

Appendices for Small Rural Town Revitalization in Maine: Test Pilot of the SEED Model

by Nory B. Jones and Manuel Wörsdörfer

APPENDIX A: LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural Town Revitalization

A review of the literature on rural and small-town revitalization reveals several common themes. One of these is the idea of creating small businesses and entrepreneurial ecosystems. This contrasts with the popular notion that small towns must attract large companies to provide jobs and drive economic growth. Research has shown that local startups are hurt when towns offer incentives to attract large(r) companies (Sablik, 2022). In fact, a study at North Carolina State University found that “tax incentives aimed at attracting and retaining large businesses find that the vast majority of these incentives ultimately leave states worse off than if they had done nothing” (McDonald and Shipman, 2020, 1).

Strategies to nurture and facilitate these small business/entrepreneurial ecosystems include tax incentives or lowering tax rates for small businesses and entrepreneurs. Broadband represents a crucial prerequisite for attracting and maintaining these organizations. This enables these businesses to expand their market outside the local area, potentially providing unique products and services across regional, national, or international markets. Some small rural towns have also established incubator spaces that offer low-cost rent, Internet access, and a social networking platform for small businesses to collaborate and form social communities (Rappleye, 2020; Sablik, 2022). One notable example is a small town in Vermont where they created “an innovation hub there that was focused on two things: one was supporting scalable tech entrepreneurs through an accelerator program but also creating a tech talent development program in partnership with different kinds of tech talent content providers, whether locally or nationally, online or in person” (Riley, 2022, 2).

Additionally, the shift to remote work was a silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many white-collar professionals, including high-tech workers, have relocated to rural areas for a lower cost of living, a more relaxed culture, and a suitable environment for raising a family (Rembert et al., 2022). These people would likely frequent local small-town businesses.

Another common theme in the context of small-town revitalization includes leveraging local assets and developing a solid brand for the town or region. Possible strategies include preserving and promoting historic buildings and landmarks, as well as leveraging unique cultural attributes that appeal to tourists. Similarly, towns have successfully created and supported art centers, such as local artisans, dance, music, and events to promote them (King, 2023). In addition, leveraging the natural environment to promote nature-based tourism can include developing recreational trails, parks, and outdoor activities that use the town or region’s natural assets.

These suggestions also create increased opportunities for a higher quality of life, revitalizing the town for current and future residents and visitors with a vibrant town center, easy access to nature-based and cultural activities, and a robust infrastructure of shops, services, transportation, and high-speed Internet (Faster Capital, 2024).

Another revitalization theme is collaboration among small towns and with different stakeholders. These often involve federal, state, and local government agencies. Collaboration with universities provides excellent opportunities for education and training, while partnering with for-profit companies and non-profit organizations can bring value in grants, sponsorships, stewardship of natural resources, and more. Creating ecosystems of stakeholders with different resources and expertise can generate valuable synergies (McFarland and Dabson, 2021).

Environmental Sustainability

Small towns like Fort Fairfield possess valuable natural resources, including the Aroostook River, surrounding forests, and various agricultural assets. Focusing on environmental practices such as water conservation, erosion prevention, creating natural flora and fauna ecosystems, and sustainable farming and forestry can provide ecological benefits (Chunjiang et al., 2020).

Sustainable tourism and renewable energy can also have positive impacts, creating open spaces and recreational areas that enhance the well-being of residents.

On a macro scale, cities and towns worldwide are working towards climate change resiliency. They have the authority to create incentives for renewable energy and energy-efficiency upgrades in buildings and homes. They can invest in renewable energy, plant more trees for shade, provide education on conservation, invest resources in public transportation or bicycles where appropriate, and create walkable towns, making downtown areas ecosystems for everyday living. Research shows that 77% of people believe sustainability is essential and want to live more sustainably. Therefore, creating eco-friendly towns can entice people to move to or visit these towns (Fromm, 2022; Pichola et al., 2021).

On a micro scale, the following list shows sustainability tactics used by small towns (ICMA, 2015):

- Community-wide recycling for residents
- Government office recycling
- Biking and walking trails
- Energy audits of government buildings
- Requiring sidewalks in new developments
- Supporting a local farmers' market
- Recycling household hazardous waste
- High-efficiency lighting in government facilities
- Recycling of household electronic waste
- Community-wide recycling for businesses
- Tree preservation and planting program
- Heating and cooling upgrades in government facilities
- Water pricing to encourage conservation
- Purchasing fuel-efficient vehicles
- Community-wide collection of compost material
- Zoning codes to encourage more mixed-use projects
- Actions to protect the quality of aquifers
- Installation of high-efficiency traffic lights
- Setting limits on impervious surfaces on private property
- Co-locating recycling with trash containers in public spaces

Socio-Economic Sustainability

Sustainable ecosystem restoration can help diversify the local economy by attracting new industries and supporting entrepreneurship. As mentioned previously, this represents a growing trend in small-town revitalization. Successful strategies may include

- Creating vibrant downtowns with walkable main streets and desirable small businesses that are widely frequented, such as restaurants, bars, and shops.
- Working on the socio-economic sustainability aspect of revitalization involves providing equitable benefits to all community members, including access to quality education, healthcare, culture, financial assistance, and other support when needed.
- Leveraging desirable local assets to provide residents and visitors with recreational and cultural experiences (in our study, providing better and more convenient access to the local river and nature trails could help achieve this goal).
- Involving the community and local government to create engagement and stewardship and help preserve the regional character of the town (Faster Capital 2025; Love and Powe, 2020).

As indicated in the paper, rural communities, such as Fort Fairfield, are already experiencing the negative impacts of climate change. Many small-town managers have recognized the need to increase ecological and socio-economic resilience.

The EPA (2025) provides guidance on how to accomplish this.

- Planning where development should or should not go can help a rural community encourage growth in town, where businesses can thrive on a walkable main street, and families can live close to their daily destinations.

- Encouraging policies that support walking, biking, and public transit can help reduce air pollution from vehicles while saving people money.
- Encouraging policies that protect the rural landscape can help preserve open space, protect air and water quality, provide places for recreation, and create tourist attractions that bring investments into the local economy.

Creating a collaborative ecosystem with government agencies and other stakeholders, developing strategies such as zoning and climate resilience planning, and involving the local community may represent a possible way to achieve sustainable.

Another concept, known as ‘embedded entrepreneurship,’ has been studied as a source of sustainable development through the power of regional knowledge and community ties, aiming to understand and meet local needs. This also suggests that local and regional governments play a vital role in supporting and prioritizing sustainability initiatives within socio-economic development strategies (Masuda et al., 2021). This approach can also help to build social connections with the local ecosystem. This is especially important for the socio-economic aspects of sustainable development (Brenton and Slawinski, 2023).

Social sustainability refers to the goal of enhancing the quality of life sustainably. Noteworthy is that 11 of the 17 U.N. Sustainable Development Goals are related to social sustainability. Some of these include ending poverty and hunger, ensuring healthy lives and well-being, ensuring quality education and lifelong learning, achieving gender equality, reducing inequality, and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>).

Sustainable communities and towns are desirable places for people to live and work. They tend to be safe and inclusive places, offering a high quality of life. Thus, social sustainability represents a crucial goal in creating environments with equitable policies, services, and opportunities for all residents (Wang and Ke, 2024).

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APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY

This section provides the reader with specific details about our project, enabling it to be replicated or offering guidance to others.

At the state level, the club collaborated closely with the Maine Office of Community Development (a division within the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development [DECD] that aims to foster quality housing and jobs, especially in deteriorated residential areas and business districts), the Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation (an agency that is also part of the DECD and works to grow Maine's outdoor recreation economy), and the Maine Office of Tourism (another sub-division of DECD that works to stimulate Maine's tourism industry).¹

Undiscovered Maine also partnered with local and regional agencies such as Aroostook County Tourism (an agency that promotes tourism in the northeast of Maine) and the Northern Maine Development Commission (a non-profit organization in Caribou, ME, that works to expand and attract industry and business in the region).

The club's for-profit businesses were Bangor Savings Bank, the largest Maine-based bank, and Old Town Canoe/Johnson Outdoors, a manufacturer of outdoor recreational products (in 2004, the company acquired Old Town Canoe, a historic maker of canoes in Maine).

Lastly, the club was supported by nonprofits. One of them is Grow Smart Maine, an organization that helps communities revitalize their historic neighborhoods, foster entrepreneurship, and support local businesses while conserving natural environments and protecting cultural and economic heritage.

¹ Another entity that supported the club's work and is funded by the State of Maine is the *Loring Development Authority*, which is responsible for bringing back industrial and commercial businesses to the Loring Commerce Center and redeveloping the former Loring Air Force Base.

APPENDIX C: IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

This section provides the reader with a specific timeline and details of the actions taken by the team to implement the SEED project pilot test.

The club started its work in September 2023 by identifying rural regions or towns in Maine (e.g., in Aroostook and Washington Counties) that might suit the SEED model test pilot. Towards the end of September, club members contacted possible rural communities in Maine.

The first contact with the newly appointed town manager of Fort Fairfield occurred at the beginning of October, initially via email and phone, and subsequently via Zoom. The club's members also started researching sustainability in general and the three pillars – economic, environmental, and social sustainability – in particular.

In mid/end of October, club members contacted possible stakeholder groups interested in joining and supporting the project and organized a stakeholder information session (25 October). The event was an informal get-together via Zoom, in which potential future partners were informed about the project's goals and (more) detailed plans, followed by a Q&A and feedback session.

Regular meetings and information exchange with the Town Manager of Fort Fairfield and the various stakeholder groups started at the end of October/beginning of November. All interested stakeholders were emailed weekly updates to keep them informed and engaged. Club members also started working on a benchmarking and SWOT analysis. The first draft was submitted on 9 November, followed by a meeting with the town manager and stakeholders on 16 November.

In December, team members devoted most of their time to creating a project proposal and strategy plan. The first draft was submitted to stakeholders on 7 December. After receiving feedback from these groups, club members revised the document and shared a new version on 20 December. The proposal included, among others, a project summary, mission and vision statements, the project's goals and objectives, an overview of the proposed strategies to achieve those goals, and appendices.

The document is noteworthy as it distinguishes between two stages: the short-term goal is to promote nature-based tourism in and around Fort Fairfield. In contrast, the long-term goal is to support the town's revitalization efforts. The other appendices contain valuable information for the reader, including an inventory of Fort Fairfield's assets, an overview of regional and statewide tourism trends, ideas for the local Potato Blossom Festival, information on Registered Maine Guides, sustainability, marketing, and a timeline overview of the project.

On 23 January, Undiscovered Maine organized a knowledge summit, informing stakeholders about the progress made so far and providing them with another opportunity to provide additional feedback and suggestions for improvement. Following the summit, the team members began working on promoting the Potato Blossom Festival (an idea that was later abandoned due to changing priorities of the town [manager] and club), supporting nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation – primarily via leveraging the Aroostook River – and facilitating the town's revitalization efforts (i.e., fostering innovation and entrepreneurship).

The club's previous research on sustainability played a significant role in this initiative. It informed both aspects of the SEED model test project (i.e., environmental sustainability is crucial for nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation, while socio-economic sustainability is vital for fostering entrepreneurship and innovation). A sub-group of the club's students began working on a marketing plan that might help the town improve its web (portal) presence and promote its local assets via multiple social media channels. With the help of our stakeholders, the club could also provide an overview or summary of available resources (e.g., financial resources, tax incentive programs, non-profit resources) and share them with the town manager.

On 4 February, the entire team visited Fort Fairfield. The town manager gave the team members a tour, e.g., of the local Amish farms and community, the Aroostook River, and the downtown area, and informed them (in more detail) about the available assets that could be leveraged and the town's socio-economic challenges. The visit provided vital knowledge to help the team understand the opportunities and challenges of Fort Fairfield.

After the visit, the team explored opportunities to leverage the International Appalachian Trail, which passes through Fort Fairfield, and researched benchmarks for Fort Fairfield in comparison to other flourishing towns and communities (see, for example, the Farmington River Stewards' website). The club members continued working on the Fort Fairfield website, which is being integrated into the Undiscovered Maine web portal to increase awareness and visibility of the town. They also explored possible collaboration opportunities with other Aroostook towns, such as Presque Isle and Caribou, within the so-called Aroostook River Triangle.

Towards the end of February/beginning of March, the club decided to continue working in sub-committees – one focusing on leveraging the Aroostook River and promoting nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation (i.e., environmental sustainability), the other focusing on innovation/entrepreneurship and boosting the town’s revitalization efforts (i.e., socio-economic sustainability).

The latter group started collecting innovation ideas and held create (20-21 February, 12 March) and ideation sessions (together with the club’s stakeholders), which led to a so-called mind map and idea bank (23 March [see the other appendices]). The club also continued researching successful initiatives in small-town revitalization projects in rural, remote communities, as well as in water conservation and tourism, and created more website content, such as for the so-called Sasquatch River Trail.

A local TV station, WABI-TV, interviewed team members to promote awareness of the club’s work. The interview was conducted on 9 April and published on 12 April (‘Undiscovered Maine Club is Working to Revamp a Small Town’). The innovation and entrepreneurship sub-group organized a revitalization session and produced a consolidated resources document (4 April). All team members met with the dean on 24 April, prepared the final presentation, and added the final touches to the project’s website.

The academic year ended in May when team members gave a final presentation to the town manager and stakeholders (summarizing the academic year’s accomplishments and providing an overview of the deliverables) (1 May). The team also published a blog article (5 May) on its website and started working on a research paper.

APPENDIX D: FORT FAIRFIELD²

The estimated population of Fort Fairfield is 3,322. The average age is 47.6 years; those under 18 make up 19% of the population, while 26% are 65 years or older. Almost 90% of the population has a high school diploma or more, but only 26.7% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The potential labor force (population 16+) is 2,821; the current labor force, however, is 1,569, leading to a participation rate of 55% (which is considerably lower than the U.S. average of 63%).

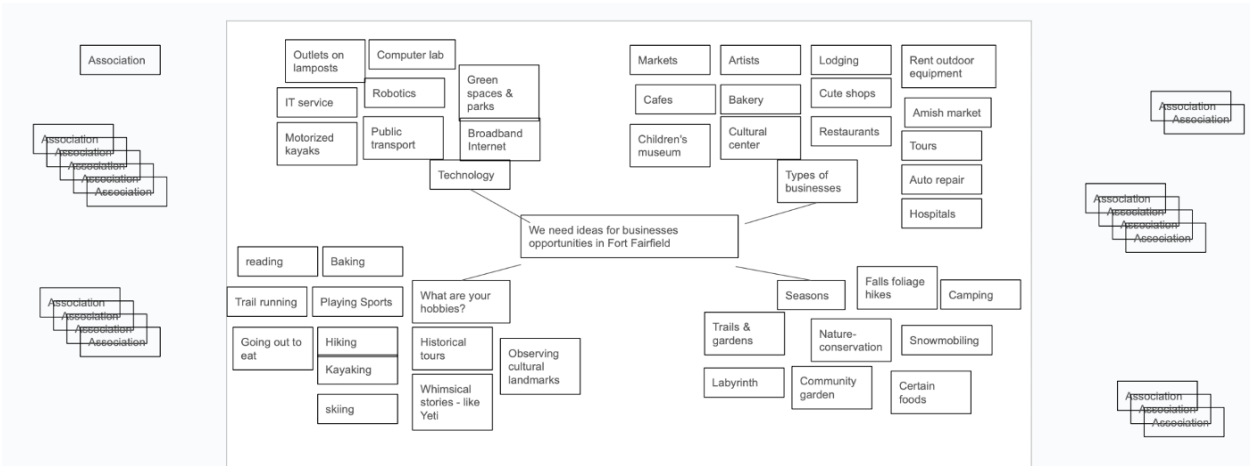
Fort Fairfield's unemployment rate in October 2023 was an estimated 4.3%, which is higher than the national average of 3.9% (seasonally adjusted) and substantially higher than the one in Aroostook County (3.2%, not seasonally adjusted) and Maine (2.8%, seasonally adjusted).

Fort Fairfielders with a high school degree earn an average of \$26,687; those with some college experience earn \$31,989, whereas those with a bachelor's degree (or higher) earn \$75,636. The median household income in Fort Fairfield is \$44,719. 10.9% of the population has an income below the poverty line, and 42% live in a low-income household (i.e., a household with an annual income of less than \$25,000).

Among the top trades of Fort Fairfield are education and healthcare (with almost 24%), transportation, warehousing, and utilities (13.6%), retail (9.6%), construction (9.5%), public administration (9.1%), agriculture and forestry (8.6%), professional (6.5%), and manufacturing (5%). Especially agricultural produce – i.e., potato and broccoli farming – is essential to the local economy, as are handcrafted products such as furniture and bakery goods (this is especially the case for the local Amish community).

² The following data was provided by the Town of Fort Fairfield.

APPENDIX E: MIND MAP



APPENDIX F: RESOURCE BANK

Undiscovered Maine developed a resource bank, which lists valuable information to support the ongoing town revitalization efforts in Fort Fairfield. The document includes, among others, links to the Pine Tree Development Zone Program (which offers eligible businesses the chance to reduce, or de facto eliminate, state taxes for up to ten years when they offer new, quality jobs in specific business sectors, or move existing jobs in those sectors to the State of Maine), the Maine Downtown Revitalization Grant Program (which provides funds to communities to implement comprehensive, integrated, and innovative solutions to the problems facing their downtown districts), and the Innovate for Maine Fellows Program (which connects Maine college students with local or regional companies in the State).

To boost nature- and culture-based tourism businesses, the State of Maine offers several grant programs, such as the Community Outdoor Recreation Assistance Grant (which supports the economic recovery of the local travel and tourism economy in a post-pandemic era), the Enterprise Marketing Grant (which supports the marketing efforts of tourism/travel companies to move toward sustainable growth), the Maine Communities Grant (which sponsors tourism-related and community-oriented marketing projects), the Maine Tourism Development and Management Grant (which supports tourism development, education, and management projects), the Special Event Grant (which provides funds to already existing events for the expansion and progression of marketing strategies to attract new visitors and increase visitation rates/stays), the Tourism Marketing and Management Grants (which supports the implementation of marketing activities designed to foster Maine's tourism industry in the State's designated tourism regions), and the Land and Water Conservation Fund (which provides funding for up to half of the costs for acquisition or development projects for public outdoor recreation).

In addition to downtown revitalization and tourism grants and programs, several community resources are also available. These include the Community Development Block Grant Program, the USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Programs, the Microenterprise Assistance Program, Funding for New and Expanding Child Care Businesses in Maine, the Agriculture Innovation Grant Program, housing preservation grants, ConnectMaine Broadband Grants, Maine Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Program, Maine Technology Institute Grants, Commercial Facilities Development Program, ATV Municipal Grant, Boating Facilities Fund, Snowmobile Municipal Grant, Recreational Trails Program, to name a few. More resources can be found on the GrowSmart Maine website.

APPENDIX G: RESOURCE LIST

Downtown Resources:

- Pine Tree Development Zone (<https://stateofmaine.my.site.com/DECDMAINE/s/funding-program/a01t000000EmbdZAAR/pine-tree-development-zone>)
- SBA grants <https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/grants/grants-community-organizations>
- Maine Downtown Revitalization Grant Program <https://www.maine.gov/decd/community-development/cdbg-program/grant-categories/downtown-revitalization-grant-program> Innovate for Maine (<https://umaine.edu/innovateformaine/>).

Tourism Resources:

- Community Outdoor Recreation Assistance Grant (<https://stateofmaine.my.site.com/DECDMAINE/s/funding-program/a0182000001YKGqAAO/community-outdoor-recreation-assistance-grant>)
- Enterprise Marketing Grant (<https://stateofmaine.my.site.com/DECDMAINE/s/funding-program/a0182000001He67AAC/enterprise-marketing-grant>).
- Maine Communities Grant (<https://stateofmaine.my.site.com/DECDMAINE/s/funding-program/a01t000000EmbdOAAR/maine-communities-grant>).
- Maine Tourism Development and Management Grant (<https://stateofmaine.my.site.com/DECDMAINE/s/funding-program/a0182000001Th8bAAC/maine-tourism-development-management-grant>).
- Special Event Grant (<https://stateofmaine.my.site.com/DECDMAINE/s/funding-program/a01t000000EmbdQAAR/special-event-grant>).
- Tourism Marketing and Management Grants (<https://motpartners.com/programs-services/marketing-grants/>).
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (https://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/grants/land_water_conservation_fund.html).

Community Resources:

- Maine Communities Grant Guidelines (<https://motpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/FY25-Maine-Communities-Guidelines-CYCLE-1.pdf>).
- Community Development Block Grant Program (http://www.maine.gov/decd/sites/maine.gov/decd/files/inline-files/2024%20CDBG%20Program%20Statement_0.pdf).

- USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Program (www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities).
- Other USDA rural grant programs (<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities>).
- Microenterprise Assistance Program (<https://www.maine.gov/decd/community-development/cdbg-program/grant-categories/microenterprise-assistance-program>).
- Funding for New and Expanding Child Care Businesses in Maine (<https://www.ceimaine.org/financing/maine-programs/child-care-infrastructure-grant-program/>).
- Agriculture Innovation Grant Program (<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/agriculture-innovation-center-program>).
- Housing Preservation Grants (<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/single-family-housing-programs/housing-preservation-grants>).
- ConnectMaine Broadband Grants (<https://www.maine.gov/connectme/grants>).
- Sustainable Management Tools (<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/services/sustainable-management-tools>).
- GrowSmart Maine Resources (<https://growsmart-maine.org/resources-for-your-community>).
- Maine TIF Districts (<https://www.maine.gov/decd/MTIF>).
- Maine Technology Institute Grants (<https://www.maintechology.org/explore-funding-programs/>).
- Commercial Facilities Development Program (<https://www.mainerda.org/laws-rules/community-facilities-development-program/>).
- Maine Community College Workforce Division (<https://www.mccs.me.edu/workforce-training/train-my-workforce/>).
- ATV Municipal Grant (https://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/grants/atv_grants/municipal.html).
- Boating Facilities Fund (https://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/grants/boating_facilities_fund.html).
- Snowmobile Municipal Grant (https://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/grants/snowmobile_grants/municipal.html).
- Recreational Trails Program (https://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/grants/recreational_trails_program.shtml).