



Connecticut Main Street Center Main Street Readiness Assessment

GNACC – Ledyard & Gales Ferry
Date of Visit: 12/16/2024





GNACC-CMSC Rural Business Development Program Overview

Connecticut Main Street Center (CMSC) and the Greater Norwich Area Chamber of Commerce (GNACC) are collaborating on a regional effort to strengthen the businesses in the GNACC 11 town area and the municipal ecosystem that provides them with critical support. CMSC is a statewide nonprofit with twenty-five years of experience supporting the creation, revitalization, and management of main streets, village centers, and downtowns in communities of all sizes across Connecticut.

GNACC serves as a liaison between business owners, town, and state officials to bridge communication gaps and foster meaningful collaboration. GNACC will be applying their suite of services to support the areas of weakness and opportunity in each town as revealed in the assessment process. GNACC assists in the following areas:

- **Business Engagement & Support:** GNACC facilitates business workshops and training sessions focused on marketing, grant opportunities, and available resources to support local business growth; offers mentorship programs and networking opportunities by connecting new or struggling businesses with experienced local entrepreneurs; and provides further assistance based on the needs identified in town assessments of “next steps,” ensuring support is tailored to each community’s specific goals.
- **Strategic Business Attraction:** GNACC helps identify and attract businesses that align with the town’s vision for the Village Center, including the promotion of business opportunities through the Chamber’s regional network and resources, assisting in mapping out available storefronts, and coordinating “Coffee Talks” with local business owners to build a stronger, more engaged business community.
- **Event Marketing Coordination:** GNACC collaborates with town Recreation Departments, Farmers Markets, and local event organizers to promote community events, integrating them into GNACC’s broader regional marketing campaigns to attract visitors and potential investors.
- **Business Directory & Marketing Campaigns:** GNACC assists in maintaining an up-to-date online business directory, accessible via the town, chamber, and regional tourism websites, as well as creates a marketing campaign that promotes local events and businesses through QR codes placed at local businesses, campgrounds, and tourist attractions.
- **Steering Committee Participation:** GNACC will assist CMSC in establishing local Steering Committees focused on Main Street and Village Center development. This group would help ensure alignment with regional economic development strategies and offer guidance on implementation efforts.

CMSC supports the vibrancy of main streets, village centers and downtowns across the state through education, events, field services, and advocacy. CMSC offers:

- **Annual Walking Tour & Assessment:** Members receive an Annual Assessment & Walking Tour with community Main Street Stakeholders that results in a thorough report with action items and resources.
- **Main Street Accelerator:** An annual program that provides team building, professional development, and project management support to community teams with a project proposal.
- **Jumpstart Your Main Street:** Tailored modules that brings CMSC staff to communities to form and support main street organizations.
- **Main Street Hotline:** CMSC helps members address pressing challenges that arise via phone, email, or in-person.
- **National & Local Expertise:** CMSC educational & training programs connect communities with experts from Connecticut & around the country.



- **Community Resource Center:** CMSC offers an online compendium of best practices, webinars, training guides, and helpful links, all at their fingertips via our new Member Community Platform.
- **Government Relations & Advocacy:** We advocate for specific legislative changes & general policies that enhance downtown walkability, expand housing, encourage business, enable inclusivity, and foster innovation.

Purpose of the Main Street Readiness Assessment

Thriving main streets are built using a community's existing assets. The culture of a town should be reflected in the infrastructure and businesses of its main street, and to do so, it requires ongoing management. Main street management is comprehensive work that convenes community stakeholders around a unifying vision while juggling competing priorities. CMSC created the Main Street Readiness Assessment evaluation tool to help towns where stakeholders want to take the first step to building a thriving main street but may not know where to start.

This assessment report identifies general strengths of the prospective main street district, areas with opportunities for or barriers to growth and improvement, and recommendations for next steps.

How to Use This Report

The assessment examines the potential of a main street district through the lens of community vision, the built environment, existing assets, and current community support. Input is provided by the point of contact for the district and/or key stakeholders who already have a role in how the downtown functions; however, wider members of the community are not included in this process. This is not a community input exercise concerning the use or perceptions of the main street. Rather, it is a means to determine potential of a main street district and community's readiness for main street management.

As such, this assessment report is for internal use only. We recommend the results of the assessment guide the district's strategic planning and be incorporated into an annual work plan. Further, CMSC is available to provide technical assistance and guidance on next steps based on the findings of the report.

CMSC will not publish your results publicly or share with other communities. CMSC may publish aggregate anonymous data for communication materials.



Methodology

The Main Street Readiness Assessment only considers the downtown, Main Street, commercial corridor, or village center district – referred to as “the district”, or “the area of focus” in this report – as defined by the community point of contact. The assessment examines four key building blocks to a thriving district: community vision for the district, the district’s built environment and existing assets, and current community support for the district. Municipalities are categorized according to the extent of their existing Main Street Infrastructure and their interest in a managed Main Street Approach.

	Ready to Go!	Untapped Potential	Aspirational	Status Quo
Main Street Infrastructure	Present	Present	Not fully present	Not present
Interest in a managed Main Street approach	Yes	No	Yes	No

Considerations for the readiness of the built environment includes but is not limited to the existing commercial/residential/mixed-use properties and their location relative to the street, sidewalks, lighting, sewer lines, walkability, signage, business mix, and arts, culture, entertainment, and recreation assets.

Considerations for the capacity of the community includes but is not limited to the number and variety of municipal staff, volunteer groups and commissions, merchants’ associations, and/or chambers (including GNACC), and other stakeholders’ interaction, work and vision concerning the main street.

Overview of Ledyard’s Main Street Readiness Assessment

Individuals Present During Assessment

- Carl Rosa, Field Services Director, Connecticut Main Street Center
- Kennedy Winslow, Field Services Coordinator, Connecticut Main Street Center
- Angela Adams – Executive Director, Greater Norwich Chamber of Commerce
- The Honorable Fred Allyn, III – Mayor, Ledyard
- John Vincent – Chairman, Economic Development Commission
- Liz Burdick – Director, Land Use and Planning

District Boundaries Assessed

The Ledyard Center district includes Route 117 from Colonel Ledyard Highway north to the intersection of Route 214. The Gales Ferry district is along Route 12 (Kings Highway) from the intersection of Christy Hill Road to Chapman Lane.



Main Street Readiness Assessment Findings

District Vision

Ledyard is seen as predominantly a family-friendly, bedroom community with the submarine base and the casinos serving as the town's primary employers for residents of both Ledyard Center and Gales Ferry.

There are recreation trail connections to main street and a multi-use pathway is being installed which will provide further options for connectivity in the region.

The articulated vision is to develop more market rate housing in the areas of focus, with some land already earmarked for housing in Ledyard Center. In addition, there is some interest in town hall to further develop the gateways leading into each of the two zones. Mayor Fred Allyn emphasized wanting to see something happen with the old service station across from Holdridge's Garden Center, which is currently a vacant eyesore right at the gateway to Ledyard Center.

District Built Environment

Ledyard Center has sidewalks that are ADA compliant, thus making the area walkable. Gales Ferry is predominantly "car-centric" with set-back shopping centers and commercial development. There is a need to install sidewalks along Route 12. Town Hall has contracted with Goman + York to complete a full corridor study for the area of focus in Gales Ferry with the intention of adding in crosswalks and slowing traffic in order to make the area more walkable. Both districts are predominantly state roads. Public water and sewer lines exist in Ledyard Center, and only public water is available in Gales Ferry., which provides some flexibility in terms of future development.

There are over 30 commercial buildings in both districts. They are not contiguous and only a few are of historic significance. The original school building on Route 117, which is slated for continued development, and the Ledyard Public Library could be considered historic buildings.

District Assets

Public parking options are limited. Apart from the Ledyard Town Hall which has municipal parking, the majority of the Ledyard Center's public parking is on-street, primarily in front of Town Hall and the former School. Restricted parking exists in both districts for privately owned commercial buildings, most of which are retail and restaurants. There are no public transit options for either location.

There are no cultural or historic districts established in either location. However, the town green, located in Ledyard Center, does provide a venue for festivals and the Farmer's Market. The existing anchor institutions in Ledyard Center include the Dime Bank, the Ledyard Public Library, The Ledyard Town Hall, the Police Station, and the Post Office. Long standing commercial- establishments include Holdridge Home and Garden, Village Market, Ming Moon Chinese Restaurant, Valentino's Pizza, and Lucille's Café.

In Gales Ferry, there is a big box store, Ocean State Job Lot that supports residents, along with smaller establishments such as Dollar Tree, CVS, and the new Dollar General. Fireside, a long-standing restaurant, has been an attraction to the area for 15 years, along with Sunny Side Diner for about 3.



Community Support for District

There are multiple stakeholder organizations in town that are driving the vision to increase residential opportunities and enhance the gateway areas. They include the Mayor’s office and the municipal departments of Land Use, Planning and Zoning, and the Parks & Recreation department, the Economic Development Commission, the property owners, local businesses, and Dime Bank. However, the town has described a “loud minority” of residents and stakeholders, particularly in Gales Ferry, who prefer to see fewer changes to what they see as their “quaint little village.”

Additional organizations such as the Rotary Club and Historical Society could be tapped to help build community support for increased housing and development, and to add historical context to the efforts.

Obstructions to moving forward include a lack of funding as well as community resistance to larger, more disruptive development projects in Gales Ferry.

Conclusions

There is an overall sentiment among municipal officials that a managed approach to main street would benefit Ledyard. With pending projects such as the continued redevelopment of the school building, the multi-use pathway, and the need for more sidewalk and infrastructure improvements in Gales Ferry, the opportunity exists to tie these two nodes together, market the commercial assets, and program the public areas with events and activities. In addition, it is important to make connections between the recreational trails and main street corridors as a strategy to support economic and small business development.

In the past, Ledyard has had a committee that oversaw the streetscape improvements to Ledyard Center. This committee dissolved after the completion of these improvements. Efforts such as these should be revisited with a mind towards continued stewardship, rather than solely focused on the planning and management of individual projects. The previous success of the streetscape committee shows that Ledyard historically harnessed community support to support continued development and management efforts and could continue to do so.

Recommended Next Steps

Based on our findings, Ledyard is **Ready to Go** – there is infrastructure to support a main street experience, and interest in implementing a managed main street approach.

To take the next step in a managed approach, we recommend engaging with the businesses & stakeholders to build a Main Street Steering Committee for a managed Main Street Approach, per CMSC’s “Jumpstart Your Main Street” pathway. The Main Street Steering Committee should consist of community stakeholders, municipal officials and other related groups, established for the purposes of drafting and implementing a strategic plan for management of the two areas of focus. The plan should include goals, specific tasks, and action items with measurable outcomes. The steering committee can also determine an organizational management model and draft an initial budget for guidance on necessary fund development.



Additional Recommended Actions

The following tables are organized by each of the Four Points, a nationally-proven approach to Main Street developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. These actions can be undertaken by the newly formed Steering Committee.

Each finding/recommended action has a link to an online resource. As part of the Rural Business Development Project, you have access to the Downtown Resource Library, CMSC's hub for member resources. This library contains all of our assessment resources, past webinars, summits, professional affiliates, and more. Once you have created an account and logged in, click the hyperlink to be taken to a resource page in our library to help you start work on the recommended action.

Economic Vitality		
Finding	Recommended Action	CMSC Resource
The owner of the mixed-use development located in the former school building wants to put in a dozen or so 55+ units, but pursues financing at his own speed.	Ledyard should keep an open channel of communication with this developer to assess his progress and recommend grants, loans, or programs the development could benefit from.	V.2.5 Property Owner Engagement



<p>The abandoned service station across from Holdridge’s is an eyesore at the gateway to town.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a business wish list for this location, and any other commercial vacancies in the districts. • Consider what businesses Ledyard Center or Gales’ Ferry lacks—there are creative dining uses for service stations like this, that may be a unique destination for Ledyard Center. • Establish contact with the building owner to stay in touch about the building’s status. • The property may be eligible for brownfields funding. Letting the owner know about this may be a good foot to start on. 	<p>V.2.6 Attracting Development and Business V.3.5 Recruiting Businesses DEEP & Downtown: An Update on DEEP’s Municipal Services and Grant Programs Webinar</p>
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Organization		
Finding	Recommended Action	CMSC Resource
<p>Ledyard could benefit from a larger and more involved volunteer base. Existing volunteers, such as the town’s EDC, do not have their hours tracked.</p>	<p>Start tracking impact, starting with tracking volunteer hours. Collecting these can help with grant writing efforts & encouraging more volunteerism.</p>	<p>CMSC Webinar: Building Your Volunteer Program O.7.1 Tracking Impact</p>

Promotion		
Finding	Recommended Action	CMSC Resource
<p>Ledyard Center has a new town green that has yet to be programmed to its full, year-round extent.</p>	<p>Consider tasking your Main Street Steering Committee with programming the Town Green year-round. This may result in a “Events and Promotion” subcommittee in the future.</p>	<p>P.3.1 Event Strategy CMSC Webinar: Implementing Successful Parklet Programming</p>
<p>Some of the town’s preserved land is not walkable from either of its districts.</p>	<p>Promote a connection between recreation opportunities and Ledyard Center/Gales Ferry through marketing strategies like rack cards or maps.</p>	<p>CMSC recommends visiting https://www.trailtowns.org/ for tools and inspiration on connecting recreational trails to your Main Street or Downtown District.</p>