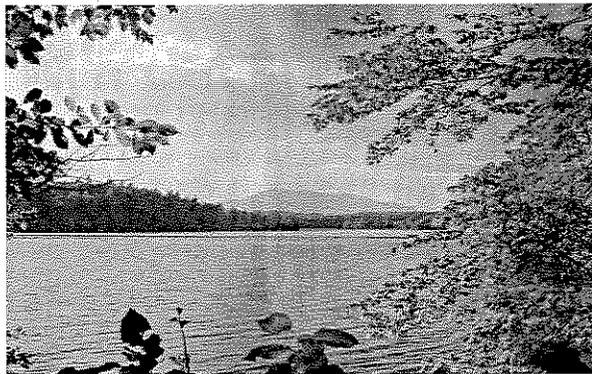
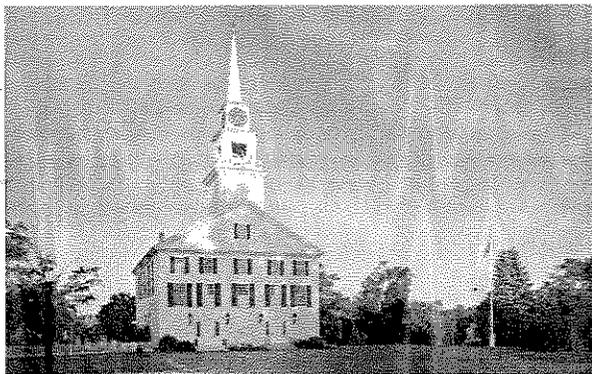


REDI

Rindge Economic Development Initiative

an Economic Development Master Plan for
The Town of Rindge, New Hampshire July, 2011



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Why Adopt a Strategy?

At the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the leadership and the citizens of Rindge have decided to take a step back, to look at where the community has been, where it is, and where it should go. An important part of that review is the health and direction of the economy of Rindge: the marketplace of local goods, services, skills, buyers and sellers. How are these local factors performing versus expectations, and how are they affected by the region, the state, and the global economy? How best to provide opportunity for a better economic future without compromising the community's values and its proud legacy?

This thinking process – the Community Master Plan – will look back, will look at today, and will make some assumptions about tomorrow. Having a plan with clear outcomes in mind – knowing what is important and how it will be accomplished – increases the likelihood of success.

Why Rindge? To develop a local economy in a competitive environment, a community needs to attract and retain productive assets to that community. These assets can be *permanent* like land and location, *attainable* such as roads, infrastructure and buildings, and *intangible* but real like work ethic, aesthetics, and a shared, positive heritage. Assets can travel. Investment capital, young college-graduate workers, new stores or offices; why would they want to invest in Rindge? The results of a community based “SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats” describes many key features that define the Rindge story.

This Report also makes extensive use of available economic statistics, and presents many in a comparison to other relevant jurisdictions. Each source has some flaws – the age of the data, the smallness of sample size, the quirks of a population with a substantial student population – but each give the community another insight into:

Why Rindge?

In addition to the statistics, a few *defining characteristics* need to be kept in mind while looking ahead:

The Border Town: Rindge shares a state border with communities in northern Massachusetts. As with most neighbors, this is can be good or bad news. If Rindge becomes a bedroom community for Massachusetts jobs, it is encumbered by the educational costs without the offsetting economic benefits. On the positive side, Rindge

does and should continue to attract regional investment into Rindge-based retail facilities, as the tax advantages of New Hampshire offer Massachusetts shoppers a price-break. This location advantage has geographic/distance limits.

The College Town: The community becomes the home-town for 9 months every year to 1,500 students from Franklin-Pierce University. The University is the largest economic entity in Rindge. Its student population could be a drain on small-town services, and its impressive campus could create a divide between “town and gown”. Conversely, this compellingly attractive campus attracts student and family spending, provides a tourist destination, as well as many cultural, economic and educational amenities that the Town could otherwise not afford.

The Monadnock Region: The southwestern region of New Hampshire is among the most beautiful and unspoiled in northern New England. The majestic Mount Monadnock, the Connecticut River valley, and a host of authentic town centers - like Rindge’s - make it easy to envision this special region as “Our Town”. But the region’s unspoiled charm also means fewer direct routes for commercial traffic, a longer drive to interstates and airports, fewer commercial amenities, less people in the workforce, and spottier internet and cell-phone coverage.

A Small New England Town: Rindge is an attractive Town in the scenic Monadnock region. But like the region, it too must consider that some of its strengths – a small population, the mountainous terrain, limited government infrastructure and overhead, and prevailing small-business enterprises – will also eliminate some economic options available to more-urbanized areas that are next to interstates and airports, or research universities, or populated by many who are unemployed.

An economic strategy going forward needs to keep these considerations in mind, and determine a course that is:

- *Sustainable* over time, and
- *Appropriate* to what Rindge is today, and what it could be tomorrow

We have included ideas from other successful experiences, and from other successful communities, not as a blueprint, but as a way to encourage innovative “what-if” thinking to determine what will work for the community of Rindge, as it finds its own *better future*.

Executive Summary

An Economic Vision for Rindge

After thoughtful review of all of the inputs to this economic development effort, the following vision goals were developed:

- A. The Town's *rural character*, enhanced by an abundance of natural resources – its lakes, mountains, agriculture and open space – shall be preserved and protected and the Town's rich historic legacy shall be honored.
- B. The community of Rindge will offer a *high quality of life* with economic opportunities, affordable quality public services, amenities and attractions including restaurants, cafes, bookstores and access to natural resources for residents and visitors.
- C. The Town of Rindge encourages our residents of all ages to live and work in the community, to *participate in its civic affairs* and take advantage of its natural and recreational resources.
- D. Rindge will be a *welcoming home* for new and existing businesses and entrepreneurs.
- E. Rindge will be a *gateway for visitors* to the Monadnock Region with adequate tourist oriented businesses and attractions.
- F. *New development* that reinforces the town's traditional New England architectural styles, a sense of community, and Rindge's unique history will be encouraged and supported.
- G. The communities of Rindge and Franklin Pierce University will be *partners* in each other's advancement.

Summary of Population Characteristics

- Rindge is fortunate to have a high quality of life that has attracted many new residents to the community over the past half century, growing by 639% since 1960 to a current population of 6,014. Between 1960 and 1990 the town grew at the rate of more than 17% per year. Since then the growth rate has averaged 6% per year.
- The town is situated in an economic region of 83,000 people of which Rindge comprises 7.6%.
- Rindge has a median age that is considerably lower than the region, largely due to the presence of Franklin Pierce University students.
- The town has a higher percentage of high school graduates than the county, state or country, but a slightly lower percentage of college graduates versus the county, state or country.
- The *average household income* is similar to the state's, and somewhat higher than that of Cheshire County.

Summary of Labor Force Characteristics

- The Rindge region employs about 25,000 people. Rindge accounts for just over 7% of that total.
- The Rindge labor force has skill sets that are most heavily concentrated in manufacturing, education, health care, social services, construction and retail trade.
- Rindge has a higher percentage of workers in the private sector than in the government as compared to the county, state or country.
- There are more people who live in Rindge and commute out of town to work than there are people who commute to Rindge for work. The highest number of Rindge residents commute to Keene, Peterborough, Jaffrey and a variety of towns in Massachusetts.
- The largest employment sectors are construction, retail trade, accommodations and food services, education, and administration/support activities.
- *Average weekly wages* for Rindge employees is \$323 less than the state average.
- For more than thirty years, unemployment in Rindge been consistently higher than either the county or state, although lower than the United States figure.

Summary of Business Characteristics

- Over the 1997-2008 decade, the number of registered businesses in Rindge has grown by 150%.
- The largest gains in the number of businesses have been in construction, retail trade and administrative support services.
- The number of jobs in Rindge grew by 125% between 1997-2008, an average annual growth of 2.3%.
- Between 2001 and 2008, Rindge experienced significant employment gains in the Construction and Accommodation/food service sectors.
- Several statistical comparisons between Rindge, Cheshire County, the State and the U.S. highlight Rindge's business sector strengths in:
 - Construction
 - Wholesale Trade
 - Retail Trade
 - Professional and technical services
 - Management of companies and enterprises
 - Administrative, support, waste management and remediation services
 - Educational services
 - Health care and social assistance
 - Arts, entertainment and recreation services
 - Accommodations and food services
- The same statistical comparisons point out business sector weaknesses in:
 - Manufacturing
 - Transportation and warehousing
 - Information technology
 - Finance and insurance
 - Real estate sales, rental and leasing
- The State of New Hampshire predicts that over the next five years positive employment growth in Cheshire County will occur in nearly all business sectors except for agriculture/forestry/fishing, information technology and manufacturing.

Real Estate & Taxes

- For the 2008 tax year, Rindge's full value tax rate was among the highest 20% of communities in the state.
- In 2008, Rindge (\$93,150) was well below the state average (\$165,830) in real estate valuation per capita; meaning that there is less taxable real estate per person.

- Rindge has a smaller percentage of land and buildings that is assessed as commercial or industrial (8.7%) than either the county (15.4%) or state (17.0%).
- Cheshire County and the state have seen residential real estate values and sales drop since 2005. The length of time that homes remain on the market for sale has increased considerably since 2004-5.

Community Survey

An important component of any community based economic development effort is to check the pulse of the citizenry to see what their comfort level is with a variety of economic initiatives and future growth scenarios. A community wide survey was undertaken in the fall of 2010 to gauge interest for and support for future economic direction and efforts. The survey produced a very strong 27% response and indicated that:

- The community would like to see more non-residential development in town provided that the rural and natural character of Rindge is protected and enhanced.
- There was an expressed desire to make the town's regulatory process more customer friendly.
- There was support for exploring a new mixed-use town center located at or near the Rt. 202-119 intersection.
- Strong support was given to the concept of providing public water/sewer for new commercial development *if it was paid for by system users.*
- Survey respondents wanted:
 - Better internet access
 - Stronger working relationships with Franklin Pierce University and
 - The town to pro-actively market Rindge's advantages and preferential tax structure as compared to neighboring communities in Massachusetts.

An Economic Development Action Plan – Making it Happen

After an extensive strategic process, seven Vision Goals were identified (see the first page of this executive summary), from which a total of fifty-one action tasks were developed. Each of these action tasks has a targeted timeframe for implementation and a designated lead committee to oversee its successful completion. All of the goals and action tasks are included in the *Action Plan* (see Chapter 9 of the full report). This is designed to be used by the Town as a working document.

If the *Rindge Economic Development Initiative* is to produce results, the town needs to use the Action Plan as an ongoing, working document that is used as a blueprint for

change. Every committee that is charged with action tasks needs to make regular progress toward their completion. It is also recommended that a *Coordinating Committee* be charged with overseeing the progress of the Action Plan, documenting the progress made on each action task several times each year. At least annually, the *Coordinating Committee* should take stock of the entire action plan, review the progress made on individual tasks, and re-assess priorities based on the best available current information. To foster this need for a constant assessment and evolution of the Action Plan an easily editable electronic version of the Plan has been provided to the town.

The REDI Action Plan has been shaped through many meetings and public input sessions over a period of more than eighteen months. The process has raised community leader expectations but the planning efforts that have gone into the plan will need the continued and deliberate involvement of all the town officials, boards and committees. Economic development requires constant and sustained effort to produce lasting economic results. Using the Action Plan as a guide to stay on task will greatly improve the chances for Rindge's successful economic future.

Introduction

What is economic development and what can Rindge do to influence it?

In the broadest sense, publically-led economic development is a way for a community to enhance its well being through:

- ◆ Job Creation
- ◆ Business Growth
- ◆ Income Growth, and
- ◆ Tax Base Expansion

Economic development is a very important element of a community's quality of life. Without access to quality employment opportunities, residents don't have the resources to buy homes, pay rent, or invest in other things that enhance a community's desirability as a place to live. People select places to live based on a wide variety of quality of life factors. Reasonably priced housing, a good education system, access to employment and an attractive physical setting are usually high on most people's list.

An economic development plan needs to look at a wide variety of factors to understand the economic environment in which the community competes. The Plan also must document and analyze the employment base, the employment offerings as well as potentials in and near the community.

What is important to a business? For businesses, the availability of competitive assets, including a skilled labor force and a building or building site are essential. Without these assets, a business will not locate in town or generate a profit. Companies are in business to make a profit. Profit is influenced by all of the costs that go into making the products or services that the company sells and how much they can charge

Figure 1. Quality of Life Factors

	Physical	Economic	Social	Aesthetic
Community Affordability (cost of living)		X		
Sense of community (social capital)			X	
Vibrant Town Center				X
Quality Education Opportunities	X		X	
Access to Entertainment – leisure/arts/culture			X	X
Environmental Quality	X			X
Community Health/health care services	X			
Housing choice	X	X		
Access to quality jobs	X	X		
Healthy, vibrant neighborhoods				X
Public safety	X			
Quality transportation options	X			
Quality visual appearance				X

for their products. Some factors are national, even global, such as currency exchange rates. Other local factors that directly affect costs include:

- ♦ A community's location relative to where supplies are purchased and the markets where products are sold.
- ♦ Availability and cost of infrastructure to meet the needs of the company (transportation, energy, water, sewer, internet access).
- ♦ State and local taxes
- ♦ Land and building availability and costs
- ♦ Labor Force: both the number of available workers, and their skills

Factors that directly influence economic conditions are highlighted in figure 1. Factors that indirectly affect business costs include all of the quality of life factors shown in figure 1.

A viable economic development plan must understand the factors that are important to business and particularly those that a community has some ability to control or influence. A town cannot directly affect a company's revenues or their cost of materials but it can play a role in many other areas, including:

- ♦ Land Assembly
- ♦ Development financing
- ♦ Zoning
- ♦ Simpler and faster regulatory process
- ♦ Taxes
- ♦ Availability and cost of infrastructure
- ♦ Community amenities
- ♦ Job recruitment and retention
- ♦ Workforce development/training

This plan will examine all of the options that Rindge can consider to achieve its long term economic goals and objectives.