



RiverCOG's Main Streets

Main Street Status Survey Results
Part 1 Workshop Recap Notes

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Main Street Status Survey

CMSC Definition of a Downtown

A “traditional downtown” or “traditional neighborhood commercial district” typically includes:

- 20+ contiguous commercial parcels with buildings of historic or architectural significance
- Zoned, planned, or used for commercial purposes for 50+ years
- Serves as a central business district and hub for social and economic activity
- Features a cohesive mix of older or historic buildings, possibly with compatible newer infill development
- Has enough businesses, buildings, and density to function effectively
- Buildings are usually side-by-side, fronting sidewalks along a main street with side streets
- Compact, walkable, and pedestrian-friendly

➡ Note: Some downtowns may not meet all historic criteria but still function as traditional downtowns based on layout, use, and community role.

Main Street Status Definitions

Managed Main Street Status	Definition
Supporting Community	Communities that do not have an existing built downtown and do not have interest in developing a main street.
Aspirational	Communities that have the desire to create a main street experience, but do not have the built environment so therefore need to construct a “downtown.”
Untapped Potential	Communities that have a downtown built environment but do not have enough community buy-in to pursue a managed approach.
Ready to Go	Communities that have the downtown built environment and interest in main street management, but no formal main street management entity in place yet.
Working Group	Communities that have a dedicated committee or subcommittee, typically out of the municipality, that is focused solely on Main Street. This could include a Cultural District.
Managed – Stage 1	Communities that have a separate entity, typically a 501(c)3, to oversee the downtown but are volunteer run.
Managed – Stage 2	Communities that have a separate entity to oversee the downtown and at least 1-paid part-time staff person, including 501(c)3 and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).
Accredited	Communities that have a main street program accredited by Main Street America.

Main Street Status Responses

Town	Town Categorization(s) Based on Survey Answers	Comments
Centerbrook (Essex)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Untapped Potential 	It appears that the focus on this survey was for Centerbrook. CMSC needs to further examine Centerbrook's built environment to determine whether its 'downtown' meets the definition of a traditional downtown.
Cromwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ready to Go Working Group 	The Cromwell Creative District has morphed into a designated cultural district. Not knowing the full makeup of the cultural commission, Cromwell could have be at the Working Group stage.
Deep River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ready to Go 	Ready to Go is appropriate categorization.
Killingworth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspirational 	Aspirational is appropriate categorization.
Old Lyme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspirational Supporting Community 	There were 4 responses for Old Lyme and the categorization results were equally split between Aspirational and Supporting Community. Given this split, it appears more interest building for a creating a main street experience is needed. Therefore, CMSC recommends the Supporting Community categorization.
Old Saybrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working Group Managed – Volunteer Run 	Based on the responses, it seems like there are multiple merchant-led and other volunteer led activities being done in downtown. However, there is not one organized group using the Four Point Approach in downtown. Per CMSC's status categorization definitions, we would put them in Ready to Go , meaning there is need to develop a more organized entity to shepherd the work downtown.
Westbrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed – Volunteer Run Working Group 	Based on the responses, it seems like there is a merchants group and the Chamber does work in the downtown. However, there is not one organized group using the Four Point Approach in downtown. Per CMSC's status categorization definitions, we would put them in Ready to Go , meaning there is need to develop a more organized entity to shepherd the work downtown.

RiverCOG Status Overview

Key:

- Bolded towns participated in Main Street Status Survey
- Yellow Highlights mean categorization changed after survey
- * Means current CMSC member

Managed Main Street Status	Definition	CMSC Assumptions Before Survey	CMSC Categorization Post Survey
Supporting Community	Communities that do not have an existing built downtown and do not have interest in developing a main street.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Killingworth • Lyme • Middlefield • Cromwell 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lyme • Middlefield • Old Lyme
Aspirational	Communities that have the desire to create a main street experience, but do not have the built environment so therefore need to construct a “downtown.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haddam* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haddam* • Killingworth
Untapped Potential	Communities that have a downtown built environment but do not have enough community buy-in to pursue a managed approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old Lyme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centerbrook (Essex)
Ready to Go	Communities that have the downtown built environment and interest in main street management, but no formal main street management entity in place yet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chester* • Clinton* • Deep River* • Durham* • East Haddam* • East Hampton • Old Saybrook* • Portland • Westbrook* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chester* • Clinton* • Deep River* • Durham* • East Haddam* • East Hampton • Old Saybrook* • Portland • Westbrook*
Working Group	Communities that have a dedicated committee or subcommittee, typically out of the municipality, that is focused solely on Main Street. This could include a Cultural District.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cromwell • Essex
Managed – Stage 1	Communities that have a separate entity, typically a 501(c)3, to oversee the downtown but are volunteer run.	n/a	
Managed – Stage 2	Communities that have a separate entity to oversee the downtown and at least 1-paid part-time staff person, including 501(c)3 and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middletown* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middletown*
Accredited	Communities that have a main street program accredited by Main Street America.	n/a	

CMSC Analysis

- Additional responses from more municipalities will provide a clearer picture of the region.
- In communities with multiple respondents, differing status categorizations results means there is need for greater consensus building locally on downtown goals.
- Downtowns across the region show strong potential, but significant capacity building and guidance is needed to execute downtown initiatives consistently.

Workshop Part 1 Recap

Held November 14, 2025

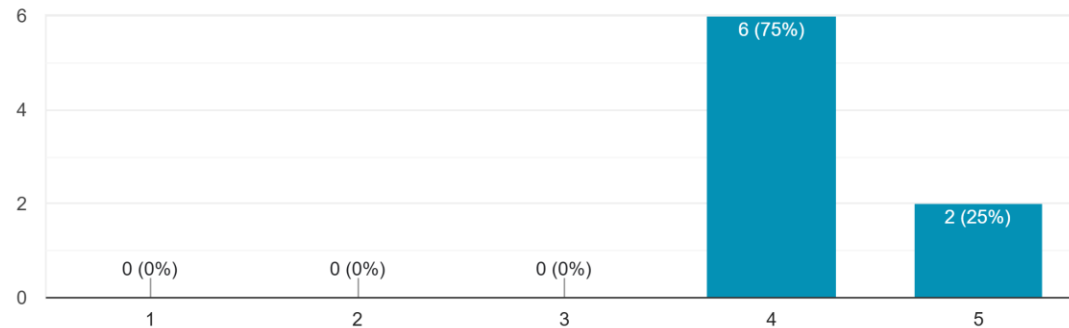
Part 1 Workshop Participating Communities

1. Chester
2. Cromwell
3. East Hampton
4. Essex
5. Old Lyme
6. Old Saybrook
7. Portland
8. Westbrook

Workshop Evaluation

Rate the overall value of the workshop

8 responses

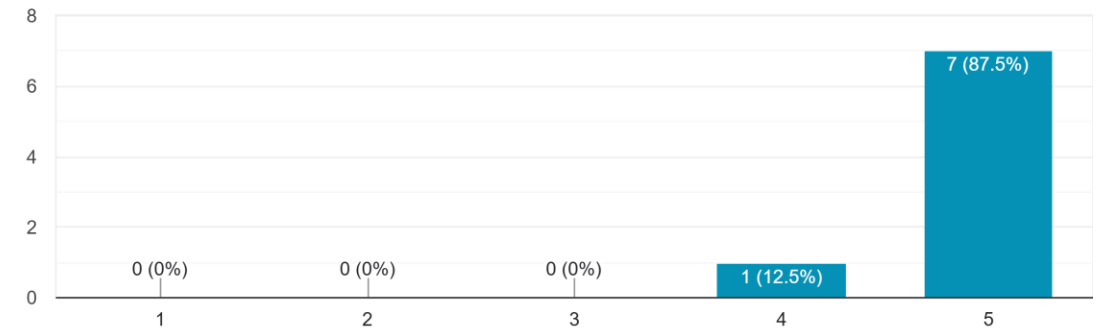


What did you like best about the workshop?

- Information
- New awareness of this initiative
- Interactive component was a nice change to the workshop
- Collaboration and making us think about bigger picture vision and goals rather than just the day to day projects we are trying to implement and fires we are trying to put out.
- thought provoking
- Soliciting participants to engage and answer specific questions.
- Very well organized and focused string of activities. Presentation had great visuals.
- interactivity -

Rate the presenters' knowledgeability about the presentation content.

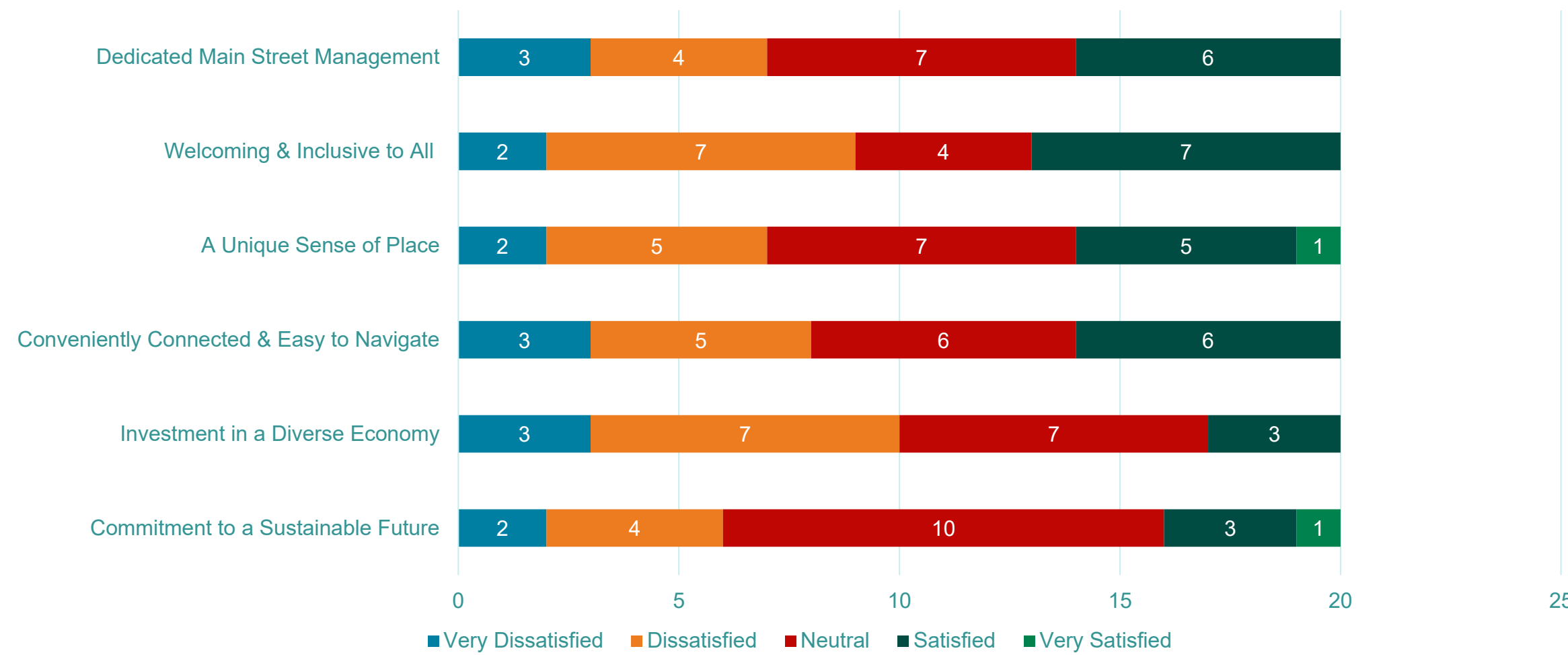
8 responses



How could we have improved this workshop? Or any other comments?

- some of us are not google doc savey. I couldn't get highlight to work
- NA - timeframe was good at 1 hour
- Tangible examples of success stories in the region.
- The first foray into the breakout session was a little rocky. Subsequently it worked out fine, except for the fact that once we were in the breakout room most of us then couldn't see the documents we were supposed to be working on. Luckily one person could and he would read things off to the group and we made it work.
- technology is always difficult and it proved to be true here as well
- More interaction, speaking vs survey only.
- Zoom exercises used are less effective with low attendance
- a bit more time to cover the info...

Six Qualities Satisfaction - Region

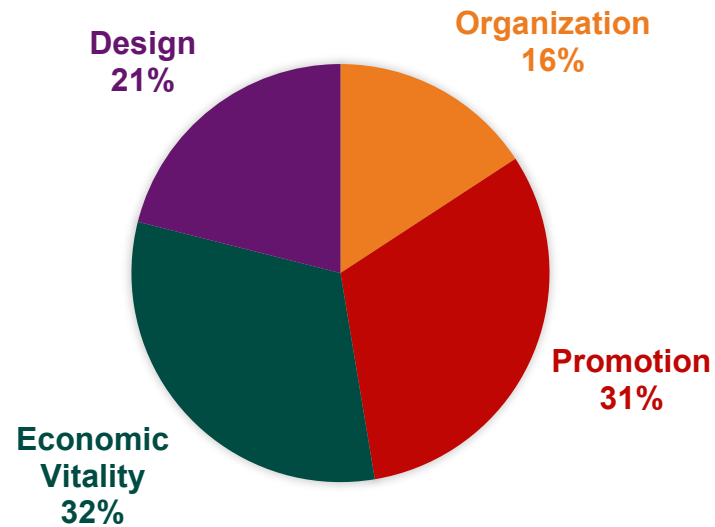


Six Qualities Satisfaction - Community

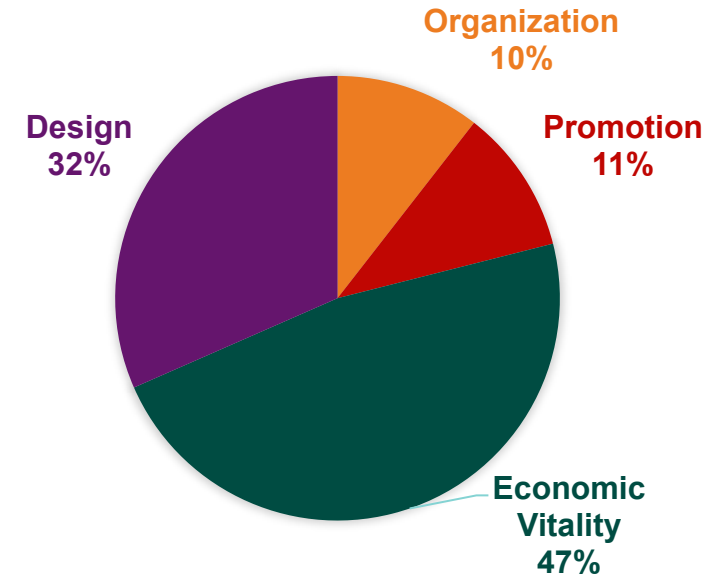
	Commitment to a Sustainable Future	Investment in a Diverse Economy	Conveniently Connected & Easy to Navigate	A Unique Sense of Place	Welcoming & Inclusive to All	Dedicated Main Street Management
Chester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (1) Satisfied (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied (1) Neutral (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied (1) Neutral (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (1) Neutral (1)
Cromwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (1) Neutral (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (1) Satisfied (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral
East Hampton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied
Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very Satisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very Satisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied
Old Lyme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (2) Very Dissatisfied (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (2) Very Dissatisfied (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (2) Very Dissatisfied (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (1) Neutral (1) Very Dissatisfied (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (2) Very Dissatisfied (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (2) Very Dissatisfied (2)
Old Saybrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral (3) Satisfied (3) Dissatisfied (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral (3) Satisfied (3) Very Dissatisfied (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied (3) Neutral (2) Dissatisfied (1) Very Dissatisfied (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral (3) Satisfied (3) Dissatisfied (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied (4) Neutral (1) Dissatisfied (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied (4) Neutral (2) Very Dissatisfied (1)
Portland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (1) Neutral (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied (1) Neutral (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfied (1) Neutral (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral
Westbrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfied

4 Points Best & Needs Improvement - Region

WHAT FOUR POINT ACTIVITY DOES YOUR TOWN CENTER DO BEST?



WHAT ACTIVITY DOES YOUR TOWN CENTER NEED TO IMPROVE THE MOST?



4 Points Best & Needs Improvement - Community

	Best	Needs Improvement
Chester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Vitality (1) • Promotion (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization
Cromwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Vitality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design
East Hampton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Vitality
Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Vitality
Old Lyme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Vitality (2) • Promotion (1) • Organization (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Vitality (2) • Promotion (1) • Design (1)
Old Saybrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion (4) • Economic Vitality (1) • Design (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Vitality (4) • Design (2) • Promotion (1)
Portland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization (1) • Economic Vitality (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design
Westbrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Vitality

Mini SWOT Results

The following pages are summaries of the Mini SWOT exercises and the Main Street Status Survey responses. Not all communities participated in these exercises, so summaries are limited.

Chester Workshop & Survey Summary

Vision Words: Clean, Family Friendly, Hospitable/Welcoming, Convenient, Active/Walkable

Old Saybrook has proximity to the Long Island Sound, excellent transportation by way of the Amtrak/Shoreline East Station, walkability and lots of recreational opportunities including a Bike Loop and a number of parks on Main Street, and finally, annual “flagship” events that the community supports and enjoys.

Old Saybrook could work on creating a more varied business mix with attractive storefronts and destinations that get people to stop. They have concerns about too many medical offices in their downtown (are these storefront?) and would like to see more retail and restaurants—things that attract people for longer and later into the evening. One longshot goal is underground utilities and redevelopment. There are opportunities for housing in upper stories on Main Street, and potential for development around the train station. The town is currently improving crosswalks to better support their already commendable walkability. They have difficulty with the age of building stock.

Sources: Main Street Status Survey, RiverCOG-CMSC Workshop 1, Municipal Meeting Notes

Cromwell Workshop & Survey Summary

Vision Words: Charming, Community-focused, Engaging, Multicultural, Walkable

Cromwell sees itself as a progressive town with a small town feel, while still being conveniently located for those who spend lots of time in the Hartford or New Haven metro areas. They would like to see the town and region brand itself more on the CT River.

Cromwell's creative district advocated for the adaptive re-use of the vacant sewer garage prior to the pandemic but was unsuccessful; the town may be interested in revisiting those plans, with the support of RiverCOG, to review the plan and make changes that may reflect the goals of the Creative District and the Cultural District going forward.

As of now, Cromwell benefits from sidewalks and bus transit in their downtown, as well as a number of popular small businesses and the town's park, all within or easily accessible from their downtown.

To better reflect their vision words and Grow Well Goal 4 of their POCD, Cromwell can encourage residential units above downtown storefronts, introducing new residents to the downtown area and increasing foot traffic. The town should also consider what specific kind of waterfront and neighborhood development they'd like to see to fulfill town goals as stated in the POCD.

Sources: Main Street Status Survey, RiverCOG-CMSC Workshop 1, Municipal Meeting Notes, Cromwell POCD (2024)

Essex Workshop & Survey Summary

Vision Words: Bustling, Charming, Connected, Intergenerational, Sustainable, Vibrant

Essex is a small waterfront community with plenty of cultural assets, from the Ivoryton Playhouse and Library, to the Connecticut River Museum and the Griswold Inn. The area's walkability and cultural attractions contribute to steady foot traffic in Essex's village centers, which benefits the retail storefronts that operate in town.

Essex could build on their existing village retail with a more varied business mix in its street-level storefronts. There are a number of highly visible units that house real estate offices or other professional services as opposed to businesses that will attract foot traffic and customers. To better support both new and existing small businesses, Essex could implement more "business development" efforts, perhaps through a business co-working space that not only provides flexible office space but also supports existing businesses with education or technical assistance (a model similar to Manchester's WorkSpace or Norwich's Foundry66 could be appropriate).

While foot traffic now is good, introducing more housing in the village centers by encouraging units in the upper stories could bring more steady foot traffic for businesses, promote more aging in place, and make way for younger people to afford to live in the area.

Some of the issues that will be more difficult for Essex to overcome are the perception that places like Essex Village cater mostly to wealthier folks, and the constraint that a lack of sewer or water services places on business or housing capacity. Pursuing some of the above changes will address the perception of Essex being accessible to more than just wealthy people.

Sources: Main Street Status Survey, RiverCOG-CMSC Workshop 1

Please note that Essex has three village centers, and the information provided by officials may not apply to all districts.

Old Lyme Workshop & Survey Summary

Old Lyme had a historical downtown along Lyme Street, which was a pedestrian friendly, walkable, traditional downtown. In the 1960s, much of the town's commercial activity relocated to a strip mall-like district along Halls Road, which is automobile centric and not pedestrian-friendly. Lyme Street still has some sidewalks, commercial activity, and a traditional downtown feel.

Recently, Old Lyme's Zoning Commission struck down a plan to incorporate mixed-use development, a bike trail, and green space along Halls Road. Both the Halls Road commercial area and Lyme Street have some vacant properties. On Halls Road in particular, these properties are ripe for redevelopment. There is transit available via both the River Valley Transit system and the Southeast Area Transit (SEAT) system.

Old Lyme has a Cultural District in place already. The town could benefit from a strategic direction for this district in concert with RiverCOG and other nearby towns.

Sources: Main Street Status Survey

Old Saybrook Workshop & Survey Summary

Vision Words: Clean, Family Friendly, Hospitable/Welcoming, Convenient, Active/Walkable

Old Saybrook has proximity to the Long Island Sound, excellent transportation by way of the Amtrak/Shoreline East Station, walkability and lots of recreational opportunities including a Bike Loop and a number of parks on Main Street, and finally, annual “flagship” events that the community supports and enjoys.

Old Saybrook could work on creating a more varied business mix with attractive storefronts and destinations that get people to stop. They have concerns about too many medical offices in their downtown (are these storefront?) and would like to see more retail and restaurants—things that attract people for longer and later into the evening. One longshot goal is underground utilities and redevelopment. There are opportunities for housing in upper stories on Main Street, and potential for development around the train station. The town is currently improving crosswalks to better support their already commendable walkability. They have difficulty with the age of building stock.

Sources: Main Street Status Survey, RiverCOG-CMSC Workshop 1, Municipal Meeting Notes

Portland Workshop & Survey Summary

Portland, like other towns in the region, sees the CT River as an underutilized brand for the area. They pride themselves on the amount of recreation and entertainment they offer, boasting 3 golf courses, 6 marinas, the Brownstone Quarry Adventure Park, and the forthcoming Nordic Spa. These are some unique destinations that draw people to Portland, even if they aren't located right in their downtown.

Within downtown, which they describe as a small, focused area right on the river, they have their Library, Senior Center, and the Brownstone Quarry Adventure Park, which attracts both residents and visitors to the downtown.

However, officials identified a few issues, including not enough businesses downtown, a disjointed, drab look with no common theme present amongst the downtown structures, and the need for improved walkability. Some changes they'd like to see are a hotel and more shopping in the district.

With two larger developments on the way, Portland sees an opportunity to better market itself and the region as a whole, via the CT River. Their recreational strengths may make it easier to improve their other concerns about their downtown.

Sources: RiverCOG-CMSC Workshop 1, Municipal Meeting Notes

Westbrook Workshop & Survey Summary

Vision Words: Diverse, Inviting, Thriving

Westbrook sees its greatest challenge in its lack of community septic, which limits what they can do in their downtown area. They have a currently inactive business owner association, and an active Town Center Revitalization Committee that focuses on the built environment and town-owned infrastructure, like traffic, parking, and design.

Their existing assets, the Town Green, Historical Society, and Restaurants in town are a good starting point for creating a diverse, inviting, and thriving downtown, in addition to the train station just outside of downtown and destination Bed & Breakfast establishments along the identified main street.

Westbrook would benefit from increasing walkability between their train station and most of their main street, as well as pursuing efforts to diversify the business mix on main street to encourage more foot traffic from visiting boaters, train travelers, or other visitors to downtown.

Sources: RiverCOG-CMSC Workshop 1, Main Street Status Survey, Municipal Meeting Notes

Town Center Vision Words

Town	Top 5 Vision Words
Chester	Charming, Diverse, Multicultural, Thriving, Welcoming
Cromwell	Charming, Community-Focused, Engaging, Multicultural, Walkable
East Hampton	
Essex	Bustling, Charming, Connected, Intergenerational, Sustainable, Vibrant
Old Lyme	
Old Saybrook	Clean, Family Friendly, Hospitable/welcoming, Convenient, Active, Walkable
Portland	
Westbrook	Diverse, Inviting, Thriving

If other communities would like to select their vision words, they can do the exercise on their respective [town's worksheet](#) and email Kristen Lopez when completed at Kristen@ctmainstreet.org.

Common Vision Words Selected

- Charming: 3
- Diverse: 2
- Multicultural: 2
- Thriving: 2
- Welcoming: 2
- Walkable: 2