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# Studying Community Vitality & Revitalization: Synthesizing Case Study Research for Practical Application

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**Studying Community Vitality & Revitalization:  
Synthesizing Case Study Research for Practical Application**

**Capstone Project Report**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Master's Degree  
in Public Policy & Management Program

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University of Southern Maine  
August 2012

# THIS CAPSTONE PROJECT

## Introduction

The *Community Vitality Self-Assessment Tool and Community Observer's Handbook* was developed as a capstone project and is the outgrowth of efforts of many individuals over the past three years. In 2009, Professor Josephine LaPlante approached a number of students about her interest in helping Maine's employment and services "hub" communities to measure and monitor efforts to improve community vitality and revive their downtowns. Although significant work on downtown revitalization had been done by the Maine Development Foundation's Downtown Center and Main Street Program in concert with participating towns, Professor LaPlante felt that a more holistic view of a community is required for an accurate assessment of accomplishments and challenges.

In 2010 two relevant capstone reports were completed. *Case Studies in Community Vitality and Downtown Revitalization* authored by Muskie graduate students Matthew Klebes, Elizabeth McLean and Kathy Lyn Tombarelli was the first phase in creating a measurement tool to examine community vitality. This phase of the study and the report focused on developing a measurement tool that would be appropriate for assessing revitalization efforts. After developing the tool, it was field tested in fourteen communities in Maine, one in New Hampshire and one in Massachusetts. The report presented findings with respect to community livability and efforts to revitalize downtown areas. In addition, suggestions were made for improving the tool. A second study was undertaken in 2010. Anne Holland, Ren Drews and Charles Carter worked with the City of Portland to consider the broad issue of measuring livability. The report they produced included guidance for developing indicator systems and organized and presented various indicators used across the United States in terms of clusters of interest. Together these two studies provided an important jumping off point for later work.

In 2011 Public Policy and Management master's degrees candidates Krissy Mailman, Kim Monaghan-Derrig and Kyra Walker tackled the second phase of the community livability measurement project. Their report, *Case Studies in Community Vitality and Downtown Revitalization: Refining Measurement Approaches and Considerations*, refined the Tombarelli, McLean and Klebes indicator system and broadened the focus by including additional fiscal information and indicators of public participation and communication. Like the earlier study, the 2011 research team applied the revamped tool, this time in 18 additional Maine communities, and then wrote a case study for each town.

In late 2011, Jennifer Curtis and Mariah Cunningham took on the tasks of synthesizing the work of prior study teams and honing the portions of the measurement tool that pertain to vitality. This third phase of the community vitality project is called: *Studying Community Vitality & Revitalization: Synthesizing Case Study Research for Practical Application*. The twin objectives of this part of the 3-year project are (1) to develop a draft of a practical assessment tool that may be applied in communities by nontechnical users (or "observers") and (2) to develop a handbook for observers. Cunningham and Curtis did substantial work on the tool and with the help of

classmate Alex Yakovleff visited multiple communities to field test the tool. Once the tool had been fully tested, the research team tackled writing a draft of the observer handbook.

## **What Is Community Vitality?**

Vitality is a difficult concept to measure. Community vitality as used herein is intended signify that a community has a level of well-being that permits it to make it appealing to current and prospective residents of various ages now and into the foreseeable future.

The Community Self-Assessment Tool is designed to give communities a means to measure the status of their services, amenities and other assets for the purpose of identifying areas in which their community may excel and also areas that provide opportunities to provide greater value to the community. It is important to keep in mind that one model will not fit all communities and not all indicators may be applicable to each community.

Municipalities may either use the whole tool for an overview of their community or to pick selected indicators simply to spur discussion or compare them to other nearby communities for a variety of purposes. For example, a community might want to compare the number of bike paths they offer to other surrounding communities. The Community Self Assessment Tool allows for a “snapshot” of data for focus areas and groups of communities, which can be very useful to community groups and planners. The tool and this handbook are meant to be a discussion starter and a guide for municipal officials and community conversations.

## **Project Scope and Methods**

The purpose of this research is to advance our ability to assess efforts by municipalities to revitalize their downtowns and improve the community amenities and opportunities that constitute livability, which is a main factor in establishing community vitality. In order to do this we will build upon the work of two previous capstone teams looking at community vitality and revitalization by working with the case studies of the previous teams to determine key indicators, identify missing indicators, and assess the validity and reliability of indicators for future case study use. This work represents the third phase of a larger project initiated in 2010.

Our efforts focused on advancing the work of the two previous capstone projects by further refining the selection of vitality indicators and further systematizing the ranking of their grades. In order to test the reliability and validity of our proposed changes, with help from Alex Yakovleff and Professor Josie LaPlante we collected information from 12 municipalities. We also had multiple surveyors assess the same community in order to determine reliability.

We performed field tests on nine municipalities in order to test the reliability and validity of the Community Self Assessment Tool. Upon completion of these field tests we analyzed the data to determine whether the indicators and ranking system (scoring rubric) that were used were valid and reliable at assessing the livability of the community and efforts to improve vitality. Through our field test, we determined that our tool was valid and reliable as a means of generating simple community assessment data that can be used to compare communities and start conversations among those concerned with community vitality. Direct observation was used by visiting the communities and collecting qualitative information about each using a template.

The Observer Handbook contains information and suggestions for obtaining secondary data through publically available records and interviews with municipal officials.

The draft of the Observer Handbook was created with input from Professor Josie LaPlante. The purpose of the Observer Handbook is to create a straightforward set of instructions for the end user of the Community Self-Assessment Tool. The handbook includes as appendices an example of what a filled-out tool looks like based on a fictitious town “Greatown”. In addition, detailed descriptions of the indicators and what the observer may particularly want to pay attention to for each one is also included in the appendices. In addition the handbook also provides suggestions for use of the tool and analysis for post-assessment.

## **Project Deliverables**

The first task involved taking the drafts of the Community Self Assessment Tool from the two previous phases and the Portland Indicators project and work with Professor LaPlante to refine and organize them into the current tool. Work was also done to refine the rating scale and add more description to the different level of ratings. Indicators were added, combined and deleted from the previous tools and the indicators were organized under a new set of categories.

The second task was to field-test our draft of the tool in multiple communities; with the help of our peer, Alex Yakovleff, and Professor LaPlante nine-communities were tested. The purpose of the field-testing was to test the reliability and validity of the tool. A field-test consisted of one of the observers spending several hours in a municipality with the intent of filling out the tool and noting indicators that were redundant, not relevant, or had been missed during the creation of the tool. Multiple observers tested some municipalities at the same time; only one observer tested some. The field-tests were also completed at different times of day and during different points in the week. Field-testing was immensely helpful in the final revisions to the tool and in creating the observer handbook. Upon completing our field-test, it was determined that the indicators and ranking system were sufficiently valid and reliable.

The final task was to develop a handbook for community observers. Unlike the tool, the handbook was created entirely in this phase of the project. The purpose of the handbook is to introduce and educate the observer to the Community Self Assessment Tool and to give suggestions for use and analysis. In creating the handbook, we used the International City Managers Association (ICMA)’s handbook on Evaluating Financial Condition as a guideline for format. The handbook contains introduction and a step-by-step instructions for use as well as description of each indicator and suggestions for analysis. A large segment of the handbook is the description of each indicator provided as an appendix. This section is meant to guide and alleviate confusion of the meanings of different indicators.

The results of these tasks were our two project deliverables; an updated and revised Community Self-Assessment Tool and a draft of the Observer Handbook.

# **Community Vitality Self-Assessment Tool And Community Observer's Handbook**

**Draft**

**Do Not Distribute or Use  
Without Permission from Professor LaPlante**

## Preface

The ***Community Vitality Self-Assessment Tool and Community Observer's Handbook*** was developed as a capstone project and is the outgrowth of efforts of many individuals over the past three years. In 2009, Professor Josephine LaPlante approached a number of students about her interest in helping Maine's employment and services "hub" communities to measure and monitor efforts to improve community vitality and revive their downtowns. Although significant work on downtown revitalization had been done by the Maine Development Foundation's Downtown Center and Main Street Program in concert with participating towns, Professor LaPlante felt that a more holistic view of a community is required for an accurate assessment of accomplishments and challenges.

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Alex Yakovleff visited multiple communities to field test the tool. Once the tool had been fully tested, the research team tackled writing a draft of the observer handbook.

## **Introduction to the Community Vitality Self-Assessment Tool and Community Observer Handbook**

Our communities are our homes and where we spend a majority of our time. We use our communities every day, whether it be using the roads to commute to work, checking out a book at our local library or visiting a municipal park for a picnic. The health of our communities is important to us. A community that attracts new residents and business becomes more vibrant and often improves a community's financial health.

It is important to measure and “take the pulse” of a community. The Community Vitality Self-Assessment Tool allows for community observers to check progress on various community efforts and can be used as a method of measuring community efforts from year to year. The tool is designed for all members of the community to use; from municipal officials, to community groups and even for students to use as a learning tool. Observations made from using the tool can be the basis for community discussions. The tool would also allow potential new residents to explore a community and look for indicators that are important to them.

The handbook is designed for a community observer to use in a community visit or to be used during a web search of a community. Certain portions of the tool are designed to be used with a community's website and data for many indicators can be collected by a quick Google search. The observer can use the whole assessment tool, or focus on indicators important to their community. Within the handbook, there is an explanation of each indicator including some of the aspects to look for.



# **Overview of the Community Vitality Self-Assessment Tool**

The Community Self-Assessment Tool is divided into 10 categories. Each category has between five and twenty-five indicators that follow the theme of the category. The categories are introduced and indicators are defined below. A detailed description of considerations for each individual indicator is included as Appendix 2. An example of how the tool could be filled out is provided as Appendix 3.

## **Community Appearance**

It's one thing for a community to appear quaint, small, and sleepy. If a town has few inhabitants, it can still appear pleasant without providing some of the amenities that more populated towns and cities offer. However, if the population is larger and the amenities are lacking and spaces and services that towns and cities normally offer are absent it is fair to suspect that the town or city is experiencing financial difficulty, is having trouble transitioning, lacks leadership of vision, may be mismanaged, or may simply have a crisis of identity with few community members taking private leadership roles to promote the town or city. Many of the indicators in this category relate to how the community feels about their shared spaces and their willingness to invest their own time, effort, and money into the future upkeep of community resources. This cluster of indicators is attempting to gage how people use and appreciate their shared spaces like sidewalks, parks, and other highly visible spaces intended for frequent public use. If people are not using and appreciating these spaces, or the city isn't placing a priority on maintaining them, it will show up in ways such as litter, unsightly accumulations of dust, dirt, and debris, and overgrowth of plants that impedes the use of the use of the space. A well-maintained and frequently used space will suggest that the primary users of the space are actively caring for it and insisting on its upkeep. The types of indicators considered in community appearance are cleanliness, the preservation and condition of historic buildings, and historic district existence.

## **Public Infrastructure**

The infrastructure of a municipality is a very important indicator of both financial health and how accessible different areas of the community are. The municipality needs to be able to compete for state and local funds to keep local infrastructure up to par with other municipalities. Planning efforts are vitally important to growth that encourages compatible uses and doesn't result in lots of unusable space between different destinations. This cluster of indicators is looking at how the city manages its resources and to what degree it is successful in serving the community by building and maintaining beneficial public infrastructure. The types of indicators considered in public infrastructure are focused on gaging the integrity of the roads and sidewalks, availability of restrooms, trashcans, and recreational-use type spaces.

## **Services Amenities and Destinations**

Services Amenities and Destinations is one of the most important sets of indicators to pay attention to when you are interested in promoting a thriving creative economy. Every item in this category is important for jobs, health, education, recreation, spiritual fulfillment, and many of them are destinations that people will frequent whether they live in the community or are within driving distance. Without these services and amenities a community would feel anemic – light on jobs, and light on places that people need or want to go to. The types of indicators considered in the Services, Amenities and Destinations category are financial and services, artistic venues and entertainment options, retail options, recreational services, religious and educational opportunities, and basic community service and tourist destinations.

### **Public Recreational Spaces**

Public recreational spaces offered by a municipality can be an attractive resource to incoming residents as well as a positive influence on the existing residents, contributing greatly to overall quality of life and sense of well-being within the community. The types of indicators considered in the Public Recreational Spaces category are spaces where families have options for active play, spaces that support specific sports, and indicators that gage the variety of options for recreation available to the community.

### **Property Use**

Housing and retail occupancy can indicate the vitality of a community in terms of how fully it is represented by people from a variety of backgrounds and supporting a diversity of socioeconomic groups. If the community is attracting and supporting a diversity of citizens, then it is likely to be full of cultural expression and can encourage innovation and growth through the sharing of ideas and skills. The types of indicators considered in the Property Use category are mix of housing, office, and commercial/retail spaces available and level of maintenance, occupancy rates, and façade appearances.

### **Transportation Considerations**

The ability to travel within and around a municipality is an important factor to consider. If a downtown is prohibitive to enter or a municipality is not near a major roadway, they may face a decrease in traffic or it could be difficult for visitors or community members to access services and destinations. Depending on the size of the community and the amount of traffic moving around, the variety and support for transportation options can be critical. The types of indicators considered in the Transportation Considerations category are looking at accessibility for non-motorized vehicles and pedestrians, safety, connectedness, adequacy of existing infrastructure, and features to aid in safe, reliable travel within the municipality.

### **Community Promotion**

A municipality's ability to promote itself is vital to a healthy community in terms of economic growth, and instilling pride in the residents and drawing the interest of potential visitors. Incentives for new businesses, events to attend and accessibility of a community via a web presence are all covered in this category.

### **Efforts to Address Community Issues**

This category is designed to house indicators that are meant to be talking points for discussion with municipal officials. Some of the indicators would be quite hard to gauge as a casual observer. The information below is meant as a guide for both observation, and points of conversation for further consideration. Indicators in this category cover a range of local welfare considerations and indicators for future concern, including participation by local private charitable organizations.

### **Embellishments**

Embellishments are the extras that make a place unique. There are two categories for embellishments, this category covers the whole community and later there is a specific category for downtown or historic district embellishments.

### **Downtown Area Attractiveness and Vitality**

A downtown (or historic district) is an important aspect of a municipality. It is a space full of history and memories that connect the community to the place. A vibrant downtown fosters local pride, encourages cultural expression and exchange, incubates small businesses, and provides a focal point for community activity. This category is included in the tool as a special category in which you can rate indicators specific to your downtown. Many of the indicators were used previously to measure aspects of the broader community. Here they are applied specifically to downtown. Indicators include the condition and existence of historic buildings, appearance, amenities, and safety.

### **Downtown Specific Embellishments**

Embellishments are the extras that make a place unique. This category looks at embellishments specific to the downtown or historic district area.

# **Community Vitality Observer's Handbook**

## Introduction to the Observer's Handbook

Be prepared to get to know a community in a very unique and intimate way. By investigating the community in order to fill out the self-assessment tool, you'll be embarking on an exercise in assessing community well-being from a variety of angles. Using the self-assessment tool, you will be guided where to look for indications of how the community is faring. Communities are complex with many varied aspects going into an overall picture of their function and personality. The self-assessment tool will show you where to look to get to know which functions the community is carrying out well, and which one's it's not. It'll help you understand the areas where it leads and areas where it lacks. After assessing one community in this way, you'll probably never look at any community quite the same again. The quality of libraries, the existence of dog parks, and the status of historic structures will hold special new meaning.

Being curious will provide you with the greatest depth of understanding about the community. The indicators tell you where to look, but allowing yourself to investigate a little deeper when the opportunity presents itself is only going to enhance your understanding of the condition of the community. For example, while testing the tool testers came across several local charitable organizations sharing space. A stop in to talk to the staff about the community was very eye-opening.

Although each person's impressions of a community will be somewhat different, the tool is designed to encourage consideration of a comprehensive range of factors, which encourages objective assessment. It is recommend that the tool be filled out by multiple people, and if possible, under a range of weather and time of week and time of day conditions. This will help to limit the influence of these factors or any one person's subjective opinions.

# How to use this handbook

## **Step 1: Review the Community Self-Assessment Tool**

A copy of the Community Self-Assessment Tool is located in Appendix 1. Before going out into your community, it is important to familiarize yourself with you're the different parts of the tool. The categories are described in the Overview section and detailed descriptions of the considerations for each individual indicator can be found in Appendix 2. An introduction to our rating system is provided below. An example of how the tool might be filled out is included in Appendix 3.

Using the tool can give you a fresh look the community where you may have lived for many years. What do you enjoy about your community? What do you think could be improved?

## **Step 2: Choose the indicators most relevant to your community**

The tool is designed to be used in multiple ways. You can choose to utilize the entire tool to create a complete profile of a community, or you can choose to use selected indicators that are the most relevant.

For example, a community wanting to increase traffic to their downtown area, might only use indicators from the community promotion and downtown attractiveness categories and compare them to nearby communities. Or a group studying education may use a set of indicators to determine how many public schools and universities are in a given geographic area. Use the tool for the purposes that best suits you. It is designed for flexibility!

## **Step 3: Collect data for the selected indicators**

Once you have selected the indicators that are the most relevant to your community, it is time to collect the data for your selected indicators. There are multiple methods of collecting data. For indicators that would be physically apparent, one can observe them in a community and evaluate them. A good example of an indicator that can be observed is bike racks, trash receptacles, and storefront occupancy in the downtown

Use Google and the city website is the other primary method of data collection. Certain indicators focus on a municipality's web presence, such as ease of finding information about online licensing or city services. Google or other web searches can be utilized to identifying indicators such as health services, hospitals, and educational institutions in a city.

Some indicators, such as homelessness or community promotion may best be answered by speaking or e-mailing a municipal official, collecting data on these indicators can assist in a more complete community profile.

#### **Step 4: Evaluate your results**

Once you have completed collecting data on your selected indicators it is time to evaluate what this data means to your community. Evaluating the results is based on how you are approaching the survey tool. If you are looking to relocate or gain more information about a municipality or you could be a current resident or official of a municipality looking to gauge your communities with other comparable communities.

If you are looking to relocate or gain more data about a community, you can evaluate your results by comparing surrounding communities or evaluate your results based on your personal criteria for a community.

If you are a current resident or official of a municipality you can also chose to evaluate your results based on municipalities of similar size, or you can utilize the tool to take a look at your own community and the presence, absence or condition of certain indicators. If multiple members of a community, for example a task force on parks and playgrounds, utilize the indicators, they can become a starting point for discussion and planning.

#### **Step 5: Plan next steps**

Once you have completed collecting data on your selected indicators it is time to evaluate what this data means to your community. Evaluating the results is based on how you are approaching the survey tool. If you are looking to relocate or gain more information about a municipality or you could be a current resident or official of a municipality looking to gauge your communities with other comparable communities.

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## Introduction to Rating Indicators

Lets talk about how to work with this tool.

LIVABILITY & VITALITY INDICATORS	Note presence	<i>Check applicable descriptor (may use check plus and check minus to provide added information)</i>				Observer Notes & Comments
Community Name:	Present? Y/N	Poor: Detracts from sense of place & vitality.	Fair: Contributes somewhat to sense of place and vitality - misses mark a bit	Good: Contributes to sense of place & vitality	Very Good or Excellent (Use Ck plus for excellent): A true asset	
<b>Community Appearance</b>						
Cleanliness						
Lighting						
People are visible, seem to be enjoying the community						
Information kiosk or welcome center						
Historic buildings						
Condition of historic buildings						
Historic district area with cluster of buildings						

For each indicator listed in the left hand column that you decide to collect data for, you will need to determine:

1. If the subject of the indicator is there or not (present or absent). If you feel the indicator is there or not answer Y for yes or N for no in the first column to the right of the indicators column. This measure may not be useful for all indicators – if so, just leave it blank. For example, if you were assessing cleanliness, you would simply leave that column blank, as cleanliness is a state of being rather than a thing, such as a hospital.
2. Consider to what degree the indicator is represented and contributes to the sense of place in the community. For example, if you were assessing cleanliness and thought the community was kept mostly clean but there were a few problem areas, you would either place a check mark in the “fair” column or the “good” column depending on how bad the problem areas were.
3. Then, note any specifics that factored into your decision that are unique to the situation or that you will want to remember later when discussing or reporting on the category. For instance, if you noticed lots of dog feces in one particular area that the community might want to address specifically at a later date, you could make a note about it in the comments section to help you remember your impression.



A rating of poor designates that an indicator detracts from the sense of place and vitality. A rating of fair designates that an indicator has the potential to contribute to sense of place and vitality, but still misses the mark. A rating of good designates that the indicator contributes to a sense of place and vitality. A very good or excellent rating designates that the indicator is a true asset. Use a check plus mark for a rating of excellent. If you are having trouble deciding what things to consider for a specific indicator, refer to a complete explanation of each indicator listed in Appendix 2.

### **Suggestions for Utilizing the Tool for Analysis:**

After utilizing the tool to measure the indicators that are of most interest to your municipality, there are several ways the data can be analyzed to provide useful information

We think the foremost use of the tool is as an excellent discussion tool. When individuals familiar with a community look down through the list of indicators, they will be prompted to think about different aspects of the community. For example, the tool could be utilized as a conversation starter for town meetings or by planning boards or economic developers. The tool provides a comprehensive list of issues that could be of interest to a municipality.

A municipality may choose to utilize this handbook to look at one particular aspect, such as higher education, and compare it to surrounding municipalities or use the data as a base for a recommendation surrounding higher education. The Community Self-Assessment Tool can be used as a comparison tool to work with several municipalities to compare services offered, public recreation, occupancy rates, etc. For example, your municipality could have a much higher retail vacancy level than surrounding municipalities. Armed with this information a municipality could investigate the factors surrounding retail occupancy, such as inter-accessibility, economic development incentives and retail facades.

If the tool is utilized over time it can be used for longitudinal assessment of community aspects to help identify which areas the city has improved on and which areas have declined. In addition, if multiple cities are using a uniform system of assessment it will help them compare and contrast their communities. Having clearly identified strong suits is sure to be a very beneficial to developers and marketers and knowing areas where the community is clearly behind their peers can help them make a case for funding to support those areas.

## **Appendices:**

Appendix 1: A blank copy of the tool

Appendix 2: Detailed descriptions of considerations for each individual indicator

Appendix 3: An example of filled out tool

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### Community Vitality, Livability & Downtown Revitalization Field Observation Tool

LIVABILITY & VITALITY INDICATORS	Note presence	Check applicable descriptor (may use check plus and check minus to provide added information)				Observer Notes & Comments
	Present? Y/N	Poor: Detracts from sense of place & vitality.	Fair: Contributes somewhat to sense of place and vitality - misses mark a bit	Good: Contributes to sense of place & vitality	Very Good or Excellent (Use Ck plus for excellent): A true asset	
<b>Community Name:</b>						
<b>Community Appearance</b>						
Cleanliness						
Lighting						
People are visible, seem to be enjoying the community						
Information kiosk or welcome center						
Historic buildings						
Condition of historic buildings						
Historic district area with cluster of buildings						
<b>Public Infrastructure</b>						
Streetscape						
Curbs						
Public restrooms						
Sidewalks						
Bike Racks						
Trash receptacles						
Public Gardens						
Open Space						
Dog Park(s)						
Boat launch(es)						
Public waterfront space						
<b>Services, Amenities and Destinations</b>						

Financial services (Banks, Credit Unions)						
Health services						
Art and Performance spaces						
Entertainment options						
Stadium(s)						
Conference center						
Hospital(s)						
Farmers market(s)						
Flea market(s)						
Recreational services						
Places of worship						
K-12 education						
College						
University						
Overnight Accomodations						
Community centers						
Library						
Museums and Historical sites						
Grocery store						
Drug store						
Retail options						
Restaurant options						
<b>Public Recreational Spaces</b>						
Park(s) for people						
Playground(s)						

Tennis courts						
Basketball courts						
Public pools						
Trails and walking paths						
Public waterfront access						
<b>Property Use</b>						
Mix of housing (low and high income)						
Housing maintenance						
Housing occupancy						
Mix of commercial/retail uses						
Commercial/retail facades						
Commercial/retail occupancy						
Mix of office spaces						
Office space facades						
Office space occupancy						
<b>Transportation considerations</b>						
Bike lanes						
Safety features (crosswalks, cross lights)						
Handicap accessibility						
Ease of traveling between frequent destinations						
Traffic flow						
Traffic congestion						
Parking						
Public transportation						
Signage to help drivers navigate						
Inter Accessibility						

Community promotion						
Recent building development or improvements						
Special events						
Community branding						
Competitive business incentives						
Competitive business climate						
Planning efforts						
Local media coverage						
Utilization of City Website to interact with Public						
Regional cooperation						
Accessibility of Town Officials						
Efforts to address community issues						
Homelessness						
Food assistance						
Distressed buildings						
Youth departure						
Youth unrest						
Crime issues						
Sprawling development						
Active local charitable organizations						
Embellishments						
Benches						
Greenery & color: flowers, trees, shrubs						
Banners, signs for attractions						
Additional embellishment(s)						
Downtown Area Attractiveness & Vitality						

Façade attractiveness						
Condition of buildings						
Anchor tenants						
Sidewalks						
Crossing lights						
Crosswalks						
Business Signage Attractiveness						
Pedestrian signage						
Public restrooms						
Parking						
Traffic Flow						
Commercial/retail occupancy level						
<b>Downtown-specific embellishments</b>						
Outside furniture						
Attractive lighting						
Greenery & color: flowers, trees, shrubs						
Art						
Additional embellishment(s)						



## **Descriptions of Individual Indicators and Considerations for Each One**

### **Introduction:**

The Community Self-Assessment Instrument is divided into 10 categories. Each category has between five and twenty-five indicators that follow the theme of the category. The categories are introduced and indicators are defined below.

### **Community Appearance**

It's one thing for a community to appear quaint, small, and sleepy. If a town has few inhabitants, it can still appear pleasant without providing some of the amenities that more populated towns and cities offer. However, if the population is larger and the amenities are lacking and public space is absent it is fair to suspect that the town or city is experiencing financial difficulty, is having trouble transitioning, lacks leadership of vision, or may be mismanaged. A town that is experiencing a loss of population, talent, demographic crisis such as a disproportionate number of retired persons or school aged children, or is being used as a service center by people who live in the surrounding towns may show signs of financial stress through declining public benefits to the members of the community. When a town or city is facing financial stress it will often react by paring back non-essential services, which often is reflected in many of the indicators under community appearance. Even though the indicators are not all directly connected to public spending, many of them are indicators of how the community feels about their shared spaces and their willingness to invest private money into the future upkeep of mixed public-private community resources.

**Cleanliness:** cleanliness in this context is meant to assess if and how people use and appreciate their shared spaces like sidewalks, parks, and other highly visible spaces intended for frequent public use. If people are not using and appreciating these spaces, or the city isn't placing a priority on maintaining them, it will show up in ways such as litter, unsightly accumulations of dust, dirt, and debris, overgrowth of plants that impedes the use of the space, and animal feces. A very clean space will suggest that not only is the space maintained, but that the primary users of the space are actively caring for it by not littering and keeping it free of animal waste.

**Lighting:** of course lighting is more difficult to assess during the day, but look for presence of street lights, and consider their spacing. What areas might you feel are inadequate to help keep you safe? Lighting that is more than adequate will be attractive and well-maintained.

**People are visible, seem to be enjoying the community:** the purpose of this indicator is to assess if the community appearance is too heavily influenced by the town government. If a community looks immaculate, but has no individuals with a connection or sense of place that attaches them to it, then it is merely a façade. Look for signs that people are using community amenities – do they use parks, libraries and community centers, walk on sidewalk.

**Information kiosk or welcome center:** this indicator was developed to assess a sense of welcoming in the community to visitors, and a sense of whether the community has banded

together to take financial advantage of visitors for the benefit of local businesses. Does the kiosk help you find established local businesses that would benefit from tourism? A widely distributed map including this type of information could be considered a close proxy. A truly excellent example of this indicator would include both a welcome center and a well-designed map of local resources promoting local businesses.

Historic buildings: does the city have a sense of place fostered by the preservation of historic buildings? Do community members have a sense of connection to the buildings? How easy is it to find out information about them? A truly excellent example of this might include a historic district, local historic markers, and a sense that the historic buildings are recognized and event utilized for the benefit of educating the future generation and visitors.

The condition of historic buildings is a separate indicator from “Historic buildings” because the buildings could have been saved from demolition and a local historic preservation organization could have done much to promote the history of the building, while it was falling into disrepair due to lack of new investment in the resources by developers and other private investors. If this is a case, it could be a sign that the city is facing a lack of hope for the future, despite its past and present condition. This could also be a sign that development in the city is focused on short term gains and may lack the planning guidance to support the historic district(s) which is likely to cause a declining sense of place for the site in the future and may indicate a lack of concern for wise-use of local resources over the long term.

Historic district area with cluster of buildings: this type of area, often a traditional “main street” from the pre-automobile era, is often a space that people are likely to attain a sense of pride of place from. If the historic district is intact, it can provide a sense of living in a stable community with a shared commitment to its present and future upkeep.

## **Public Infrastructure**

The infrastructure of a municipality is a very important indicator of both financial health and how accessible different areas of the community are.

Streetscape: the appearance and structural integrity of the roads is an indicator of the financial well-being of the municipality and its ability to secure state and federal funds for critical infrastructure relative to other municipalities.

Curbs: look at the condition, and consider safety factors and ease of use.

Public restrooms: look to see if bathrooms encourage people to stay and utilize public spaces. Are they safe, sanitary, and accessible?

Sidewalks: look at the placement, condition, and consider safety factors and ease of use

Bike racks: do bike racks encourage community members to bike as an alternative form of transportation?

Trash receptacles: are there enough trash receptacles and are they regularly emptied?

Public gardens: does the municipality make an effort to attract newcomers and engender a sense of pride in the community? Are the gardens well-maintained?

Open space: has the community preserved, and cared for enough public open space to invite outdoor enjoyment?

Dog parks: does the community invite dog owners and encourage a culture of responsible dog ownership?

Boat launches: if the municipality has river, pond or lake it would ideally offer one or more nice accessible public boat launches to accommodate all types of boat and paddling recreation.

Public waterfront space: if the town has a river, pond or lake it will ideally offer enough public waterfront space to accommodate a variety of activities such as fishing, picnicking, and those who just want to relax near the water.

### **Services Amenities and Destinations**

Services Amenities and Destinations is one of the most important sets of indicators to pay attention to when you are interested in promoting a thriving creative economy. Every item in this section is important for jobs, health, education, recreation, spiritual fulfillment, and many of them are destinations that people will frequent whether they live in the community or are within driving distance. Without these services and amenities a community would feel anemic – light on jobs, and light on places that people need or want to go to.

Financial services: are there enough banks to ensure some competition among local lenders? Are there a number of conveniently located branches that make banking a quick stop along the way?

Health services: will families need to go out of town for basic services, or even common specialty services? How far out are appointments being scheduled? Are there adequate numbers of dentists offices, or will community members need to travel out of town for services?

Art and performance spaces: many young families want their children to experience the arts at a young age. Are there opportunities for children to learn about various art forms locally? Are there local theater performances? What about art galleries to display local art? Many thriving communities will offer regular art walks.

Entertainment options: many young people move away because of a lack of things to do for fun out on the town at night. What types of activities are offered locally for young adults, young families, older adults? Look for arcades, pool or billiard halls, dance halls, movie theaters, community theaters, amusement parks, pubs, lounges, bowling alleys etc.

Stadiums: stadiums larger than a school sports stadium can be a destination and draw people from nearby areas. Look for local, regional, or professional stadiums and arenas for sports and other presentations.

Hospitals: not only a large employer, a nearby hospital offers peace of mind to people from all walks of life who have young, old, accident-prone or ailing family members.

Farmers markets: established farmers markets can be a sign of a healthy local economy, and also a great place to find healthy whole foods that haven't been flown or trucked across hundreds of miles. This will help insulate the community from the price of food rising due to rising transportation costs. It also indicates that the community values sustainable land use.

Flea markets: flea markets are an excellent way to encourage a local creative economy. A wide variety of goods may be exchanged and artists of all types can inexpensively set up a retail space. Flea markets are also a destination for crafters, antique dealers, scrappers, and others who make use of used goods.

Recreational services: what is there to do on a hot summer day? What is there to do on a cold winter's night? What to do on a rainy day? Look for YMCAs, pools, tennis and golf courses (including disc golf), and many of the same amenities listed under "Entertainment Options". Specialty recreational services may be a draw and attract individuals who enjoy a particular activity.

Places of worship: are there enough number and variety of places of worship to service the community? Are they active in community efforts?

K-12 Education: good quality children's educational opportunities are crucial if you want to attract and keep young families. In addition, schools provide many jobs and are likely to play a role in after school activities and offer recreational amenities like basketball courts.

College: like hospitals, colleges provide many good jobs to the community and will keep some young adults in the community and attract new ones to the area. Colleges also usually have libraries and stadiums or performance spaces and offer recreational amenities such as pools, tennis and basketball courts, etc., which are all beneficial to the community. Colleges can also lead to the creation of new businesses and improve the skill level and thereby earning potential of community members.

University: See college. Universities will provide all of the benefits of the college, and more, as they typically have students living on-campus and nearby, thereby bringing lots of educated young people to the area.

Overnight accommodations: overnight accommodations are an indicator that people are frequently traveling to and through the area, creating an ever-changing consumer base and promoting the exchange of ideas, and goods.

Community Centers: community centers are often a safe space with multiple recreational offerings where young families can go to exercise and socialize. Community centers promote socialization and exchange of ideas and local information.

Library: a community library can say a lot about a community. What type of space is the library? Is it inviting, well kept, well stocked, safe, and appealing? If the library is run down, or feels unsafe, then the community may be experiencing difficulties and forcing the library to bear the brunt of budget cuts or to shelter the impoverished or homeless.

Museums and historical site: does the community value its history and celebrate its heritage? A community that does so is much more likely to have a sense of pride of place which makes people happier to live there and feel less negatively toward it. Museums and historical sites also attract tourists and often are enjoyable spaces for locals to frequent if the grounds are well maintained and offer parks, gardens or cafes.

Grocery store: it is absolutely critical to most professionals that there be a well-stocked grocery store nearby. They want to be able to access a variety of foods and not spend a lot of time doing it. A variety of grocery stores is best, to promote ease of access and competition.

Drug store: besides being convenient for picking up basic necessities, drug stores are important for anyone taking medications. This is a store they will need to use frequently, and will want to have one close by to avoid the need to travel.

Retail options: having retail options available locally will help attract people to live in the area and also encourage them to spend their money locally instead of taking it elsewhere. In addition, it will attract people from nearby areas.

Restaurant options: see “Retail options”

### **Public Recreational Spaces**

The amount of public recreational spaces offered by a municipality can be a good indicator of financial condition and also can be an attractive asset to incoming residents.

Parks: How many public parks are available? Are these parks well-maintained? What services do these parks offer? Are there water fountains, restrooms or benches?

Playgrounds: Are there publically maintained playgrounds? What areas do they serve? What age groups?

Tennis courts: Are public tennis courts available? Do they need to be reserved? Are they in good repair?

Basketball courts: Are public basketball courts available? Do they need to be reserved? Are they in good repair?

Public pools: Are public pools available? If yes, is there a lifeguard on duty? Is the pool cleaned and maintained regularly? What are the hours the pool is open?

Trails and walking paths: Does the municipality maintain trails and walking paths or are they maintained by groups and foundations? Are trails and walking paths well-marked and up kept?

Public waterfront access: Is there a place for community members to launch boats, visit a beach or otherwise have access to a municipality's waterfront?

## **Property Use**

Housing and retail occupancy can indicate the health of a community. The mix of affordable housing available and level of housing maintenance can also provide insight to a municipality.

Mix of housing (low and high income): Is there subsidized housing and other housing opportunities for low-income community members? Are apartment rentals available for a range of income levels? Are houses available in a range of income levels?

Housing maintenance: Are houses well-maintained? Are yards maintained? Are there visible signs of disrepair, such as chipping paint or roofs losing shingles?

Housing occupancy: What percentages of residential buildings in a municipality are occupied? Speaking to the town assessor, tax collector or other municipal official may be the best way to collect this information.

Mix of commercial/retail uses: What services are offered in a municipality? What is the mix of professional services to retail options?

Commercial/retail facades: A façade is a the exterior of a building most often in the front. A façade can give a good first impression to the exterior of a business or building. Some aspects to consider when considering façade attractiveness are awnings, signage, paint and general attractiveness and upkeep of the visible exterior of the building.

Commercial/retail occupancy: Commercial or retail occupancy can be visually measured by assessing the number of vacant storefronts or by studying a municipalities records on business occupancy

Mix of office spaces: Are there a variety of sizes of office spaces available to fit the needs of different sized businesses?

Office space facades: A façade is a the exterior of a building most often in the front. A façade can give a good first impression to the exterior of a business or building. Some aspects to consider when considering façade attractiveness are awnings, signage, paint and general attractiveness and upkeep of the visible exterior of the building.

Office space vacancy: What percentage of office space in a municipality is occupied? Speaking to the town assessor, tax collector or other municipal official may be the best way to collect this information.

### **Transportation Considerations**

The ability to travel within and around a municipality is an important factor to consider. If a downtown is prohibitive to enter or a municipality is not near a major roadway, they may face a decrease in traffic.

Bike lanes: Are there bike lanes on the major roadways in and around a municipality? Are there accessible marked bike paths and racks?

Safety features (crosswalks, crosslights): Are the crosswalks visible? Are there crossing lights at busy intersections? Are stop signs visible?

Handicap accessibility: This indicator can be measured in a variety of ways. Are the streets and sidewalks accessible? Are ramps prevalent and are they in good condition? Is there plenty of handicap parking? Are restaurants, stores and offices accessible?

Ease of traveling between frequent destinations: Is the grocery store close to the gas station and the bank? Are common services located in one area of spread around town? Are municipal and other government buildings located in the same district? Location of a municipalities schools is also important to note for parents who may have children in more than one grade level.

Traffic flow: Are there one-way streets? Are there stoplights and signs at high traveled intersections?

Traffic congestion: Are there frequent stops, long waits, or slow movement in your municipality? Does this problem become more noticeable during morning and evening commute times? Are there intersections that cause considerable back-up?

Parking: Is parking free, or available in metered spots and parking garages? Is parking accessible near community resources, such as the post office, municipal offices and libraries? Is there parking available downtown and are there time limits on the parking spots?

Public transportation: Are public buses or other means of public transportation available? Are they adequate for the size of the community?

Signage to help drivers navigate: Are signs for state and federal roadways clearly designated? Are street signs clearly visible and not blocked by trees or shrubs?

Inter Accessibility: How close is a municipality to a major roadway? Proximity to I-295 and I-95 and US Route 1 are good examples.

## **Community Promotion**

A municipality's ability to promote itself is vital to a healthy community. Incentives for new businesses, events to attend and accessibility of a community via a web presence are all covered in this category.

Recent building development or improvements: Are new buildings for office space, retail, or restaurants being built? Are existing buildings being rehabbed and renovated? New development or renovation is often a sign of economic health in a municipality.

Special events: Does the municipality hold special events to promote their municipality or other divisions. Heritage Days, Cook-outs, ball games, and fundraisers for police and fire are all examples. Fairs and festivals promoting a municipality are also often common.

Community branding: Does the community have a motto or logo? One example is Bath, Maine, the motto is City of Ships and there is a logo as well. The logo and motto are uniform throughout the city.

Competitive business incentives: Is Tax Increment Financing available? Are other economic development programs such as, EPA Brownfields, Historic Building Tax Credits, and Pine Tree Development Zones available? Does the municipality have its own incentives for attracting business?

Competitive business climate: Are the programs offered comparable to the programs offered by neighboring municipalities? Are the programs well-advertised on the city website?

Planning efforts: Is there a planning department, growth study, or a comprehensive plan? This indicator can be more thoroughly answered by discussion with a municipal official

Local media coverage: Does the municipality have a newspaper or a section in a regional newspaper? Are local events and issues covered on television or on websites and blogs?

Utilization of city website to interact with public: Can fees be paid online? Can licenses be renewed? Are upcoming events posted on the city website? Are different departments accessible via the main city website?

Regional cooperation: Is the municipality part of any regional organization, such as a county of governments or an economic development council? Does the municipality share contracting or other responsibilities with any nearby municipalities?

Accessibility of town officials: Is contact information and office hours for town officials readily available?

## **Efforts to Address Community Issues**

This category is designed to have the indicators that are also meant to be talking points for discussion with municipal officials. Some of the indicators would be hard to gauge as a casual



observer. The information below is meant to search as a guide for both observation and conversation.

Homelessness: Are there homeless shelters, warming centers, community outreach efforts and assistance for homeless individuals in a municipality? How visible are these services? A municipal official may be able to provide statistics on number of individuals served or referred.

Food assistance: Is there a food pantry or soup kitchen in the municipality? If yes, how many families/individuals are they serving in a year? Are there other forms of food assistance such as community level gardens or food drives?

Distressed buildings: Are buildings being maintained and what is the vacancy rate for both retail and residential occupancy?

Youth departure: Are there career services or incentives for youth to stay and work or return and work to a municipality? Are there low-income support programs?

Youth unrest: Are intervention services offered for troubled youth? Is there a good relationship between the school system and community resources? Are after school programs offered for educational outreach?

Crime issues: What are they crime rates? Are rates of some crimes higher than others? What outreach is being done to educate the community about crime and resources available to report it?

Sprawling development: Are large retail spaces developing in a municipality? How does this affect other areas of the municipality such as a downtown and local business? Has the development increased traffic to a municipality? Has it affected the tax burden?

Active local charitable organizations: Are there active charitable organizations such as the elks, rotary, girl scouts, non-profits? What impact to these organizations have on a community? Are events such as road races, fundraisers, community service an integrated part of the community?

## **Embellishments**

Embellishments are the extras that make a municipality unique. There are two sections for embellishments, this section covers the whole community and later there is a specific section for downtown embellishments.

Greenery & color: flowers, trees, shrubs: Are there well-maintained greenspace in town? Are public areas attractive and inviting?

Banners, signs for attractions: Are there banners for upcoming events? Are local attractions such as museums, shops, restaurants and points of interest visible from major roadways?

Additional Embellishments: This indicator is designed for you to gauge and additional downtown specific embellishments that are unique to your municipality.

### **Downtown Area Attractiveness and Vitality**

A downtown is an important aspect of a municipality. This category is included in the instrument as a special section in which you can rate indicators specific to your downtown.

Façade attractiveness: A façade is a the exterior of a building most often in the front. A façade can give a good first impression to the exterior of a business or building. Some aspects to consider when considering façade attractiveness are awnings, signage, paint and general attractiveness and upkeep of the visible exterior of the building.

Condition of buildings: In addition to the façade it is important to observe the general condition of buildings, especially in a downtown area where many buildings may be clustered together. Important aspects to consider are the conditions of the buildings: including paint, condition of building material and windows and doors.

Anchor tenants: An anchor tenant can be defined in multiple ways. An anchor tenant can be a major retail store, often one of a chain with brand recognition and be a destination for consumers. An anchor tenants can also be a local establishment that is well known and is a consistent draw to the downtown area. It may be in the form of a restaurant, specialty shop, or service-provider.

Sidewalks: This indicator is meant to gauge the condition of the sidewalks in the downtown. Some features to consider for this indicator are the general condition of the sidewalks, such as cracks and missing pavement. Another feature to consider is the width of the sidewalk and how many people can comfortably walk next to each other and is there room for people to pass by.

Crossing lights: Crossing lights is a mostly presence or absence indicator. If there are crossing lights it is important to note their working condition and how often they appear in a downtown. There are also other methods of indicating crossing, for example in downtown Brunswick, Maine, there are crossing flags.

Crosswalks: For this indicator it is important to note the condition of the crosswalks to ensure that they are visible and to note any additional characteristics such as raised crosswalks or other unique features.

Business sign attractiveness: Some aspects to consider when considering business sign attractiveness are paint, upkeep, visibility and general attractiveness

Pedestrian signage: Some signage to look for includes, signs directing to public resources, such as libraries and parks. Other signs may direct pedestrians to nearby attractions or provide direction for crossing public roadways. In some cases a downtown may have a marked walking path with footprints or paws to direct pedestrians to local attractions or provide a tour.

Public restrooms: Cleanliness and availability are two important factors in rating public restrooms. Often during site visits dedicated public restrooms were not available in a downtown, but a restroom could be accessed via a public space such as a library or a larger retailer.

Parking: There are many factors to take into consideration when considering parking in a downtown and some considerations may be unique to your municipality. Frequent considerations for parking are: availability, proximity to retail and service space, free or metered and time limits

Traffic flow: Congestion is a important factor in assessing the traffic flow of a downtown. Does the area become more congested during commute times for workers or is there a consistent traffic issue. Are the traffic patterns consistent and how are the roads designed in the downtown area.

Commercial/retail occupancy level: An important indicator of economic health in a downtown. Commercial or retail occupancy can be visually measured by assessing the number of vacant storefronts or by studying a municipalities records on business occupancy

### **Downtown Specific Embellishments**

Outside furniture: Are there benches or tables and chairs available for downtown visitors to sit and relax? Are there awnings or umbrellas to protect from the sun?

Attractive lighting: Are the streets well-lit and safe? Are the lights presented in an attractive way, such as well maintained streetlights or other creative lighting structures?

Greenery & color: flowers, trees, shrubs: Is the downtown greenery well-maintained? Are the flowers and shrubs aesthetically appealing?

Art: Is there public art in the downtown? Are there art galleries and museum that make art available in the downtown area?

Additional embellishments: This indicator is designed for you to gauge and additional downtown specific embellishments that are unique to your municipality.

**Community Vitality,  
Livability & Downtown  
Revitalization Field  
Observation Instrument**

LIVABILITY & VITALITY INDICATORS  Town of: Greatown	Note presence	Check applicable descriptor (may use check plus and check minus to provide added information)				Observer Notes & Comments
	Present? Y/N	Poor: Detracts from sense of place & vitality.	Fair: Could contribute to sense of space & vitality but misses mark somewhat	Good: Contributes to sense of space & vitality	Very Good or Excellent (Use Ck plus for excellent): A true asset	
<b>Community Appearance</b>						
Cleanliness				V		Visited on a gray day
Lighting						visited during the day
People are visible, seem to be enjoying the community				V		Dog walkers/students/elderly/summer visitors
Information kiosk or welcome center					V	Visitors Info building and informative kiosk
Presence of historic buildings				V+		Some older buildings, lots of newer buildings - signs of urban renewal.
Condition of historic buildings				V+		Externally they appear in good repair
Historic district area with cluster of buildings (Whether designated or undesignated)	Y					
<b>Public Infrastructure</b>						
Streetscape	Y			V		
Curbs	Y		V			Need maintenance
Public restrooms	Y		V			I used the one in the library - didn't see any designated
Sidewalks	Y		V			Brick looks nice but crumbling and uneven
Bike Racks	N					I didn't notice any - not positive there are none
Trash receptacles	Y			V		Plain, round, black metal
Public Gardens	N		V			Nothing obvious? Some trees/benches
Open Space	Y			V		Waterfront Park - not big enough for the size of the community
Dog Park(s)	N					
Public waterfront space	Y			V		Waterfront Park

Services, Amenities and Destinations						
Financial services (Banks, Credit Unions)	Y			V		
Health services	Y			V		
Art and Performance spaces	Y			V		Art studios downtown and Church performance space
Entertainment options	Y				V	Movie theater, pubs, lounges, bowling, etc
Stadium(s)	N					
Conference center	Y		V			Meeting and event space local hotels up to 150
Hospital(s)	Y				V	Well-regarded local Hospital
Farmers market(s)	Y				V	
Flea market(s)	N					
Recreational services	Y				V	Gyms, pools, golf courses, and bowling lanes etc
Places of worship	Y			V		Churches, Synagogue, other
K-12 education	Y			V		
College	Y			V		Local University College
University	Y			V		Local University College
Overnight Accomodations	Y			V		Modern, but not blended with the community
Community centers	Y			V		Lambert Park Community Center
Library	Y				V+	Exceptionally nice public library
Museums and Historical sites	Y				V+	Maritime Museum
Grocery store	Y			V		Multiple
Drug store	Y				V	Very nice traditional one in downtown
Retail options	Y				V+	Three major retail centers and excellent downtown retail selection
Restaurant options					V	Lots of restaurants - mostly American food, some variety
Public Recreational Spaces						
Park(s) for people	Y				V+	Public Parks & Rec department at the City
Playground(s)	Y				V	3 in the City

Tennis courts	Y				V	Four Courts lighted for nighttime use
Basketball courts	Y				V	Six outdoor courts, two lighted for nighttime
Public pools	Y		V			at the YMCA - not public or free for most
Trails and walking paths			V			Some at public park
Public waterfront access	Y				V	Waterfront Park - mentioned above (also, boat launches maintained by the state)
<b>Property Use</b>						
Mix of housing (low and high income)				V		
Housing maintenance					V	
Housing occupancy					V	
Mix of commercial/retail uses				V		
Commercial/retail facades					V	
Commercial/retail occupancy					V	
Mix of office spaces				V		
Office space facades				V		
Office space occupancy				V		
<b>Transportation considerations</b>						
Bike lanes	N					Has a bicycle and pedestrian plan
Urban trails	Y			V		
Safety features (crosswalks, cross lights)	Y			V		
Handicap accessibility	Y		V			Would be difficult in a wheel chair
Ease of traveling between frequent destinations				V		Can be confusing to out-of-towners
Traffic flow			V			Can be confusing to out-of-towners
Traffic congestion			V			At certain times of the day
Parking	Y		V			Can be difficult to find parking
Public transportation	Y			V		Bus & Trolley
Signage to help drivers navigate	Y				V	
Inter Accessibility					V	
<b>Community promotion</b>						
Recent building development or improvements	Y			V		

Special events	Y				V	Summer festival, other
Community branding	Y				V	Historic Downtown, Shipbuilding, etc.
Competitive business incentives	Y				V	Aggressive economic development
Competitive business climate	Y				V	
Planning efforts	Y				V+	Planning department & board, comprehensive plan, open space & natural resources plan
Local media coverage	Y				V	Coastal Journal, Times Record
Utilization of City Website to interact with Public	Y				V+	LOTS of information about the City on City website
Online services (fees, licenses)	N		V			Information, but not interactive
Regional cooperation	Y		V			Mention of Kennebec-Chaudier Corridor on Kiosk, promotion of beach area and nearby attractions
Accessibility of Town Officials	Y				V	Contact info readily available
<b>Efforts to address community issues</b>						
Homelessness	N					No efforts apparent
Food assistance	Y			V		Food pantry
Distressed buildings	N					Most buildings in decent shape or better
Health problems						No efforts apparent
Youth departure						No efforts apparent
Youth unrest						No efforts apparent
Crime issues						No efforts apparent
Sprawling development						No efforts apparent
Active local charitable organizations	Y				V	
Citizen engagement	Y				V	
<b>Embellishments</b>						
Benches	Y			V		
Greenery & color: flowers, trees, shrubs	Y				V	
Banners, signs for attractions	Y				V	

Additional embellishment(s)						
<b>Downtown Area Attractiveness &amp; Vitality</b>						
Façade attractiveness					V	
Condition of buildings				V		
Anchor tenants				V		Renys, and some other specialty retail stores
Sidewalks	Y		V			Cracked and uneven
Crossing lights	N					
Crosswalks	Y					
Business Signage Attractiveness					V	A few really nice historic façade signs
Pedestrian signage - sufficiency	Y					
Public restrooms	Y			V		
Parking	Y			V		Could be hard to find parking
Traffic Flow	Y			V		Could be confusing to out of towners
Commercial/retail occupancy level					V	
<b>Downtown-specific embellishments</b>						
Outside furniture	N					
Attractive lighting						Visited during day
Greenery & color: flowers, trees, shrubs	Y				V	Probably looks a lot better in summer - empty planters
Art	Y					Sculpture at library, art downtown
Additional embellishment(s)						