

WHAT IS THE DOWNTOWN INITIATIVE?

The Downtown Initiative is an effort spearheaded by the Economic Development Committee (EDC), to revitalize Southborough's Downtown and bring back the vibrant heart of Southborough.

This is a ***Community Development*** effort that will bring more local options and opportunities to Southborough residents and – simultaneously – help existing businesses currently operating in Downtown.

The 2017 Survey put out by the EDC, confirmed overwhelming support from residents for improvements to Downtown, particularly restaurants, small scale stores, mixed-use development and beautification and connectivity.

HISTORIC SOUTHBOROUGH

By the late 1700s, large house-lots of farmsteads were widely spread out along the line of Main Street. Commercial enterprises sprang up as well.

Winchester's Tavern was well established by the early 1800s and became a popular meeting house for the locals. The Centre General Store, with its nearby Post Office, was operational by the 1830s and would continue for more than a century under a succession of proprietors.

When the railroad arrived in 1855, a small cluster of commercial buildings began to form around the depot.

In the early 1900s, Southborough's Downtown developed into an active center with several grocery stores, a hardware store, a thriving inn, a grist mill and feed store, a blacksmith shop (later followed by a filling station), and eventually a new library on land donated by the Burnett family.

HISTORIC SOUTHBOROUGH

The Southborough Arms on Main Street functioned as a hotel and restaurant from the early 1900s. The Inn was the place to stay in Southborough, and numerous generations of Southborough residents wined, dined and generally celebrated on its ample porch and in the comfortable social rooms. The Southborough arms remained in business till 1966, when a disastrous fire severely damaged the structure. The structure was razed and replaced by a terribly banal “Professional Building,” still extant, with a large, barren sea of asphalt out front, and stunted plantings along the street. Of the original inn, only the massive stone wall remains.

The new ***Peters High School*** replaced an even older structure dating back to 1833. Contrary to its name, for most of its life it housed both the high school and elementary grades. Classes were discontinued there after 1959 when Algonquin Regional High School opened and Peters High School was demolished. The town of Hopkinton was far smarter, and converted their similarly sized high school building into a thriving commercial complex.

The Main Street train station: demolished sometime during the 1950s. Today the site remains a blighted vacant lot, stark testimony to the lack of urban planning that has so characterized Southborough. What a marvelous restaurant or pub this lovely building would have made!

SOUTHBOROUGH HOW IT IS TODAY

The lack of strategic and urban planning has resulted in an erosion of economic and community activity in our Downtown.

What makes Downtown Southborough unique, is its historic character of which much has been lost in the last 50 years.

The lost Downtown buildings and with it, it's commercial activity, include:

1966 Southborough Arms

1962 Peters High School

1950s Train Station

1999 Post Office

Other Commercial activity such as: café, drugstore, blacksmith, grocery store and cobbler shop.

By not taking any action, we are *not* preserving the Downtown and we are *not* helping the few small businesses that are still there.

We have to act now with adopting clear and updated zoning laws and design guidelines to attract commercial investments that are desirable for Southborough and make business sense to potential investors.

VISION OF A FUTURE DOWNTOWN SOUTHBOROUGH

A walkable and well-connected small town “Main Street” with locally owned restaurant and pub, lunch café, ice cream shop, boutique style stores and/or other small businesses as well as residential properties.

The mixed-use properties provide more affordable housing options, increased residential density and a larger economic base for the Downtown Business Village District.

With more attractive public space and a larger number of community events, the downtown area truly feels like the heart of Southborough.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO MAKE CHANGES

The EDC is actively working on two issues that currently make doing business in Downtown difficult and cost prohibitive:

- Updating the existing Downtown Village Business District zoning by-law to allow for small scale, mixed-use development;
- Possible implementation of a wastewater solution that will allow additional small-scale businesses and restaurants or cafés to operate in Downtown.

In addition, new and expanded design guidelines need to be implemented to ensure desirable development of the DBVD that will serve Southborough's needs for the future while preserving the downtown's historic character.

We need the support of Southborough residents to vote on these issues at Town Meeting.