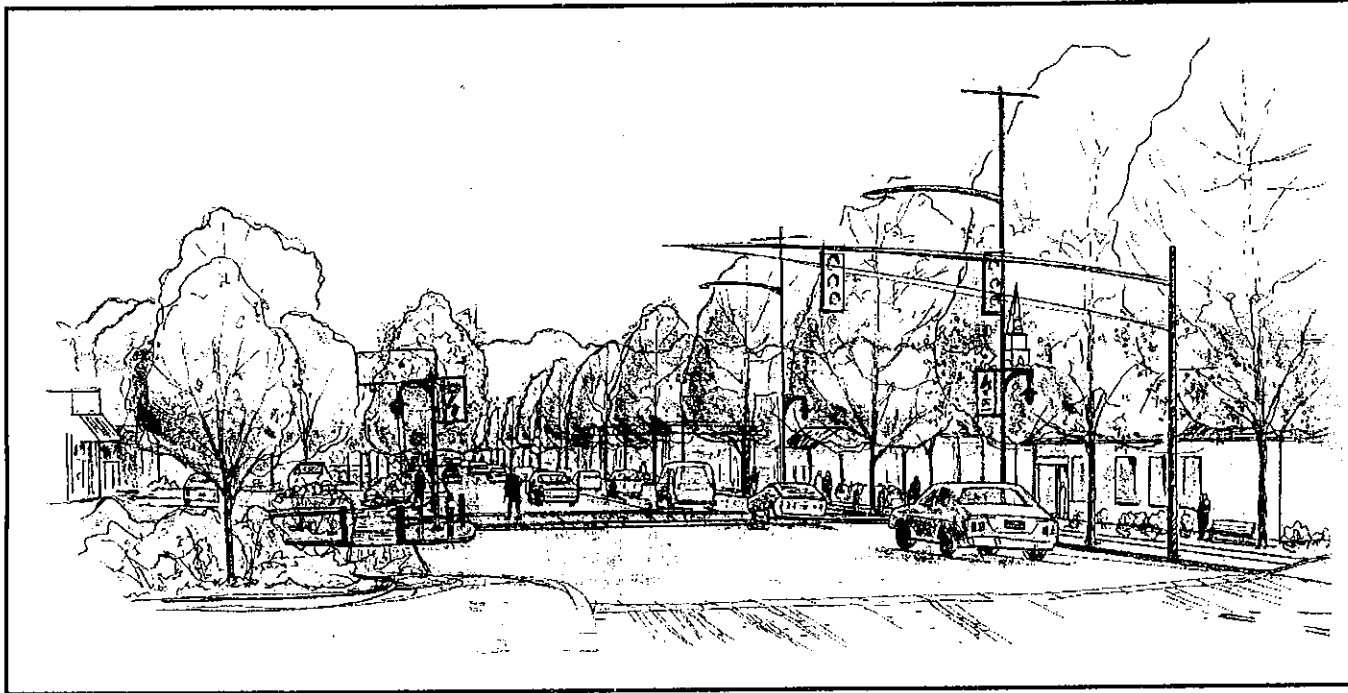


GORHAM MAIN STREET MASTER PLAN



May, 1998
Final Report

Prepared for:
Town of Gorham
Village Improvements Committee
Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee

Prepared by:
Wilbur Smith Associates, Portland, Maine
Richardson & Associates, Saco, Maine
in association with
Rothe Associates, Hallowell, Maine

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The consultant team and VIC members and staff would like to thank Tom Greer and Therese Sanpietro for their invaluable input as former members of the VIC.

GORHAM MAIN STREET MASTER PLAN

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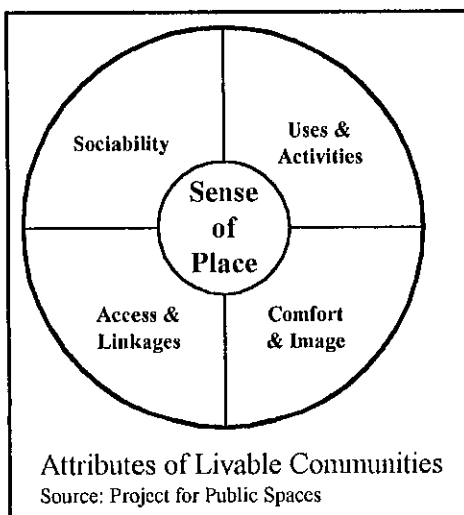
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I. INTRODUCTION



Gorham Village is the civic, cultural and economic heart of the Town of Gorham. The village houses many of the Town's schools and churches, and its library, community center, central business district and a university campus. The vitality of a village center depends on a combination of physical and non-physical characteristics to create a sense of place. Elements that, when combined positively, contribute to this sense of place include sociability, uses and activities, access and linkages, and comfort and image.¹

Allan Jacobs, a noted urban designer, suggests eight requirements for 'great streets'. The requirements are: places for people to walk with some leisure; physical comfort; definition; qualities that engage the eyes; transparency (elements such as windows, doors and fences that 'invite you' in, over or through them); complementarity (the elements get along with one another); maintenance; and, quality of construction and design.²

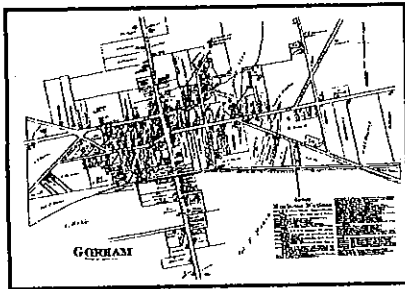
Jacobs further states that while necessary, these requirements are not sufficient for creating a great street. An intangible "magic" is also needed.

This magic includes the mix of businesses, institutions, residences and people and activities that take place on the street. It makes places that people desire to go to live, walk, shop or meet others, either formally or informally. While this magic cannot be directly created by government or private actions, there are many steps that both can take to stimulate it. These steps include public actions such as improving traffic flow, making it easier to cross the street, providing open space and changes to zoning. Business owners can undertake private improvements such as upgrading business signs, maintaining their buildings and improving landscaping.

This Plan contains ideas and recommendations for guiding change in the Village Center. It seeks to enhance the sense of place that is Gorham Village and weave together the elements that help create a 'great street'. The Village has evolved over time and this Plan envisions that the best implementation of this Plan's recommendations will occur over time as well. It contains both small and large actions that, taken together, can help to make Gorham Village a more vital place to live, work, go to school, shop or visit.

An important element of the Plan is highlighting potential opportunities.. A Plan of this type cannot anticipate all of the changes that will occur but can (and tries to) propose an approach to managing change and taking advantage of opportunities as they arise. An important part of this Plan is the compilation and discussion of tools the Town can use to manage change. A linchpin to realize many of these opportunities is the construction of the proposed southwest relief route. Traffic is certainly a double-edged sword – it carries potential customers for downtown shops and offices but should not overwhelm the downtown, creating an undesirable place to shop.

A. PREVIOUS STUDIES



Numerous planning studies have been conducted during the previous 35 years concerning the Village Center. Several of these have been highway relief route studies that would allow through-traffic to bypass the village center. These documents include:

- * Master/Comprehensive Plans -- 1976 Gorham Village Study, 1960/1972/1986/1992 and 1994 Comprehensive Plans covering the entire town;
- * Traffic/Transportation Plans -- 1978 Westbrook-Gorham Bypass Study (MDOT), 1989 Westerly Connector Study (Maine Turnpike Authority), 1993 Route 25 Corridor Study (VHB/MDOT), 1997 Gorham-Portland Corridor Study (PACTS/ T.Y. LIN/ Market Decisions), 1980 Parking Study (PACTS), 1989 Village Traffic Study (T.Y. LIN), 1994 Main Street/New Portland Road Study (PACTS), 1996 Gorham Transportation Study (Eaton Traffic Engineering);
- * Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans -- 1995 Regional Bicycle and Interim Pedestrian Plan (PACTS).

The most significant of these are three of the most recent.

The *Gorham-Portland Corridor Study* recommends construction of a relief route west and southwest of the Village Center that would connect Route 114/South Street to Route 25/State Street. Coupled with recommended changes on Route 22 in South Gorham/North Scarborough, future (2015) afternoon traffic through the village is expected to be reduced by over 25% over the no-bypass alternative. This future level of traffic would be essentially at existing 1997 levels.

The Maine DOT and the Town of Gorham have funded the preliminary engineering work required for the location studies and environmental permitting required to move this project forward to the design and construction stage (\$600,000).

The *Gorham Transportation Study* recommended several significant changes within the Village Center. Principal recommendations were replacement of the traffic signal equipment at the two intersections and elimination of the exclusive pedestrian crossing phase at the Main/State/South/School Streets intersection. These changes were expected to make the two intersections operate acceptably at existing traffic levels. It was recommended to keep Mechanic Street in the Main Street/New Portland Road intersection signal system. Several proposals, including removing it from the signal system, were proposed by the 1994 PACTS study.

Funding has been approved to replace the traffic and pedestrian signal equipment at the Main Street/State Street/South Street/School Street and Main Street/Mechanic Street/New Portland Road intersections (\$35,000).

The *1994 Comprehensive Plan* reaffirms Gorham's commitment to its village centers as the hub of civic and commercial life in the community. It targets residential and compatible commercial growth to the village centers. This will aid in retaining much of Gorham's historic growth pattern of distinct agricultural/rural areas and village centers. This, and several previous comprehensive plans, call for the construction of a relief route to ease congestion in the Village Center.

B. GOALS

The Gorham Village Improvements Committee was appointed to develop an improvement program for the Village Center. It adopted a set of seven goals to guide the development of the Plan. The goals cover each aspect of the scope of services and articulate a vision for the Village Center.

Master Plan Goals

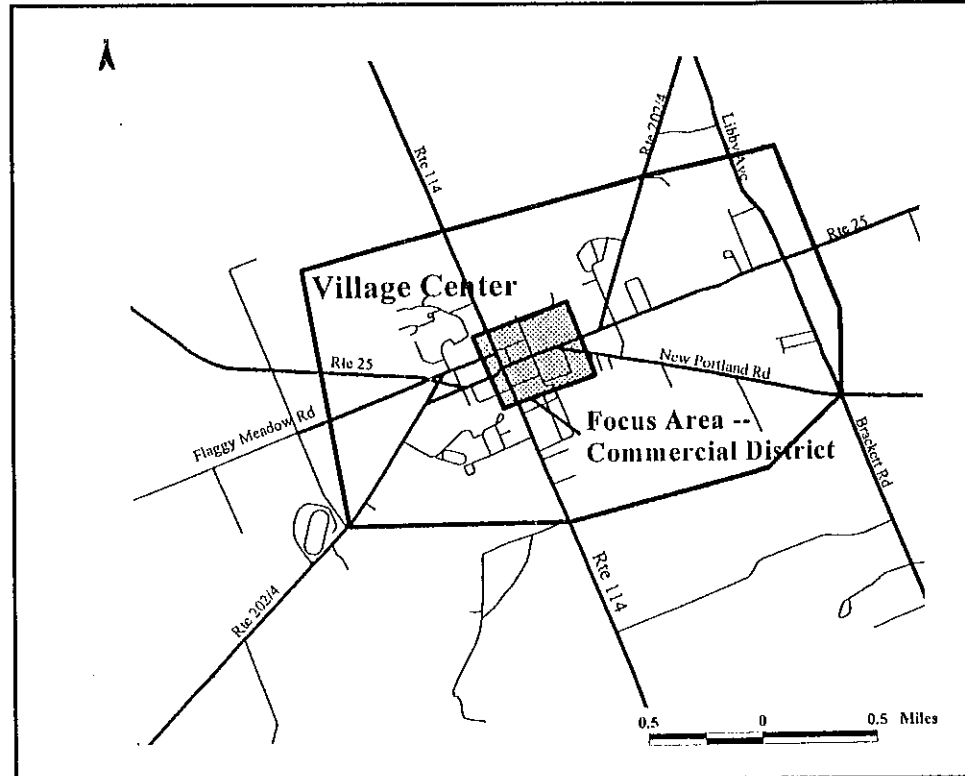
- * Improve the aesthetic appeal of the Village Center to improve the livability and enhance the economic vitality of the community.
- * Develop a consistent, unified streetscape on Main Street within the village commercial districts.
- * Improve pedestrian, bicyclist and vehicular circulation and safety.
- * Provide for efficient and adequate parking without compromising the aesthetics of the Village Center.
- * Maintain and protect historic and residential areas.
- * Develop implementable, cost-conscious recommendations.
- * Develop regulatory and zoning measures and policies that encourage (or require as appropriate) the desired pattern, mix and quality of buildings and uses in the village commercial district.

C. PROJECT SCOPE

The scope of services developed for the Main Street Master Plan Study integrates traffic engineering and urban design considerations. It covers four major elements: vehicular travel, the streetscape/pedestrian environment, other transportation modes, and policy/ordinance/regulatory measures.

The study area consists of the area bounded by urban residential zoning districts. The village, with its residential neighborhoods, generally extends east-west from Cressey Rd. to Libby Ave./Brackett Rd. and north-south from Tommy's Brook to Weeks Rd.

Many tasks were completed with the primary emphasis on the commercial district sub-area. These are denoted by a 'CD' designation. Tasks completed for the study area are denoted by 'SA'. Each element includes sub-tasks which are described below.



Master Plan Study Area

Vehicular Travel Elements

- * Access management (CD) -- Assess commercial driveways for potential for reducing width, eliminating or relocating/consolidating.
- * Parking (CD) -- Assess existing supply and demand and potential for interconnected and shared parking.
- * Traffic circulation (CD and SA) -- Assess traffic circulation to and within the village; evaluate recommendations from previous studies.

- * Roadway cross-sections (CD and SA) -- Develop recommended roadway cross-sections to channelize traffic including turning lanes, two way center turn lanes, reduced roadway widths, and crosswalk neckdowns.
- * Inter-parcel connections (CD) – Identify opportunities for new connections between parcels to improve vehicle circulation between land uses and eliminate traffic movements from Main Street.
- * Truck traffic (SA) – Identify opportunities for alternative routings for truck traffic and mitigation of the impact of trucks that do pass through the village center.

Streetscape/Pedestrian Environment Elements

- * Pedestrian facilities (CD and SA) -- Improve sidewalk connectivity and aesthetics.
- * Street furniture and amenities (CD) – Determine appropriate locations and style for street furniture and other amenities such as benches and trash receptacles.
- * Crosswalks (CD and SA) – Assess existing crosswalk locations and develop recommendations for new locations and design.
- * Inter-parcel pedestrian connections (CD) – Identify opportunities for new connections between parcels to improve pedestrian circulation between land uses and from parking areas; assess off-street walking alternatives.
- * USM integration (CD) – Create more attractive pedestrian linkages between the campus and downtown.
- * Signs (CD) – Assess the visual impact of existing signs on the downtown.
- * Lighting (CD) – Assess existing lighting and make recommendations for pedestrian scale lighting within the commercial district.
- * Utilities (CD) – Assess opportunities for mitigating visual impact of utilities including burying utilities.

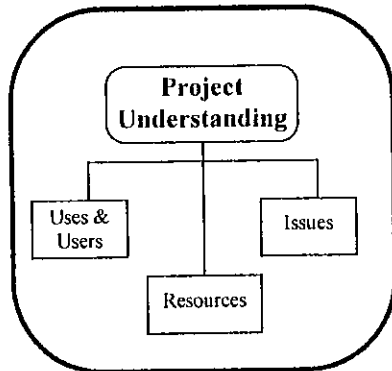
Other Modal Elements

- * Bicycle routes (CD and SA) – Identify alternatives for bicycle travel to and within the village center.
- * Bus/transit (CD and SA) – Coordinate with planning to bring public bus service to Gorham.
- * USM integration (CD and SA) – Coordinate with transportation policies of USM.

Policy/Ordinance/Regulatory Elements

- * Access management and parking (CD) – Develop recommendations for changes to access management and parking regulations.
- * Land use/development/zoning (CD) – Develop recommendations for changes to the land use and zoning regulations and policies.
- * USM integration (CD) – Develop policy recommendations to further integrate the USM and Town communities.
- * Signs (CD) – Develop recommendations for changes to sign regulations.

D. PROJECT APPROACH



An integrated approach to problem solving was the basis for developing the Master Plan. This involved not looking at each category of problems in an isolated manner. For instance, the problem of poor sidewalks was looked at also from the standpoint of access management. Excessively wide or redundant driveways degrade the pedestrian experience as well as the traffic operations of the roadway. Many such interrelationships were found and considered in our analysis of the problems and opportunities. Solving a “pedestrian problem” often solves a “traffic problem”. The focus of solutions was to find the right balance between the competing uses of the village’s streets and land.

The study advisory committee, the Village Improvements Committee, issued an interim report in 1996 that outlined broad issues affecting the village center and many of its problems. The interim report listed the following “findings” (this is an excerpt of those listed in that report), describing existing conditions in the village center:

- * Ineffective pedestrian crossing protection
- * High speed of village traffic during off-peak periods and of cut through traffic on side streets
- * Mish-mash of signs - cluttered appearance
- * “Satellite” development outside of village centers dilutes economic vitality of the Village
- * Loss of historic structures
- * New construction does not harmonize with existing built environment
- * Urban Commercial zoning district encourages suburban scale development -- deeper setbacks, parking in front
- * No overall improvement plan for public downtown improvements.

This and other prior work set the tone and formed the basis for much of the focus of this Master Plan.

Understanding the Physical Resources

Understanding the current resources of Gorham Village involved a series of quantitative and qualitative analyses and assessments of the natural, physical and visual resources of the study area. These include resources which define the village center as well as contextual resources such as travel routes and destinations which have an immediate impact upon Gorham's downtown.

Through a review of previous studies relating to the project area as well as through a current analysis and assessment, the current consultants inventoried the conditions, problems and potential opportunities of the current resources, thereby diagnosing the village streetscape environment in terms of specific resources and the important relationships between them. Special attention was given to the concepts of edges and permeability. Permeability is a measure of how easy it is to pass through an area, whether a parking lot or subdivision. Edges provide definition and can create smooth or harsh transitions between areas. Providing definition and gateways to the village center is a primary goal of this Plan.

Understanding the Uses and Users

Gorham Village needs to comfortably accommodate pedestrians, drivers, bicyclists and transit users. Special attention must be placed on the pedestrian experience, because ultimately all users of the Village are pedestrians, upon leaving their vehicles.

Main Street is a public space in which vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists routinely accomplish goals for business, socializing and the pleasures of everyday life in Maine. Walking, crossing streets, sitting, moving in and out of cars and of buildings, driving, parking, and changing directions are the human activities of the streetscape. The successful Main Street environment makes the accomplishment of such activities easy, comfortable and unencumbered. The downtown should be identifiable and being there a positive, memorable experience.

Focusing on the pedestrian experience includes much more than addressing sidewalks and crosswalks. It must address the complexities of the question, 'Why, where and how would one choose to walk in and around Gorham Village?' Spatial elements such as scale, density, visual interest, visual sequence, diversity of experience, definition and texture of edges, landmarks, and horizon lines determine both the experience and the uses of the Village. The pedestrian experience

differs from the drivers' and bicyclists' experiences in terms of speed, visual perspective, scale, and approach. Identifying the specifics of these similarities and differences of perspective and experience were important aspects of the development of this master plan.

Our use analysis and assessment included an examination of the existing uses of the project area as well as the conflicts and problems associated with them. It included travel patterns, parking patterns, perceptions of users, origins and destinations of travel by various modes, and maintenance needs and problems. This information was obtained from observation, informal interviews, meetings with the Village Improvement Committee, Town staff, and from public meetings.

Understanding the Issues

With direct input from the Committee, Town staff and the public, major issues of interest and concern were identified. The following categories summarize the issues of greatest concern:

<u>Major Issues</u>		
* Land use	* Handicapped access	* Character of Main Street
* Aesthetics	* Utilities/Powerlines	* Business climate
* Pedestrian friendliness	* Safety	* Town/USM relationship.
* Traffic and parking	* Bicycles	
* Street trees/vegetation	* Lack of alternative modes	