



The Importance of Housing to Downtown Bennington

Downtown residents activate street life, provide a “built-in” market for downtown businesses, and help establish a sense of community.

Unfortunately, Bennington’s downtown core has lost housing and residents over the past two decades. Today, there are 55 less households living in Bennington’s downtown than there were in 2000. Between 2000 and 2015, Bennington’s downtown lost 20 housing units. Douglas Kennedy Advisor’s 2015 Downtown Bennington Market Assessment found there to be “an almost total lack of quality housing in Bennington’s downtown core... and the number of quality market units within easy walking distance of the downtown core is minimal.”



Housing Impact

How will the proposed Putnam Block housing impact the downtown? The project plans to create 105 new units of housing over several phases of development, providing homes for about 150 residents and contributing \$4.2 million annually to the local economy. The new housing is projected to increase the Town’s property value grand list by \$6.8 million. Mixed-income housing in the downtown has many more benefits, including:

- **Increased stakeholder engagement and participation from a broad population of residents:** a resident-populated downtown will be interested in improving and maintaining municipal infrastructure, public services, and schools.
- **A greater downtown business customer base:** residents of the downtown are loyal supporters of neighborhood businesses.
- **Increased after-hours safety and security:** 60% more residents downtown will provide more visual surveillance; renovated buildings with increased activity will engender a sense of pride and ownership in community.
- **Increased opportunity for job access and mobility:** social norms of a vibrant community and interaction and networking between different income households strengthens the area workforce.
- **Increased activity after work hours:** residents keep the downtown active after 5 pm by supporting businesses like eateries, groceries, and entertainment venues.
- **Greater access to healthier living for all:** by attracting a grocery to the downtown, providing access to services like the farmer’s market, hosting health clinics supported by the VNA, and community-facing health programming hosted by the hospital, the project will address residents’ basic needs, regardless of income or whether they own a car.
- **Greater opportunity to age independently in place:** downtown living with access to services and transportation is the single biggest factor in helping rural New England communities support their elder population in remaining close to their loved ones. All seniors, regardless of income, should have the option to age in place.

\$4.2M
CONTRIBUTED
ANNUALLY TO
LOCAL ECONOMY

\$6.8M
INCREASE IN
PROPERTY VALUE
GRAND LIST

Local Survey Supports Projected Housing Mix Downtown

A recent survey* of 63 young professionals who currently live in the Bennington area found that 27, or 43%, are renters. The household income of these renters is distributed as follows:

- 120%+ MFI: 33% (9 households)
- 80%-120% MFI: 37% (10 households)
- Less than 80% MFI: 30% (8 households)
- Over 50% of the renters indicated that they would like to live downtown at around their current rent if a unit were available
- Over 25% of the renters indicated that they would pay higher than their current rent if a high-quality unit were available downtown

* Survey conducted with SurveyMonkey; promoted via email

¹ Based on Consumer Expenditure Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

“There is an almost total lack of quality housing in Bennington’s downtown core,”

DOUGLAS KENNEDY ADVISOR’S
2015 DOWNTOWN BENNINGTON
MARKET ASSESSMENT

Project Overview

The Putnam Block Redevelopment project has received additional Federal Tax Credits and State grants so that the 4-acre downtown project can now move to construction this fall. For months the project sponsors have been working with national and regional tax credit entities to secure additional tax credits in order to fund the project. Recently, Vermont Rural Ventures increased their commitment to a record amount and the State of Vermont facilitated several additional funding sources to help close the funding gap.

The additional tax credits were allocated because the project was able to increase the benefit to the low-income community by agreeing to land bank a future lot for 20 to 30 units of affordable housing. The purpose of the New Markets Tax Credit program is to improve the lives of residents in qualified low-income census tracts. The Putnam Block project is proposing to add quality jobs, support services, and housing targeted to a range of worker and higher-income residents to spur economic activity in the area. With the addition of affordable housing, a greater number of residents will be able to live and contribute to the downtown.

Housing Mix

The Putnam Block project will be providing a mix of housing types (efficiencies, 1- and 2-bedroom apartments) that should be affordable to a wide range of residents (see graphic). The plans at total build-out will add an additional 105 units to the 160 which are currently situated downtown—an increase of 65%. In addition to adding quality apartments to the downtown core, the project should demonstrate that nicer apartments can obtain higher rents in the Bennington market. Over time, we infer that other landlords will invest in their housing stock, improving its quality and increasing rents. The new affordable units envisioned for a later phase of this project will act to mitigate any future displacement of current downtown residents, in addition to adding to the vitality and economy of the downtown.

