image with investments in public infrastructure and marketing." Investments in infrastructure, according to Participant 4, resulted in planners meeting their goal of 500 jobs. Participant 4 also suggested that, in addition to infrastructure upgrades, planners focused on the physical assets already present in Barre such as water and sewer capacity, highway access, and popular historic buildings.

Throughout the planning and implementation processes, planners consistently returned to address the physical strategies by which they could create more parking. Citizens identified parking as a need, particularly on the northeast side of Main Street. Businesses on the opposite side of Main Street were typically more successful because, Participant 4 believed, they already had access to parking. To meet this need, one of the major changes made was to add a sizable parking lot behind the new City Place building. The central location of the parking increased the likelihood of visitors and residents shopping in the downtown area. Although parking meter spaces were still available along the street, adding accessible parking was a physical change that significantly supported economic and social development in the downtown.

Approximately 90 percent of participants discussed the value of giving the downtown a facelift and six of those participants considered the impact of aesthetics on community morale. Participants commented that, prior to the upgrades made to the sidewalks, the burying of the power lines, and the installation of benches, community morale was low. Barre looked "like a poor community" and morale, as Participant 2 noted, "was about as low as it could get." He later likened the infrastructure and aesthetic changes to a light switch and credits these physical strategies with spurring the rest of the revitalization projects. However, Participant 8, a Barre

business owner, commented that a facelift was not enough to spur revitalization. Although aesthetic changes were good ways to get citizens on board, Participant 8 believed that physical changes alone needed to be augmented by economic development. He recommended considering citizens' shopping patterns and the potential market for any goods and services in the community.

In terms of Research Question One, none of the participants discussed physical strategies in isolation. Instead, each one underscored the importance of using infrastructure and aesthetic strategies to engage citizens in the revitalization process. Once involved in the physical revitalization efforts, citizens had the opportunity to engage in discussions about economic and social strategies to further improve the community. The evidence of physical strategies in conjunction with economic and social efforts speaks to the importance of using a tri-fold approach to revitalization.

### **Major Theme Three: Social Strategies**

The third major theme that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts and city planning documents in Barre was social strategies. Social strategies are those actions taken by citizens and planners to improve the quality of life in a community in terms of wellness, housing, community gatherings or cultural development (Morckel, 2014). 75 percent of interview participants and approximately 60 percent of city planning documents discussed steps that were taken to bring Barre residents together and support community wellness. Based on an analysis of the data, two subthemes emerged: investing in community gatherings and supporting at-risk community members (see table 10).

**Table 10***Barre: Major Theme Three and Subthemes*

Major Theme Three: Social Strategies

Subthemes

3.1 Investing in community gatherings

3.2 Supporting at-risk community members

Of all the revitalization strategies associated with Research Question One, social strategies were the least emphasized by interview participants and were the second to last strategy emphasized by city planning documents. Both interview participants and documents discussed social issues in Barre. Participant 4, for example, discussed Barre’s challenges in terms of having a county courthouse and being home to a range of individuals under surveillance of the department of corrections. Participants 1, 3, 4 and 8 also considered the impact of poverty on Barre residents. However, discussions about specific social strategies to address these issues lagged behind discussions about supporting physical and economic development. Social challenges in a community are often the result of layers of issues. Thus, city planners in Barre struggled to address these concerns since the roots of the problems often stemmed from societal factors beyond their control.

***Major Theme Three—Subtheme 3.1: Investing in Community Gatherings.*** The subtheme “investing in community gatherings” appeared approximately 60 percent of interview transcripts and 25 percent of city planning documents. Planners and citizens both recognized that revitalization in Barre would require them to be purposeful about the opportunities they provided for citizens to come together. Subtheme 3.1 shows evidence of comprehensive planning because Barre’s investment in community gatherings frequently overlapped with economic and physical revitalization strategies. For example, when planners, business owners, and the citizen-led Barre



Partnership came together to decide how they would support existing businesses during the reconstruction of Main Street, they decided to use incentives and gathering opportunities that would support local shopping and build excitement about the reconstruction. Planners and citizens also worked together to simultaneously support physical and social revitalization efforts through their establishment and maintenance of a community walking path. Further investment in gathering spaces such as the Pearl Street Pedway allowed citizens to access the downtown area on foot from adjacent streets while also providing a place for people to congregate and support local restaurants. Barre planners recognized that community events could not happen in isolation and were deliberate in their attempts to connect social strategies with economic and physical goals. Through the combined efforts of a city-employed architect and a business owner, locations such as the Pearl Street Pedway became spaces for farmer's markets and later an outdoor dining extension. The transition between Figures 2 and 3 show how community members worked together to transform the Pearl Street Pedway from an alley into a gathering space.

*Figure 3: Pearl Street Pedway Before BarreCity.org*



*Figure 4: Pearl Street Pedway After AR Market Facebook*



**Major Theme Three—Subtheme 3.2: Supporting At-risk Community Members.** The subtheme “supporting at risk community members” appeared in just 25 percent of interview transcripts and approximately 30 percent of city planning documents. However, this strategy is a critical example of how Barre planners used social approaches to support the local economy and citizen wellness. The primary means by which Barre planners supported at-risk community members came from research conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. This research firm supported Barre’s application for the Working Communities Challenge. Essentially, this challenge required Barre to consider how declining communities come out of a decline. During this investigation, Barre planners noted that 60 percent of single women with children lived below the poverty line. Supporting this targeted group was challenging. Physical revitalization efforts were unlikely to be useful to these women, and economic development in Barre often did not impact them because of the way that the public assistance system operates. As women tried to rise out of poverty by working more or getting promotions, their public assistance funds diminished. Therefore, Participants 1, the city manager, and 4, former director of planning, permitting, and assessing, focused on building a safety net around these women that went beyond “food stamps” and instead supported them with childcare, housing, job acquisition, and support with any substance abuse issues. Data is not yet available on the efficacy of this program.

However, Participant 1 stated,

If we can get rid of those barriers for people that historically haven't been able to come out of poverty, it not only affects just them but also that future generation which is their kids. They'll come out of poverty too. I think the current goal is really looking at all of what our strategic planning has been. It makes sure there's focus in the right way...All these efforts are going forward for the same purposes and it's going to benefit the community overall.

In terms of Research Question One, subthemes 3.1 and 3.2 demonstrate that planners in Barre are aware of the vital role that social wellness plays in the community. Creating

opportunities for citizens to gather to support local businesses and to become involved with making decisions about aesthetics and infrastructure connects to comprehensive planning because this demonstrates that social wellness efforts cannot occur in a vacuum. In addition, supporting citizen groups who have had historic challenges brings the community up economically, socially, and physically. The presence of social strategies in Barre supported, and continues to support, community development.

#### **Major Theme Four: Stakeholder Engagement Strategies**

The fourth major theme that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts and city planning documents in Barre was “stakeholder engagement strategies.” Stakeholder engagement strategies are those actions that planners and citizens take to involve not only citizens, businesses, and planners directly impacted by revitalization but also state, federal, regional and nonprofit institutions that may play a role in revitalization (Morckel, 2014). Table 5 defines stakeholder engagement as strategies that to create public-private partnerships and provide opportunities for stakeholder input. 75 percent of participants identified stakeholder engagement strategies as being present in Barre revitalization. However, only 25 percent of city planning documents discussed stakeholder strategies: the *Barre Case Study*, the *Barre city Municipal Plan*, and *Barre City: Our Plan for a Healthy Future*. Based on an analysis of the interview and document data, two subthemes emerged: Creating public-private partnerships and providing opportunities for stakeholder input (see table 11).

#### **Table 11**

##### *Barre: Major Theme Four and Subthemes*

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Major Theme Four: Stakeholder Engagement

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Subthemes

4.1 Creating public-private partnerships

4.2 Providing opportunities for stakeholder input

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When discussing effective revitalization strategies that were present in Barre, Participant 3 stated, “You need a multi-stakeholder partnership. You need municipality; you need government. You need private sector; you need nonprofit; you need educational institutions; you need all of these groups working together towards the same goal.” Both municipal and regional planners in Barre recognized the importance of building those public-private networks as well as providing opportunities for groups to have conversations about community needs and goals. The presence of stakeholder engagement strategies is one of the reasons that participants believed that Barre was successful with revitalization. Subthemes 4.1 and 4.2 discuss specific examples of how Barre planners used stakeholder engagement strategies.

**Major Theme Four—Subtheme 4.1: Creating Public-Private Partnerships.** The subtheme “creating public-private partnerships” appeared in 50 percent of interview data and 25 percent of city planning documents and provides evidence of comprehensive planning in Barre. Creating public-private partnerships is a critical strategy by which stakeholders build relationships amongst stakeholders. Without stakeholder partnerships, revitalization efforts can stall and eventually be forgotten (Rupp et al, 2019; Morckel, 2014). Participant 1, the city manager, believed that, without the combination of public funding and private sector involvement, the reconstruction of Main Street would never have been possible. He commented that revitalization is “the result of a lot of different initiatives...a lot of different people, a lot of different organizations working in a parallel fashion for a common goal...a number of different people and city departments all working together in their jurisdictions and as a team to make things happen.” In contrast, he noted that a redevelopment plan for a portion of Merchant’s Row had been put on “life support” due to a shift in project funding and an inability to obtain investment from the private sector. Strong public-private partnerships, such as the one identified in the

reconstruction of Main Street, result in positive community outcomes discussed by approximately 90 percent of participants. Ineffective or underdeveloped partnerships, such as the Merchant's Row plan, lead to incomplete or stagnated revitalization efforts.

***Major Theme Four—Subtheme 4.2: Providing Opportunities for Stakeholder Input.*** The subtheme “providing opportunities for stakeholder input” appeared in approximately 60 percent of interview data and 25 percent of city planning documents. Providing opportunities for stakeholder input consists of giving citizens, business owners, city officials, and state and federal government the chance to share their perspectives and aspirations for a revitalization project (Morckel, 2014). The interview and document data show that Barre was a model city in this area. Participant 2, the city mayor, discussed the process of obtaining citizen input. During the yearly Town Meeting Day, city officials asked citizens to fill out a short form indicating areas of interest they held in the community. City officials then contacted these citizens to ask if they would be interested in serving on a board or committee that aligned with their interests. Participant 2 noted that citizen participation increased dramatically. Planners also solicited community input to identify perceived problems in the community and potential community goals. Planners will be using this information to move forward with future revitalization projects.

Regarding Research Question One, the interview and document data clearly demonstrate that Barre was and continues to use stakeholder engagement strategies to support revitalization efforts. Projects founded by strong partnerships and by stakeholder input resulted in positive community outcomes while initiatives lacking in this area, such as the Merchant's Row redevelopment, struggled to move past the idea phase. Stakeholder involvement is a cornerstone of revitalization literature and is one of the key strategies used in Barre.

## Research Question One Results: Bennington

The four major themes that emerged from the interview and document data shed light on how Bennington used economic, physical, social, and stakeholder engagement strategies to further revitalization projects. The first research question was as follows: How are planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington using economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts? Table 12 lists and defines the major themes that emerged related to Research Question One in Bennington. Tables 13 and 14 further break down the data by showing if, and to what degree, a theme appeared in an interview transcript or a city document.

**Table 12**

*Major Themes Emerging from Thematic Analysis in Bennington*

Theme	Definition
Economic Strategies	Strategies used to access federal and state support and utilize anchor institutions such as the bank, hospital, and colleges
Physical Strategies	Strategies used to create mixed-use spaces and preserve the historic downtown
Social Strategies	Strategies used to invest in quality of life through cultural opportunities
Stakeholder Engagement Strategies	Strategies used to begin planning with public input and build relationships through trust and transparency

**Table 13**

*Major Themes—Types of Revitalization Strategies Identified in Bennington by Interview Participants*

Participant	Economic Strategies	Physical Strategies	Social Strategies	Stakeholder Engagement Strategies
Participant 9	X	XX		X
Participant 10	XX	XX	X	XX
Participant 11	XX	XX	XX	XX
Participant 12	XX	XX	XX	XX
Participant 13	XX	XX	XX	XX
Participant 14	X			X
Participant 15	X	X	X	
Participant 16	X	X	X	

X-mentioned during the interview

XX-mentioned and emphasized during the interview

**Table 14***Major Themes—Types of Revitalization Strategies Identified by Bennington Document Analysis*

Document Title	Economic Strategies	Physical Strategies	Social Strategies	Stakeholder Engagement Strategies
<i>Bennington County Mixed Use Development Report</i>	X	XX	XX	
<i>Bennington Downtown Area-wide Plan</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX
<i>Bennington Strategic Economic Development Plan</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX
<i>Bennington County Cultural Plan</i>	XX		XX	XX
<i>Bennington County Regional Plan</i>	XX	X	X	
<i>Bennington Town Plan</i>	XX	XX	XX	X
<i>Brownfields Redevelopment Program Overview</i>		X		
<i>Energizer Reuse Study</i>	XX	XX		
<i>Four Point Approach</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX
<i>Opportunity Zone</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX
<i>Map: Town of Bennington</i>		XX		



## Major Theme One: Economic Strategies

The first major theme that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts and city planning documents in Bennington was Economic Strategies (see tables 13 and 14). Economic strategies are efforts to boost the local economy by creating jobs as well as retaining and attracting businesses (Eversole, 2003) and manifested in Bennington as strategies used to access federal and state support and utilize anchor institutions such as the bank, hospital, and colleges. 100% of interview participants in Bennington as well as just over 80% of the city planning documents identified strategies for economic growth as a revitalization strategy used in Bennington. Based on an analysis of the data, two subthemes emerged under the theme of economic strategies. These include accessing federal and state support and utilizing anchor institutions (see table 15).

### Table 15

#### *Bennington: Major Theme One and Subthemes*

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Major Theme One: Economic Strategies

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Subthemes

1.1 Utilizing Anchor Institutions

1.2 Accessing Federal and State Support

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Bennington's challenges regarding economic decline stem, in part, from the departure of manufacturing positions in the city. The jobs in food service and retail that have replaced manufacturing are oftentimes unable to pay a livable wage. Participant 2 noted that "there was a time when you could finish high school and get a job that paid \$20-\$25 bucks an hour... There's that middle class American dream... and it's in living memory. It is very difficult for people to let that time period go." The resulting economic decline in Bennington has impacted community morale as well as the community's image. Therefore, economic development was a critical goal of revitalization efforts. To bring economic vitality back to the community, city planning efforts

included core community institutions and sought to access all available federal and state supports.

***Major Theme One: Subtheme 1.1 Utilizing Anchor Institutions.*** The subtheme “utilizing anchor institutions” appeared in 75 percent of interview data and 45 percent of city planning documents. Utilizing anchor institutions means identifying community organizations that have considerable influence and then bringing those groups together to support revitalization. In terms of Bennington, key institutions who became a part of the revitalization work were the Bank of Bennington, Southwestern Vermont Healthcare (hospital), Southern Vermont College, Southern Vermont Arts Center, and Bennington College. Participant 5, the director of planning, noted that revitalization had to have “big hitter institutions in the community that can be brought to the table that are very invested in the geographic area and its future growth as opposed to decline and that have some real resources.” These groups initially became involved with revitalization because, as noted by Participant 10, the community and economic development specialist, they were struggling to attract talented professionals for employment. Participant 14, the bank president stated that these anchor institutions became involved because “we had a downtown that was not doing well” and they needed to “do something because none of us are going anywhere.”

These anchor institutions came together with city officials, citizen investors, and regional planners to assess their options. Out of their initial conversations came the inspiration for revitalizing the Putnam Block, a historic downtown building. Without the financial and public support from these critical city institutions, it is unlikely that Bennington revitalization efforts would have taken place. Participant 3, the executive director of the Bennington County Regional Development Commission, considered the difference between past revitalization attempts and the Putnam Block redevelopment project. He noted that it had “always been a question of critical

mass... There just hadn't been enough investment and growth in the downtown to really get things to spark... When everybody (anchor institutions) got together a few years back and started pitching in and sharing resources to redevelop the Putnam Block, that is really a critical piece of turning the downtown in the heart of the community around." The utilization of those anchor institutions contributed significantly to the initiation of Bennington revitalization efforts.

***Major Theme One: Subtheme 1.2 Accessing Federal and State Support.*** The subtheme "accessing federal and state support" appeared in 75 percent of interview data and approximately 60 percent of city planning documents. State and federal supports in the form of grants for Bennington's historic downtown designation, tax increment financing, and the use of opportunity zones to allow private investors to participate were all means by which Bennington utilized state and federal money. Accessing financial support from state and federal sources is a primary means through which small communities can fund revitalization. The significant costs and time commitments make it nearly impossible for municipalities and private investors to shoulder the financial burdens alone. As an economic strategy, using state and federal money or other incentives can help get revitalization projects off the ground. However, financial supports come with regulations that planners must observe in the implementation of the project.

In terms of Research Question One, the interview and city planning document data provide evidence of the economic strategies used in Bennington. Without the investment of anchor institutions and the use of state and federal supports, it is unlikely that the community could have funded the \$31 million needed for the revitalization project's goals. Using economic development tools is essential for revitalization projects to come to fruition.

## Major Theme Two: Physical Strategies

The second major theme that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts and city planning documents in Bennington was Physical Strategies (see table 16). Physical strategies are those actions taken by citizens and planners to repair or replace infrastructure or to improve the aesthetics of the community (Morckel, 2014) and appeared in Bennington as strategies used to create mixed-use spaces and preserve the historic downtown. Physical strategies appeared in approximately 90 percent of interview data and just over 80 percent of city planning documents (see tables 13 and 14). Based on an analysis of the data, two subthemes emerged under the theme of physical strategies. These include creating mixed-use spaces and preserving the historic downtown (see table 16).

### Table 16

#### *Bennington: Major Theme Two and Subthemes*

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#### Major Theme Two: Physical Strategies

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##### Subthemes

2.1 Creating mixed-use spaces

2.2 Preserving the historic downtown

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**Major Theme Two: Subtheme 2.1 Creating Mixed-Use Spaces.** The subtheme “creating mixed use spaces” appeared in 75 percent of interview data and approximately 40 percent of city planning documents. Creating mixed-use spaces meant redeveloping a building to include residential and commercial components. The Putnam Block, located in the downtown’s primary intersection “the four corners” was an ideal central location for revitalization. The area-wide plan developed prior to revitalization was a process that worked with community members to identify revitalization priorities. In addition to an interest in commercial spaces, citizens also voiced their challenges with finding affordable housing in the downtown area. When planners began to develop the physical revitalization plans for the Putnam Block, they planned for retail and

restaurant spaces on the first floor and residential units on the second and third floors that were available to suit a range of income levels. These blueprints demonstrate that planners developed mixed-use spaces to align with citizen's needs. Figures 4, 5, and 6 show the floor plans for the first, second, and third floors of the Putnam Block project. These floors show a mix of retail, restaurant, and apartment space made available to citizens.



*Figure 5: First Floor of Putnam Block, Retail and Dining Space*

[www.putnamblock.com](http://www.putnamblock.com)

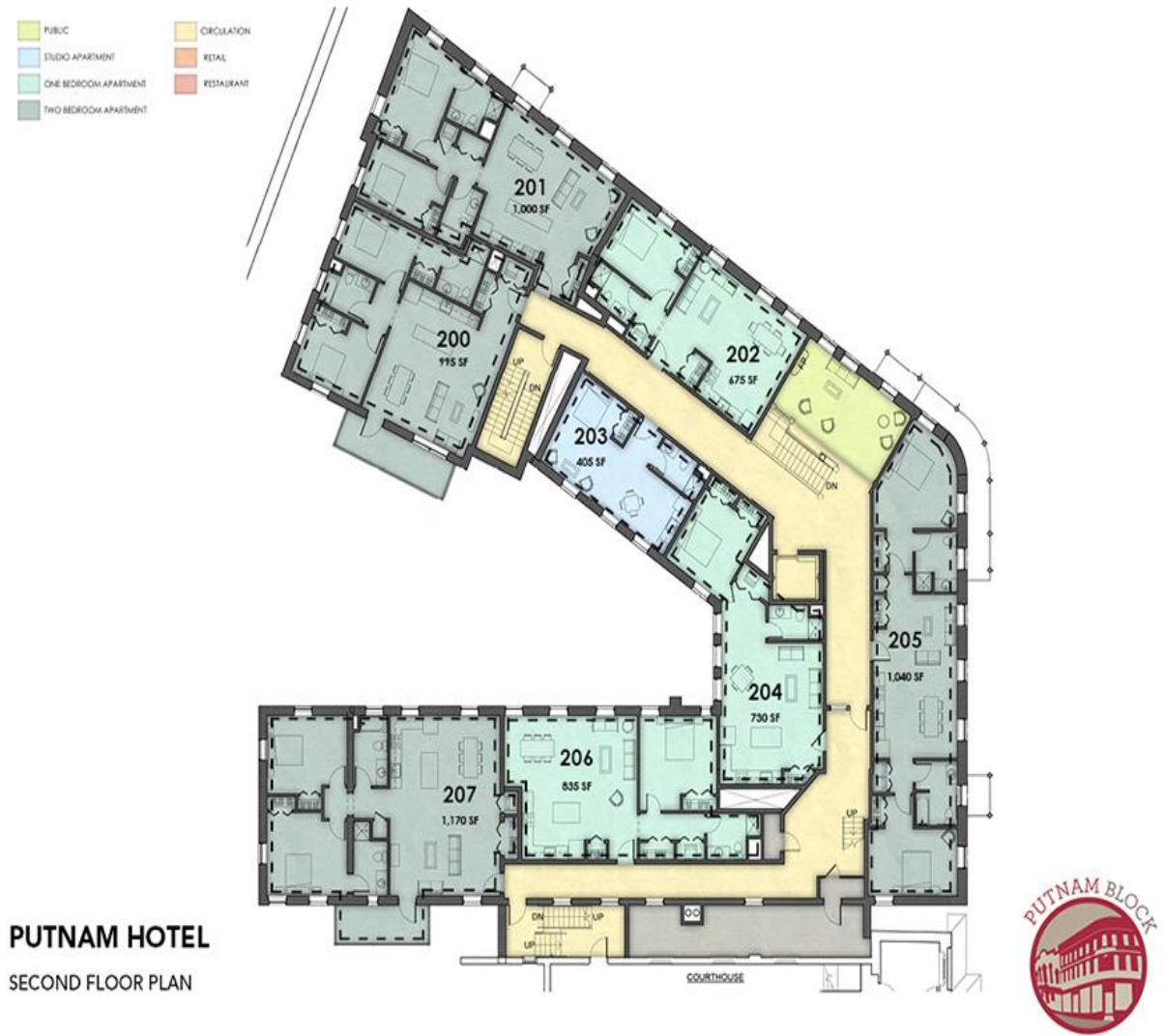


Figure 6: Second Floor of Putnam Block, Residential Spaces

[www.putnamblock.com](http://www.putnamblock.com)

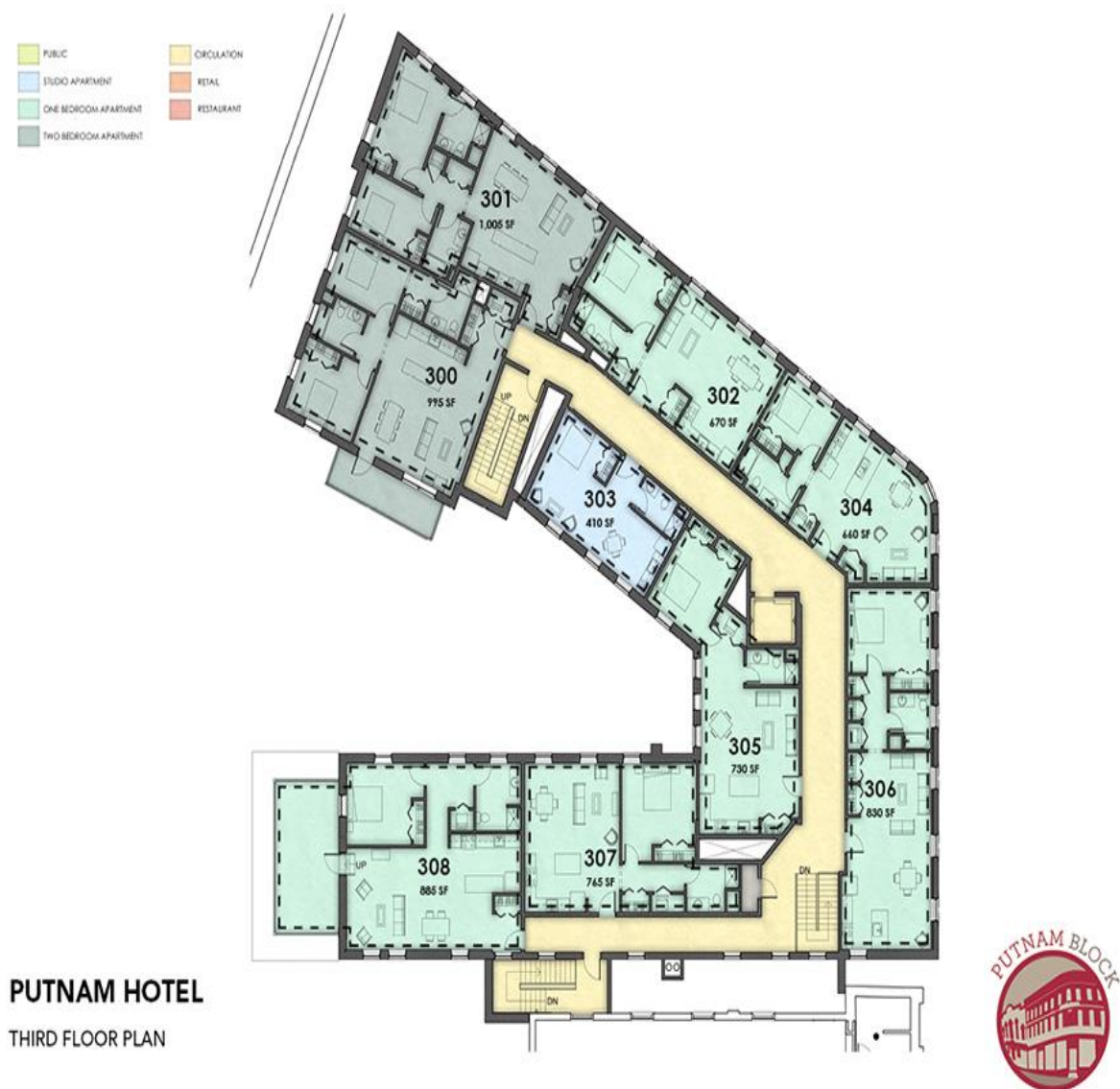


Figure 7: Third Floor of Putnam Block, Residential Spaces

[www.putnamblock.com](http://www.putnamblock.com)

**Major Theme Two: Subtheme 2.2. Preserving the Historic Downtown.** The subtheme “preserving the historic downtown” appeared in 50 percent of interview data and 45 percent of city planning documents. Preserving the historic downtown was a strategy that planners used to capitalize on Bennington’s historic roots. Historic buildings can be a strong asset for a community in terms of supporting access to grant funding, attracting visitors and businesses, and

building community morale. The Putnam Block, in particular, had long been a historic landmark in the community but had suffered from the economic decline of the downtown. Participant 10, the community and economic development specialist, noted the general improvement in community morale as a result of the Putnam Building redevelopment. Despite its benefits as a physical revitalization strategy, historic preservation was not without its challenges in Bennington. Regulatory challenges, for instance, cropped up during conversations about energy efficiency and compliance with federal accessibility requirements. Historic preservation is also challenging to justify financially since the cost associated with restoring buildings to their former glory is often significantly higher than the cost of new construction. Participant 10 stated, “One of the reasons that these projects don’t happen is that we’re going to have to spend \$26 million to do this and at the end of it, it’s going to be worth over a million dollars.” Notwithstanding these obstacles, historic preservation was a powerful physical revitalization strategy in Bennington and resulted in an increase in the attractiveness of the downtown and in community member morale.

In terms of Research Question One, creating mixed-use spaces and preserving the historic downtown were two physical strategies used by planners to address physical decline in Bennington. These two strategies provide evidence of comprehensive planning in Bennington.

### **Major Theme Three: Social Strategies**

The third major theme that emerged from the analysis of interview transcripts and city planning documents in Bennington was Social Strategies (see tables 13 and 14). Social strategies in Bennington were those actions taken to improve the quality of life for citizens. Social strategies appeared in 75 percent of interview data and approximately 70 percent of city planning documents. Participant 10, the community economic development specialist, noted that Bennington sought to capitalize on the potential for social vitality in the downtown area and



stated that “It wasn’t just about having a walkable downtown...people talk about quality of life and if you can offer actual quality of life, you should spend time on that discussion.” Based on an analysis of the data, one subtheme emerged: investing in quality of life through cultural opportunities. Social strategies in Bennington focused heavily on supporting citizen well-being in this area.

**Table 17**

*Bennington: Major Theme Three and Subthemes*

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Major Theme Three: Social Strategies

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Subtheme

3.1 Investing in quality of life through cultural opportunities

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***Major Theme Three: Subtheme 3.1: Investing in quality of life through cultural opportunities.***

The subtheme “investing in quality of life through cultural opportunities” appeared in 25 percent of interview data and approximately 40 percent of city planning documents. According to the *Bennington County Cultural Plan*, “by developing cultural activities in the area we enhance the lives of all who live and visit here.” After identifying a lack of cultural resources in Bennington, the planners behind the *Bennington County Cultural Plan* identified four primary goals to use culture to improve Bennington’s quality of life. Those goals involved capitalizing on the traditional Vermont “brand,” engaging the community in cultural activities, building relationships with stakeholders, and using community resources to strengthen the economy. To develop Bennington’s ability to offer cultural experiences, planners highlighted the roles of important cultural institutions such as Bennington College and the Southern Vermont Arts Center. Planners were optimistic about the cultural assets in Bennington. The *Cultural Plan*, taking stock of Bennington’s cultural assets, stated, “For a community of our size and area, we are fortunate to have the variety and dynamism that we do. It’s an important, and often overlooked, aspect to quality of life.”

## Major Theme Four: Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

The fourth theme that emerged from the analysis of the interview data and city planning documents was Stakeholder Engagement Strategies. Stakeholder Engagement Strategies in Bennington are those strategies used to create public-private partnerships and build trust and transparency amongst stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement strategies appeared in 75 percent of interview data and approximately 50 percent of city planning documents. Based on an analysis of the data, two subthemes emerged: beginning with public outreach and building trust and transparency (see table 18).

**Table 18**

*Bennington: Major Theme Four and Subthemes*

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Major Theme Four: Stakeholder Engagement

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Subthemes

4.1 Beginning with public outreach

4.2 Building trust and transparency

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**Major Theme Four: Subtheme 4.1: Beginning with Public Outreach.** The subtheme “starting with public outreach” appeared in approximately 90 percent of interview data and approximately 50 percent of city planning documents. Beginning with public outreach was a strategy used in Bennington to fund projects and to engage stakeholders in the revitalization process. In the initial planning for downtown revitalization, city officials used state and federal funding to conduct an area-wide plan that connected private citizens with public officials and planners. According to Participant 10, the economic development specialist, the area-wide plan “is a public planning process. It’s about getting stakeholder input and asking, ‘What kind of development would you like to see in this area?’ That gave the public a lot of opportunity to talk about...where they would like to see the development efforts focused...The public overwhelmingly said, ‘We want to see something happen at the four corners on the Putnam properties. We want to see mixed-use,

multi-residential and commercial spaces.” Participant 10 also noted that “So much of what enabled this initiative to come through was that it began with public outreach and with what people would like to see...It allowed the public to come to lay the groundwork on which a vision could be built, as opposed to a top down ‘diktat.’” Beginning the planning process with a clear assessment of public needs gave Bennington planners something concrete that they could use in the implementation phase. Revitalization literature asserts the value of starting projects with community input as the foundation (Rupp et al., 2019; Morckel, 2014; Soen, 1981). One concern identified in the literature was the difficulty that planners and citizens might have in communicating with each other. This challenge, however, did not appear in the interview and city planning document data from Bennington.

**Major Theme Four: Subtheme 4.2: Building Trust and Transparency.** The subtheme “building trust and transparency” appeared in approximately 40 percent of interview data and approximately 40 percent of city planning documents. Building trust and transparency was a strategy that planners used to establish relationships with all types of stakeholders. Participant 10, the community and economic development specialist, identified “professionalization” as a way that planners established that trust. Participant 10 believed that it was essential that all planners adopt a neutral, professional stance when dealing with investors and citizens and stated,

You can’t get angry. You can’t make it super personal. You can’t try to just arm wrestle people...you have to have everybody rowing in the same direction and that requires serious trust. When we enter into executive session to discuss things that would be a problem if it became public...loose lips sink ships.

Participant 10 further asserted that building trust and transparency “had to be demonstrated over time.” At one point, due to a change in federal policy regarding tax credits, planners were struggling to come up with the funds needed to complete the Putnam Project. Participant 10 stated, “The way...people had conducted themselves (in the past) meant that, when they reached

out to other individuals who had the capacity, they were able to secure (the needed investments).”

In terms of utilizing transparency, Participant 10 stated that it is important “that everybody feels like you have a good sense of where things are and where things are going. The least amount of surprises possible is a way to keep all hands on deck.” One strategy used to “keep all hands on deck” was the local newspaper *The Bennington Banner*. Participant 13, director of planning, stated that the local coverage of events in the *Banner* was essential for “people to have opinions and to be aware of and have opinions about what’s happening.” Citizens and institutions who feel that planners are being honest throughout the revitalization process are more likely to be supportive of planning efforts and potentially more willing to participate in the process.

### **Cross-Case Comparison**

Revitalization is a unique process in each community. Nevertheless, the analysis of the interview data and city planning documents identified similarities and differences in the ways in which Bennington and Barre approached revitalization. Table 19 shows the subthemes from both communities.

**Table 19***Comparison of the Revitalization Strategies Used in Barre and Bennington*

Theme	Barre	Bennington
Economic Strategies	Supporting existing businesses Accessing federal and state supports Marketing Barre's historic identity	Accessing federal and state supports Utilizing anchor institutions
Physical Strategies	Repairing and updating infrastructure Creating a welcoming and user-friendly space	Creating mixed-use spaces Preserving the historic downtown
Social Strategies	Organizing community events Supporting citizens in need	Investing in quality of life through cultural opportunities
Stakeholder Engagement Strategies	Building public-private partnerships Providing opportunities for stakeholder input	Beginning with public input Building relationships through trust and transparency

***Economic Strategies.*** Both Barre and Bennington relied heavily on state and federal funding throughout the project. The substantial costs associated with community revitalization make it impossible for a city to gather the funds on its own. The historic character of these Vermont communities gave them a distinct advantage in competing for federal resources. Interview and document data from both communities identified federal and state supports in 75 percent of interview data and approximately 60 percent of documents. Once planners had accessed federal and state funding, however, economic efforts diverged. Barre chose to focus on supporting existing businesses in the downtown and to use the successes of those businesses to attract other potential companies. Bennington, on the other hand, chose to tap into the social and financial capacities of anchor institutions such as the hospital, the Bank of Bennington, and Bennington

College. This strategy was fitting for Bennington because those anchor institutions had, in a large sense, initiated the conversations about revitalization.

***Physical Strategies.*** Barre and Bennington approached the physical revitalization of their communities in diverse ways. Because the funding for Barre's downtown projects came primarily from federal and state supports designed to repair failing or outdated infrastructure, Barre chose to address physical concerns such as burying the power lines, replacing a primary sewer pipe, replacing sidewalks, and updating the lighting. Although Bennington did have some infrastructure needs such as street lighting, the city's primary physical efforts involved the Putnam Block property which did not require the same degree of extensive downtown reconstruction. Both communities did consider the types of spaces they were creating in their downtowns. However, Bennington residents identified residential and commercial mixed spaces as a priority while Barre residents were more interested in the downtown appearing welcoming and user-friendly. Barre's focus on creating a positive image aligns with the city's initial negative reputation and desire to reinvent itself.

***Social Strategies.*** Barre's approach to supporting the social needs of its residents involved being proactive in organizing community events and taking steps to support citizens who were struggling socially and economically. Bennington, on the other hand, considered social investment from a cultural standpoint. Both communities possess cultural institutions that offer diverse experiences to citizens. However, Bennington's access to opportunities at Bennington College and Southwestern Vermont Arts Center enabled planners to promote involvement in the arts. Although both communities struggled with populations below the poverty line, Barre was able to access funding to pay for the support of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston in conducting revitalization research that identified strategies for lifting single women with children

out of poverty. The use of social strategies was heavily dependent on the resources available in each community.

***Stakeholder Engagement Strategies.*** Both Barre and Bennington invested in connecting citizens with city officials and planners. However, revitalization efforts in Bennington were heavily dependent on the relationships and trust established amongst stakeholders while Barre focused on the number of opportunities that citizens had to offer input. Barre also benefited from the efforts of the Barre Partnership, a citizen-led group that invested significantly in revitalization efforts. Bennington's approach to stakeholder engagement also differs from that of Barre because Bennington's efforts began with public input while Barre's efforts began with planners who had a few clear goals and then solicited input along the way. Both methods were effective for each community. Barre's strategies speak to the fact that the need for updated infrastructure was already clear. Bennington, on the other hand, had more freedom to assess what community members wanted out of revitalization.

### **Research Question Two**

The six major themes that emerged from the interview and document data shed light on how Barre and Bennington are combining physical, social, and stakeholder engagement strategies to further revitalization projects. The second research question states: How are planners and citizens combining social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts in Barre and Bennington? Table 20 lists and defines the major theme and subthemes that emerged related to Research Question Two in both communities. Tables 21 and 22 further break down the data from Barre by showing whether a participant or city document discussed a specific theme. This section discusses the six themes that emerged relating to Research Question Two by community and concludes with a cross-case comparison.

**Table 20***Major Theme Five and Subthemes for Barre and Bennington*

Theme 5	Definition
Major Theme: Pairings	Strategies used together during revitalization ( <i>the restoration of a historic building by a community group would be an example of pairing physical strategies and internal stakeholders</i> )
Subtheme 5.1 Physical and Social Elements	Revitalizing infrastructure or aesthetics to improve the quality of life in the community
Subtheme 5.2 Physical Elements and Internal Stakeholders	Community residents, businesses, or institutions working to improve community aesthetics or infrastructure
Subtheme 5.3 Physical Elements and External Stakeholders	Outside institutions (state, federal, nonprofits) working to improve community aesthetics or infrastructure
Subtheme 5.4 Social Elements and Internal Stakeholders	Community residents, businesses, or institutions working to improve the quality of life in the community
Subtheme 5.5 Social Elements and External Stakeholders	Outside institutions (state, federal, nonprofits) working to improve the quality of life in the community
Subtheme 5.6 Internal and External Stakeholders	Community residents, businesses, or institutions working together with outside institutions (state, federal, nonprofits)



### Major Theme 5: Pairings in Barre and Bennington

Major Theme 5: Pairings appeared in 100 percent of both interview data and city planning documents from both communities. Pairings are strategies used together during revitalization (*the restoration of a historic building by a community group would be an example of pairing physical strategies and internal stakeholders*). Planners and citizens paired revitalization strategies in Barre in six ways as indicated by Table 21. The concept of “pairing” is essential to revitalization literature because it demonstrates that revitalization strategies cannot act in isolation. Rather, revitalization is a process of overlapping action steps that operates most effectively when planners use multiple types of strategies to make progress.

### Research Question Two Results: Barre

**Table 21**

*Major Theme 5—Types of Paired Strategies Identified in Barre by Interview Participants*

Participant	Physical and Social	Physical and Internal	Physical and External	Social and Internal	Social and External	Internal and External
1		X	XX	X		XX
2	XX	XX		XX	XX	XX
3	XX	X	X	XX	XX	XX
4	X	X	XX			X
5	X	X				
6		X		X		
7		XX	X	X		
8	X					

X-mentioned during the interview

XX-mentioned and emphasized during the interview

**Table 22***Major Theme 5—Types of Paired Strategies Identified in Barre Document Analysis*

Document Title	Physical and Social	Physical and Internal	Physical and External	Social and Internal	Social and External	Internal and External
<i>Barre Case Study</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX	X	XX
<i>Barre City Municipal Plan</i>	XX	X	XX	X	XX	X
<i>Barre Summary of Historic Downtown</i>	X	X	X			
<i>Barre TIF</i>		X	X			
<i>Stormwater Regional Master Plan</i>		X	X			
<i>Barre TIF Plan</i>	X	X	X			
<i>Barre Summary of Historic Designation Benefits</i>	XX	X	X			
<i>Barre City: Our Plan for a Healthy Future</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX
<i>North Main Street to Summer Street Master Plan</i>		XX	XX			
<i>Listing of Historic Addresses</i>		X				

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.1: Physical and Social Strategies.** The subtheme “physical and social strategies” appeared in approximately 60 percent of interview data and approximately 70 percent of city planning documents. This pairing occurs when revitalization efforts use physical strategies such as updating infrastructure or improving aesthetics to spur community gatherings or improve the quality of life for citizens (Morckel, 2014). This pairing can also occur when social forces in a community come together to conduct physical improvements. This pairing appeared in Barre when physical improvements to the downtown caused a leap in community morale and established a positive community reputation. Participant 1, the city manager, stated that the improvement in morale “was almost palpable” following the reconstruction of Main Street. Planners used physical improvements to spur social wellbeing.

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.2: Physical Elements and Internal Stakeholders.** The subtheme “physical elements and internal stakeholders” appeared in approximately 90 percent of interview data and 100 percent of city planning documents. This pairing occurs when revitalization efforts use physical strategies with engagement from internal stakeholders or when internal stakeholders take initiative for physical improvements. Internal stakeholders are those community members who have a direct stake in the outcome of the revitalization (Morckel, 2014). This pairing appeared in Barre when planners solicited input from community members using established methods of communication such as select board meetings, Front Porch Forum, social media, and Town Meeting Day. Conversely, internal stakeholders also took ownership of physical improvements in the creation of the Pearl Street Pedway, a revitalized alleyway.

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.3: Physical Elements and External Stakeholders.** The subtheme “physical elements and external stakeholders” appeared in 50 percent of interview data and approximately 80 percent of city planning documents. This pairing occurs when revitalization

efforts use physical strategies with engagement from external stakeholders. External stakeholders are those institutions who have a financial stake in the revitalization but are not daily impacted by the results of revitalization (Morckel, 2014). This pairing appeared in Barre when external stakeholders played a role in the regulations surrounding physical changes. Participant 4, former director of planning, permitting, and assessing, noted the challenges associated with complying with federal and state regulations. “When you’re working with five or six different grant sources...it takes a lot of very careful management...There’s a NEPA clearance but the NEPA clearance for HUD dollars is different than transportation dollars.” Planners felt the presence of external stakeholders during revitalization even though they were not on site.

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.4: Social Strategies and Internal Stakeholders.** The subtheme “social strategies and internal stakeholders” appeared in approximately 60 percent of interview data and approximately 30 percent of city planning documents. This pairing occurs when planners engage internal stakeholders with social revitalization efforts. This pairing appeared in Barre when planners created a town event out of the reconstruction of Main Street and when the citizen-led Barre Partnership took steps to support the community businesses affected by construction. Participant 4, former director of planning, permitting, and assessing, discussed this strategy: “We had a Big Dig promotion; we made it into an event. We had a guy dressed up as a big gopher with a hard hat, and we would have events to bring people in. We had all this signage to redirect people...So from that aspect, it was very successful.”

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.5: Social Strategies and External Stakeholders.** The subtheme “social strategies and external stakeholders” appeared in 25 percent of interview data and approximately 30 percent of city planning documents. This pairing occurs when outside institutions such as state and federal government intervene in social issues in a community

(Morckel, 2014). This pairing occurred in Barre when the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston supported Barre planners with socioeconomic challenges for citizens. The Bank conducted research about communities coming out of poverty and, together with Green Mountain United Way, helped Barre identify single women heads-of-household as an at-risk group in the community. Barre used the information from this research to begin developing strategies to help these women improve their quality of life.

***Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.6: Internal and External Stakeholders.*** The subtheme “internal and external stakeholders” appeared in approximately 60 percent of interview data and approximately 30 percent of city planning documents. This pairing occurs when community members and institutions work together with outside institutions to revitalize in the community (Morckel, 2014). The pairing appeared in Barre when city officials worked with federal and state government to access funding sources. It also appeared when Barre planners accessed the support of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston to conduct socioeconomic research in the community.

## Research Question Two Results: Bennington

**Table 23**

*Major Theme 5—Types of Paired Strategies Identified in Bennington by Interview Participants*

Participant	Physical and Social	Physical and Internal	Physical and External	Social and Internal	Social and External	Internal and External
9		XX	X			XX
10	XX	XX	XX	XX		XX
11	X	X	X	X		XX
12	X	X		X		X
13	XX	XX		XX		XX
14		X	X			XX
15	XX			XX		
16	X	X		X		XX

X-mentioned during the interview

XX-mentioned and emphasized during the interview

**Table 24***Major Theme 5—Types of Paired Strategies Identified in Bennington Document Analysis*

Document Title	Physical and Social	Physical and Internal	Physical and External	Social and Internal	Social and External	Internal and External
<i>Bennington County Mixed Use Development Report</i>	XX	XX		X		
<i>Bennington Downtown Area-wide Plan</i>	XX	XX	XX	X		XX
<i>Bennington Strategic Economic Development Plan</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX		XX
<i>Bennington County Cultural Plan</i>	X	X	X	X		X
<i>Bennington Town Plan</i>	XX	XX	XX	XX		XX
<i>Brownfields Redevelopment Program Overview</i>		X	X	X		
<i>Energizer Reuse Study</i>		X	X			XX
<i>Four Point Approach</i>	X	X	X	X		XX
<i>Opportunity Zones</i>	X	XX		XX		
<i>Map: Town of Bennington Downtown Improvement</i>	X					

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.1: Physical and Social Strategies.** The subtheme “physical and social strategies” appeared in 75 percent of interview data and approximately 70 percent of city planning documents. This pairing appeared in Bennington when planners used the Putnam Block building to create a range of spaces that improved the quality of life in downtown Bennington. Citizens, through the area-wide planning process, had identified mixed-use commercial and residential spaces as a priority for the downtown. Participant 10, a community and economic development specialist, noted that revitalization couldn’t happen “off in a desert or a random spot. This (Putnam Block) is an anchor of a larger downtown...People want to live and work in the downtown...Everyone is talking about quality of life.” Thus, planners’ dedication to address citizen’s needs through physical development demonstrates the pairing of physical and social strategies.

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.2: Physical Elements and Internal Stakeholders.** The subtheme “physical elements and internal stakeholders” appeared in approximately 90 percent of interview data and approximately 80 percent of city planning documents. This pairing appeared in Bennington when planners, citizens, and community institutions came together to revitalize the Putnam Block, repair downtown sidewalks, and update downtown lighting. Bennington planners also paired physical elements with internal stakeholders by working together to establish a standard for the types of developments they wanted to see in the downtown. Participant 11, the executive director of the Bennington Regional Development Commission, stated that planners were not interested in “the cheapest thing that you could build. They didn’t panic and say, ‘We’ve got to get anything we can get.’ They did keep the standards up...They wanted quality.” Internal stakeholders hold a unique position in revitalization because they bear the impact of



failed revitalization efforts. Thus, the internal stakeholders in Bennington wanted the physical improvements to be high-quality developments.

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.3: Physical Elements and External Stakeholders.** The subtheme “physical elements and external stakeholders” appeared in 50 percent of interview data and approximately 60 percent of city planning documents. The pairing of physical elements and external stakeholders appeared through the presence of federal and state regulations tied to the use of historic preservation funding. Participant 10, the community economic development specialist, noted that one idea for revitalization, the establishment of a hardware store and a marketplace, did not come to fruition because of regulations tied to the reconstruction of historic buildings. Funding gives external stakeholders an investment in the process and outcomes of revitalization.

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.4: Social Strategies and Internal Stakeholders.** The subtheme “social strategies and internal stakeholders” appeared in 75 percent of interview data and approximately 70 percent of city planning documents. Planners paired social strategies with internal stakeholders by using cultural opportunities to improve the quality of life for citizens. Bennington’s access to cultural anchors (colleges, arts centers, museum) enabled planners to invest in marketing these opportunities to citizens. *The Bennington County Cultural Plan*, a planning document that assessed cultural opportunities available to citizens and outlined strategies for increasing the presence of the arts in Bennington, voiced the importance of cultural investment.

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.5: Social Strategies and External Stakeholders.** The subtheme “social strategies and external stakeholders” did not appear in the interview data or city planning documents.

**Major Theme 5: Subtheme 5.6: Internal and External Stakeholders.** The subtheme “internal and external stakeholders” appeared in approximately 90 percent of interview data and approximately 50 percent of city planning documents. The pairing of internal and external stakeholders appeared primarily in the funding process for the downtown revitalization project. The *Opportunity Zones* document outlined the process by which the private sector could invest in downtown revitalization. “Opportunity Zones are new private sector investment vehicles that invest at least 90 percent of their capital into qualifying assets...to enable a broad array of investors to pool their resources...increasing the scale of investments.” Participant 14, president of the Bank of Bennington, noted that there were 17 total investors in addition to citizens who “basically bought preferred stock in the project to get an annual return.” Thus, internal and external stakeholders were able to work together during the funding process.

### **Cross-Case Comparison**

Bennington and Barre actively paired strategies throughout their revitalization processes. Physical and social strategies, as well as physical strategies and internal stakeholders, were pairings that surfaced frequently in the data. Social strategies and external stakeholders were the most infrequently identified strategy in interview data and documents for both communities. This pairing did not appear in Bennington’s data at all.

Although both communities utilized the same pairings, each city’s approach appeared different. For example, both communities paired physical and social strategies. However, Barre focused on using physical improvements to increase community morale and restore the city’s reputation. Bennington, on the other hand, paired physical and social strategies in the Putnam Block project to address the needs that citizens had identified in the area-wide planning process. In addition, while Bennington paired social strategies and internal stakeholders by using cultural

opportunities, Barre paired these elements to support the socioeconomic status of residents and businesses. Cultural opportunities, though present in Barre, did not appear in the interview or document data. Thus, each community used these pairings by working with what was available to them to address specific priorities. The pairings are not “one size fits all.” Instead, planners must flexibly expand the use of paired strategies to suit their community’s needs.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the economic, social, and physical strategies that planners and citizens used to conduct revitalization efforts in Barre and Bennington. Each interview participant discussed their experiences with revitalization in their community, and each document and photograph provided evidence of the types of revitalization efforts that occurred.

The researcher discovered four major themes in common between both communities. Major Theme One revealed the economic revitalization strategies used in both communities. In Barre, the three subthemes were supporting local businesses, accessing federal and state support, and marketing the town’s historic identity. In Bennington, the two subthemes were accessing federal and state support and involving anchor institutions. Participant and city planning data thoroughly documented the use of these strategies in both communities. Each community approached economic revitalization from its own assets and barriers. However, both communities recognized the importance of applying for a range of federal and state grants.

Major Theme Two revealed physical revitalization strategies used in both communities. In Barre, the subtheme was revitalizing infrastructure and giving the downtown a facelift. In Bennington, the two subthemes were creating mixed-use spaces and preserving the historic downtown. Barre approached revitalization with an emphasis on infrastructure and image since

these were their greatest barriers to tackle. Bennington, on the other hand, approached physical revitalization from a community needs perspective and used their area-wide plan to determine that a mixed-use space in the Putnam Block building would best serve citizens' needs.

Major Theme Three revealed physical revitalization strategies used in both communities. In Barre, the subthemes were organizing community events and supporting citizens in need. In Bennington, social strategies manifested in improving the quality of life through cultural opportunities. Because of research conducted in Barre about economic turnaround, planners focused on building social supports for at-risk women who lived below the poverty line. Bennington chose to approach social revitalization through the lens of cultural opportunities because it has key anchor institutions that promoted the arts.

Major Theme Four revealed stakeholder engagement strategies used in both communities. In Barre, the subthemes were building public-private partnerships and offering opportunities for stakeholder input. In Bennington, the subthemes were beginning with public input and building relationships through trust and transparency. Barre approached stakeholder involvement differently because their goals had much more clarity at the outset than did goals in Bennington. Failing infrastructure and dilapidated buildings were non-negotiable starting points in Barre. Bennington, lacking these crucial infrastructure issues, had more freedom to assess what citizens wanted to see during the revitalization process.

In response to Research Question Two, the researcher discovered one main theme and six subthemes in both communities. The main theme "Pairings" revealed that effective revitalization projects resulted from strategies used in conjunction with one another. The six subthemes were:

Physical and Social Elements  
Physical Elements and Internal Stakeholders  
Physical Elements and External Stakeholders  
Social Elements and Internal Stakeholders  
Social Elements and External Stakeholders  
Internal and External Stakeholders

These six pairings were present in Barre and Bennington revitalization efforts and provide evidence of effective planning methods.

Through the themes and subthemes identified, study participants, documents, and photographs demonstrated that Barre and Bennington both used comprehensive planning methods in their revitalization projects and effectively paired strategies to increase the benefits of their work. Planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington both recognized that revitalization needed to include specific plans for addressing economic, social, and physical elements and needed to include internal and external stakeholders. Furthermore, both communities recognized that using paired strategies ensured that revitalization efforts would effectively meet community revitalization goals.

## CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

### **Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to investigate how city planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington, Vermont, addressed comprehensive planning strategies in their community revitalization projects. This chapter discusses a summary of the study's findings and considers how those findings align with the theoretical literature. Furthermore, the chapter discusses recommendations for city planners and citizens who might be initiating revitalization efforts in their communities and concludes with a discussion of the study's delimitations and limitations, recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

The focus of the study considered how city planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington, Vermont, used and are using economic, physical, social, and stakeholder engagement strategies. The literature asserts the need for combining these engagement strategies in a variety of ways (Morckel, 2014) (Eversole, 2003) (Rupp et al., 2019). The use of engagement strategies in conjunction with each other is called comprehensive planning (Morckel, 2014). The study used interviews, documents, and photographs from each of the two sites. The researcher conducted sixteen interviews using the Google Meet platform or telephone in accordance with Covid-19 safety measures and transcribed the interviews using Otter.ai software. Moreover, the researcher accessed twenty-three documents through public sector (city) or nonprofit websites.

Participants in Barre and Bennington discussed their experiences with revitalization and shared their knowledge of specific economic, physical, social, or stakeholder engagement strategies used in their communities. The documents used in the study shared information about

the origins of revitalization in each community and specific strategies used during the process. Through multiple analyses of the transcripts and documents and time spent listening to audio recordings, the researcher developed a main list of similar ideas. After creating a list of those similar ideas, the researcher revisited the data and, after reviewing all highlighted statements, condensed the related categories into themes. Four major themes emerged in each community for Research Question One: economic strategies, physical strategies, social strategies, and stakeholder engagement strategies. One to three subthemes supported each major theme. Six major themes emerged in each community for Research Question Two:

- Physical and social elements
- Physical elements and internal stakeholders
- Physical elements and external stakeholders
- Social elements and internal stakeholders
- Social elements and external stakeholders
- Internal and external stakeholders

The following research questions have guided this study: 1.) How are planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington using economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts? 2.) How are planners and citizens combining social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts in Barre and Bennington?

The themes that emerged from the data originated from Research Questions 1 and 2. The researcher analyzed interview transcripts and documents to determine the prevalence of each strategy in each community.

## **Discussion**

The following sections discuss the theoretical literature and purpose of the study and make recommendations for city planners in each of the four critical areas.

## **Theoretical Literature**

According to Merriam (1998, 6), “The key philosophical assumption...upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed.” Under the qualitative research umbrella, the case study gives the researcher the opportunity to examine a single unit to gain a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon and its meaning for those involved (Merriam, 1998). The background and context are paramount. As the researcher examines the situation or case under a “microscope,” she gains a rich description of the phenomenon of interest.

The objective of the study was to investigate how planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington, Vermont, were using comprehensive planning methods in their community revitalization projects. The first research question investigated whether communities were using economic, physical, social, and stakeholder engagement strategies. The second question went a step further and considered how citizens and planners were combining the strategies. These questions were built on Morckel’s assertion that combining revitalization strategies would lead to successful revitalization projects. Because Barre and Bennington had both conducted successful revitalization projects that positively impacted residents, the researcher expected to find that communities were using each of these types of strategies in a variety of ways in their planning and implementation work. The findings reported in Chapter 4 demonstrate that planners and citizens used each of the strategies to varying degrees in each community. However, because each community had its own assets and barriers, there were similarities and differences in the use of each strategy. The researcher selected these questions because she was interested in examining



successful revitalization projects to determine commonalities that contributed to successful outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

The purpose of the study was to provide Vermont planners and citizens with information on best practices in community revitalization. The study does not intend to create a series of recommendations that are generalizable to all Vermont communities. Rather, the case study seeks to investigate the distinct qualities of each community for the purpose of recommending potential strategies for other revitalization projects. By investigating two case studies, the researcher gathered a series of best practices or recommendations in each of the three critical revitalization areas. These recommendations have been shown to be effective in Barre and/or Bennington, Vermont, and can support planners as they move forward with their revitalization goals. The recommendations are divided into economic, social, and physical categories.

#### **Economic Recommendations**

Economic development, a critical concern in both Barre and Bennington, must be specifically planned for during revitalization. The results of the case study identify the following recommendations as best practices in planning for economic development:

- Prior to revitalization efforts, identify federal and state supports available
- Build financial resources and public engagement by accessing support from anchor institutions such as banks, schools, and hospitals
- Identify a unique feature of the community (history, specific product, landform etc) that can be marketed to draw tourists and businesses

**Strengths.** The strength of the first two recommendations is that they encourage communities to seek economic support beyond and within their own borders. Revitalization projects are often

stalled because those involved are unable to think flexibly about the stakeholders they are choosing to include (Eversole, 2003). They become fixated on their limited assets and are unable to think beyond what is immediately available. Bennington and Barre, however, initiated the process through conversations amongst internal stakeholders (planners, citizens, anchor institutions) that later translated into seeking out federal and state monies that could support their goals. The economic support gained from federal and state sources was essential to the project. Participants in both communities reported that it was unlikely the revitalization would have occurred without the grant money and special financing they received. In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, federal grant money is readily available in the form of ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds. Communities seeking to revitalize should be proactive about accessing federal funds before they are no longer available. Bennington participants also stated that the initial support of the Bank of Bennington, Bennington College, and Southwestern Vermont Healthcare was essential in terms of financing and of building public goodwill for the project. Communities need to consider their own anchor institutions and should solicit their economic support in the initial stages of revitalization. Using both internal and external stakeholders to drive economic development is a key facet of the revitalization process.

The strengths of the third recommendation are that marketing the town's historic identity draws on assets already available (history, architecture, anchor buildings) and creates a reason for visitors and businesses to come to the community. Barre and Bennington both already had rich historical assets, as evidenced by their histories, stately buildings, and quintessential New England downtowns. Capitalizing on these assets did not require planners to completely reinvent the town or spend money creating a brand-new attraction that would draw visitors. Instead, they used their historical niches to make their communities a popular tourist destination. Vermont

communities interested in revitalization should first take stock of what their community already has to offer or of what sets it apart from other communities in the area. Eversole (2003) advocates that this type of community marketing is a homegrown way to spur economic development and often does not require extensive outside support. Internal stakeholders often already possess a strong sense of the unique aspects of their community since they have chosen to live there. In addition to marketing their historic locations, Vermont towns can choose to market a particular product that their community produces or a unique service or cultural experience. Identifying a niche in the market will allow Vermont towns to be competitive with communities that have a particular draw such as Stowe, Manchester, or Jay Peak. Not every community has ski resorts. However, Vermont communities seeking to revitalize must work to identify features that set their town apart from the rest.

Barre's and Bennington's efforts to include a wide array of stakeholders in the economic planning process and market the town's history opened the door to other opportunities. By accessing federal supports, Barre, for example, was able to have the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston come in and conduct a study on ways to bring economies out of decline. The community used the results of the study and partnered with the Green Mountain United Way to initiate a program for supporting female head-of-households living below the poverty line. Bennington, by drawing on the rich historical identity of the Putnam Hotel, was able to turn an underused space in the heart of the downtown into a thriving multi-use area that will continue to grow and develop with the downtown.

**Challenges.** In terms of challenges, relying on federal and state supports is not without its weaknesses and threats. Federal and state supports come with specific regulations and restrictions that must be adhered to throughout the life of the project. Municipalities that fail to

comply with these regulations risk losing funding for their projects or may not be reimbursed for projects they have already begun to pay for. This occurred in Barre when, according to Participant 4, a construction bid did not follow the channels stipulated by the federal government. In addition, inflation, rising interest rates, and changing government policies may impede cities from accessing federal and state funding. Thus, although external funding is typically necessary due to the immense cost of revitalization projects, these sources may not always be reliable. Cities who cannot access external funding may be forced to either forgo the project or raise the money themselves. Relying solely on state and federal funds can be a risky way to fund an entire revitalization project because those funds are ultimately subject to the approval or denial of external stakeholders that may or may not be on board with the goals of the project.

Marketing a town's historic identity is also a problematic recommendation when a community cannot identify or has contradictory opinions about a niche that will draw tourists and visitors. Barre and Bennington were fortunate to possess historical assets. Barre's history as a granite center and Bennington's downtown anchor building, the Putnam Hotel, were both significant advantages in the revitalization process. Communities, unfortunately, may struggle to reach a consensus about what image should be marketed to tourists. If conflict resolution processes are not established, the project risks being dominated by the loudest voices.

Planning for economic development using these recommendations has immediate and long-term impacts for a community. The immediate outcomes in Barre and Bennington were increased economic activity or vitality in the downtown area, the attraction of new businesses, and increased community pride. Participants in both Bennington and Barre noted the palpable improvement in morale experienced by community members and commented on the successes of

downtown businesses. However, planning for economic development can also have long-term effects. Barre, for example, worked to economically support female head-of-households in poverty. Participant 2 noted that he was looking forward to the multi-generational impact that this action step would have. He noted that bringing mothers out of poverty would support their children's future well-being both socially and economically. Economic planning also improves a community's long-term reputation. Community reputations take a long time to change. Towns with dilapidated buildings and vacant lots, as noted by Rupp et al. (2019) develop a negative image that can inhibit stakeholders from being willing to invest in the community. Similarly, a lack of jobs can create a poverty mindset that is challenging to remediate. Although it is still too early to identify long-term impacts of revitalization on community reputations, participants in both Barre and Bennington felt that resident's mindsets were slowly beginning to shift. People were starting to feel hopeful about the direction the downtown was taking and were interested in how they might be a part of the continuing process.

### **Social Recommendations**

Morckel (2014) identifies social strategies as critical to the quality of life in a community. The results of the case study identify the following recommendations as best practices in planning for social development:

- Improve quality of life by assessing citizen interests and needs prior to revitalization
- Find ways to support the most vulnerable members of the community

**Strengths.** The first social recommendation is important because it establishes the importance of finding out what citizens truly value. Although revitalization literature (Morckel, 2014) emphasizes the importance of coordinating community gathering events such as potluck suppers, fall festivals, and farmer's markets, these events are futile if they are not based on what citizens

truly value. Social improvements must be made using the suggestions that citizens make because they are the ones who will have to live with the results. Bennington, for example, conducted an area-wide assessment plan to determine what citizens were looking for from revitalization both in terms of physical redevelopments and quality of life improvements. Barre, similarly, used a neighborhood watch network and questionnaires at Town Meeting Day to find out what citizens truly wanted in their community and conducted community-wide assessments to identify next steps for revitalization. Their most recent assessment showed that citizens were interested in the construction of a community center. This recommendation has strength as a starting point for revitalization because it asks planners to put aside their ideas for community activities and invest time to find out what their citizens truly want. Rupp et al. (2019) supports this recommendation by noting that revitalization must happen through and not to citizens. Starting with citizen input for social issues can potentially open new opportunities for planners, especially if citizens share ideas that planners had not considered. Citizens may be willing to invest their expertise and resources if they feel that they are a part of the process.

The second social recommendation, finding ways to support the most vulnerable members of the community, stems from Barre's work in supporting single mothers in poverty. This recommendation is important because it reminds planners to address the heart of a community's social woes. Planners may be tempted to get caught up in event planning so much so that they fail to work on the real social issues in their communities such as poverty, crime, and homelessness. Both Barre and Bennington invested time and money in establishing affordable housing in the downtown comparable to market rate housing, and Barre went a step further by participating in research that identified single mothers at risk in the community. The strength of supporting vulnerable community members is that the supports can affect future generations. In

addition, helping the most vulnerable members can bring the entire community up both in terms of socioeconomic status and in terms of morale.

**Challenges.** There are several weaknesses associated with these recommendations. First, the process of assessing citizens' social needs does not guarantee that all voices are represented. Citizens who are interested in participating or who are perceived as controlling the direction of town improvements may purposefully or inadvertently inhibit others from participating. In smaller, more close-knit Vermont communities, dominant or well-established voices may pressure other opinions into silence. The resulting revitalization is then a reflection of the will of the proverbial "squeaky wheel." Secondly, citizens may seek social changes that are beyond planners' ability to impact. Participant 1 expressed frustration with citizens who held unrealistic expectations for change in their community. He noted that laypeople may not always realize the tedious process involved with accessing grant funding or complying with federal and state regulations. Supporting at-risk citizens is also not without its risks. Choosing to invest city resources in a particular group can be a lengthy process and, due to the myriad factors involved, is not a guaranteed means of improving the city socially. At-risk individuals may not be able to access the supports they need, or they may be unwilling to alter their lifestyles. Furthermore, citizens may perceive these interventions as a misuse of city funds and may be unwilling to support these programs further.

Planning for social development using these recommendations has immediate and long-term impacts for a community. The immediate outcomes described by interview participants were an increase in the number of citizens communicating their ideas about social revitalization, vulnerable groups receiving financial supports, and planners and citizens working together to coordinate events that citizens found valuable. These outcomes make sense when compared with

the literature because both Morckel (2014) and Rupp et al. (2019) establish the importance of using citizens as drivers of the process and allowing them to take a leading or at least highly involved role. In terms of secondary impacts, social wellness in a community creates an attractive place to live and work. As communities invest in social aspects and in quality of life, morale increases and so does the sense of place that residents feel. This pride in one's community is important to young Vermonters as many become adults and leave the state in search of better opportunities. Socially well communities, in conjunction with economic opportunities, may convince them to stay in Vermont and use their talents to better their hometowns.

### **Physical Recommendations**

Physical strategies, a key element in both Barre and Bennington, can play an important role in other Vermont communities contemplating revitalization. The results of the case study identify the following recommendations as best practices in planning for physical development:

- Identify deteriorating infrastructure and use these repairs to build public engagement and access grant funding
- Invest in creating multi-use spaces

**Strengths.** The first physical recommendation is valuable because it addresses a prevalent problem in Vermont communities. Vermont towns are working to manage failing water, sewer, power lines, and roadways. The repairs and replacements required place a significant burden on taxpayers and municipalities. During the revitalization process, Barre planners accessed available grant funding to support their infrastructure upgrades. However, they also used the infrastructure and aesthetic improvements to build public engagement around revitalization. In addition to having community members contribute opinions about aesthetics such as sidewalks and lighting,



planners also turned the first day of construction into a newsworthy event. Planners in other Vermont communities can use physical improvements to engage citizens because physical improvements are, in many cases, visible or have a direct impact on daily life (improved roadways, parking access, updated lighting etc).

The second physical recommendation is valuable because it reiterates the importance of creating a safety net for revitalized spaces. Creating multi-use spaces ensures that, if one option for the space falls through, the building can still be used for something else. This is evident in Bennington's work on the Putnam Building. After soliciting citizen feedback, planners decided to use the two upper levels for a range of market rate and affordable housing while using the first floor as a commercial/retail space. By having several purposes for the Putnam building, planners ensured that, if one use of the space did not work out, the building would have value in other ways. Communities seeking to revitalize would be advised to use spaces and resources in multiple ways so that they do not sink all their resources in one area.

**Challenges.** In using these physical recommendations, planners must be aware of the following challenges. First, in terms of investing in infrastructure, planners must consider quality. As revitalization projects get underway, there can be immense pressure on leaders to get things done. It may be tempting, when faced with this pressure, to accept the quickest and least expensive fixes to infrastructure. However, physical revitalization that lasts should not be rushed. Participant 10 noted that Bennington planners did an excellent job of holding out for quality developments and improvements. They were not satisfied with just filling space or quick fixes. A potential weakness of the recommendation to engage citizens with infrastructure is that planners may not be able to hold out for quality improvements.

Planning for physical developments has short and long-term impacts on a community. In the short-term, as discussed by participants in Barre and Bennington, citizen morale may increase, and tourists and businesses may be attracted to the area. This was the case in Barre with the advent of 500 new jobs to the city post-revitalization and in resident comments about the attractiveness of the downtown. However, physical improvements also support long-term development. Addressing current infrastructure concerns allows planners to take advantage of new technology that is more environmentally friendly and inexpensive. In addition, repairing infrastructure removes the burden from future generations and will allow them to focus on growing their communities socially and economically.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations and limitations were present in the study. The study's design was a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998) that the researcher conducted using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The first delimitation was the qualifications for participation. Interviewees had to have participated in the revitalization projects in either Barre or Bennington, Vermont. The second delimitation was the multi-site design and number of participants and documents. There were eight participants from each site and a total of twenty-three documents.

The first limitation was the sample size of only two sites in the study. A triangulated study design, the use of three sites, is ideal (Merriam, 1998). However, scheduling and staffing constraints prevented other communities from participating. The use of additional sites for analysis would have enabled the researcher to explore commonalities amongst cases and provide more general recommendations. A second limitation was sample bias. The participants had each played a role in the revitalization project in their communities. Thus, they were predisposed to view the revitalization favorably since they were a part of the process. Interviewing people who

felt disengaged from the process would have added another dimension to the study, particularly in the category of stakeholder engagement. These participants may have been able to provide a more balanced account of the revitalization. A third limitation was a lack of previous research to examine. Although revitalization literature abounds, no studies existed that discussed Vermont revitalization specifically. Having other research to consider at the outset of the study may have supported refinement of the research questions and objectives. Rather than exploring comprehensive planning as a whole, the study might have focused on just one element of the model. A fourth limitation was access to interview participants and diverse community types. Finding interviewees to participate in the study was extremely challenging. Some of this difficulty was due, in part, to restrictions around Covid-19. However, much of the difficulty in obtaining interviewees stemmed from scheduling conflicts and short staffing. The inclusion of a greater number of interviewees supports the validity of the conclusions drawn from the study (Merriam, 1998). In addition, the current study explored two cities that were relatively similar in composition and population. Examining a diverse array of community sizes and structures for comprehensive planning would have solidified the value of comprehensive planning for a broader range of community types. A final limitation of the study is its investigation into all four components of comprehensive planning. The breadth of the study resulted in an overview of each component at each site. However, an in-depth study of one element of comprehensive planning would have provided more information.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As Vermont communities work to rebound in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, citizens and city planners will look to community revitalization to bring economic growth and social vitality back to their downtowns. The first recommendation for future study is to canvas

all Vermont communities that have completed a revitalization project to gather information that can potentially generalize to other communities. This study was limited because it only investigated two sites. If more cities and towns participated in the study in the future, the researcher would be able to draw conclusions about Vermont revitalizations with confidence. The researcher could compare communities that used comprehensive planning with communities that did piecemeal revitalization projects and could explore the outcomes of each type of revitalization. A second recommendation for future research is to include interview participants who felt disengaged from the revitalization process in their communities. The current study recruited interview participants who had a direct role and in the process. However, it would be helpful if future research explored the voices of those who felt powerless when faced with community changes. Future studies could investigate ways to ensure that community members do not feel isolated from the revitalization process. A third recommendation for future study is to compare the revitalization process in rural and urban communities. Because Barre and Bennington are comparatively urban communities in comparison with the rest of Vermont, city planners could benefit from considering how rural towns can implement revitalization projects. Very rural communities often have even greater limitations in terms of funding. Thus, considering comprehensive planning in these settings may result in recommendations that are more relevant to small Vermont towns. A fourth and final recommendation for future research is for researchers to focus on just one element of comprehensive planning in Vermont communities. Examining all four elements in one study provided brief recommendations for each category. However, for planners to deeply consider the comprehensive planning model, studies devoted to just one element of the model would provide an in-depth understanding of how the model works. In addition, if future studies focused on just one element at a time, researchers

might choose to include a quantitative element to further justify the model's efficacy. For example, if examining the impact of economic development, researchers might examine changes in property values, unemployment, and retail earnings during pre- and post-revitalization periods.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how city planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington, Vermont, were using economic, physical, social, and stakeholder engagement strategies during community revitalization projects. The following research questions have guided this study: 1.) How are planners and citizens in Barre and Bennington using economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts? 2.) How are planners and citizens combining social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies during revitalization efforts in Barre and Bennington? Interview participants from both sites discussed their experiences with community revitalization and outlined economic, social, physical, and stakeholder engagement strategies that citizens and planners used throughout the process. Photographs, city planning studies, and public outreach documents complemented the interviews by providing a context for the revitalization and information about strategies used.

The results of the study demonstrate that comprehensive planning is a valuable tool for communities seeking to revitalize. Under the umbrella of comprehensive planning, communities have a range of economic, social, and physical tools. To spur economic development, planners should be accessing federal and state support as well as buy-in from anchor institutions in the community and must utilize the historic identity of their town to draw tourists and potential businesses. To spur social development, planners must invest in quality of life by assessing what citizens need and should look for ways to support at-risk members of the community. Finally, to spur physical development, planners should establish multi-use spaces and should prioritize

upgrades to infrastructure and aesthetics. Throughout the process in each area, planners should be soliciting both internal and external stakeholder input and support.

Comprehensive planning methods visibly and palpably impact communities in the present. Citizens and tourists alike can appreciate the increased downtown vitality, upgraded infrastructure, and economic prosperity. Seeing the lights on in a once vacant building, hearing traffic on a once deserted street, and seeing an increase in local jobs are all tangible revitalization outcomes that matter to citizens in the moment. However, the long-term impacts of revitalization—a positive community reputation, a higher quality of living, and the continued attraction of new businesses and residents— are what make revitalization worth the effort.

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## APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

As a doctoral student in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research to fulfill the requirements for a doctorate in public administration. The purpose of my research is to investigate strategies that Vermont communities are using to revitalize the economic, physical, and social aspects of their towns. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to take part in a 30-40 minute virtual or telephone interview about revitalization practices and will be asked to review their interview transcript once. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and have been involved in a community revitalization project in Barre or Bennington, Vermont. To participate, please contact me at \_\_\_\_\_ to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me prior to the interview. I look forward to discussing Vermont revitalization with you.

Sincerely,

Erica Rumball-Petre  
Doctoral Student, Liberty University



## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

### Consent

**Title of the Project:** Community Revitalization in Vermont

**Principal Investigator:** Erica Rumball-Petre, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and have been involved in a community revitalization project in Barre or Bennington, Vermont. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to investigate how Vermont communities are implementing revitalization projects. This study looks specifically at strategies for economic, social, and physical development.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a virtual interview (approximately 30-40 minutes). The interview's audio will be recorded for the purpose of transcription.
2. Review your interview transcript once.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, the expected benefit to local communities is an increased understanding of revitalization strategies in Vermont.

#### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

#### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

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Approved on 9-7-2021

#### Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Erica Rumball-Petre. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at \_\_\_\_\_  
You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor \_\_\_\_\_

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Subject Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature & Date

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