

## **Chapter 2. Introduction and Background**

### **A. Introduction**

This Study Report summarizes the outcomes of the Neighborhood District Planning (NDP) process for districts within Mammoth Lakes' Downtown area, encompassing the Main Street/Highway 203 corridor from the Town entry to Minaret Road, the North Old Mammoth Road area, and the 25-acre Shady Rest Site. Successful planning through the NDP process is critical to redefining the character, form and function of Main Street and the entire downtown as the town's major gateway and commercial district, providing a catalyst for reinvestment and change.

Over a ten month period from August 2009 to June 2010, a series of Focus Group and public meetings were held to develop a Framework for the study, review existing conditions, develop and refine alternatives, and finally, create a Preferred Concept for the Study Area. The Preferred Concept is a bold, long-range vision for the downtown, including:

- Significant change and improvement to physical and design conditions along the Main Street corridor.
- Creation of a walkable, connected downtown focused around the east end of Main Street and North Old Mammoth Road.
- Transportation system enhancements including additional road network connections and an emphasis on alternate transportation modes.
- Focused concepts for major catalyst sites including the US Forest Service property north of Main Street, and Town/County property at Sierra Park Road/Main Street.
- Creation of a livable workforce neighborhood within the Shady Rest Site.

While significant progress has been made through the Downtown NDP process so far, additional work remains to be done. Additional study and analysis will be completed to test and refine the concepts articulated in this report, and to determine the realistic and feasible program of changes that are needed. Ultimately, the refined Downtown Concept will be codified through planning and development standards adopted into the Municipal Code, and with a refined implementation program to make the concept a reality. These "next steps" are more fully described in Chapter 5.

## **B. District Planning**

District Planning is a concept defined in the recently-adopted General Plan. It recognizes that many areas of the community have special considerations or conditions for which more focused, community-driven planning should be undertaken. District Planning allows for the desired form, function, and character of an area to be defined, setting the stage for future Town actions, such as revised development standards, development of new facilities or improvements, and consideration of development proposals that may come forward.

The goal of the Downtown NDP (DNNDP) is to develop directed and strategic planning and policy recommendations for the Downtown area (Main Street Corridor/North Old Mammoth Road/Shady Rest districts). Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA) and the Snowcreek Investment Company took the initiative to kick-off the Downtown district planning process in 2009 by having Hart Howerton, an experienced planning firm, prepare a planning concept for the Downtown area, shown in Figure 2-1. The Hart Howerton concept evoked a range of reactions, some positive and some negative. Most importantly it started a dialog and accentuated the need for a community-driven planning process for the Downtown area.

The Town Council directed that the DNNDP should be completed as part of the Fiscal Year 2009-10 Community Development Department work program, followed by completion of other remaining district plans for the South Old Mammoth Road, Sierra Valley Sites, Gateway area, Sierra Star, and East Open Space Stream Corridor (OSSC).

In recent years, NDPs have primarily been initiated in conjunction with major development project applications, including proposed Master Plan or Specific Plan Amendments, with work funded by applicants and undertaken by third party planning consultants. The Downtown NDP differs from this model in several ways: it was triggered by the MMSA/Chadmar-initiated planning effort, which did not revolve around a specific development proposal. In addition the Town has acted as the “planning consultant” with most work completed by staff, with logistical and marketing support from MMSA.

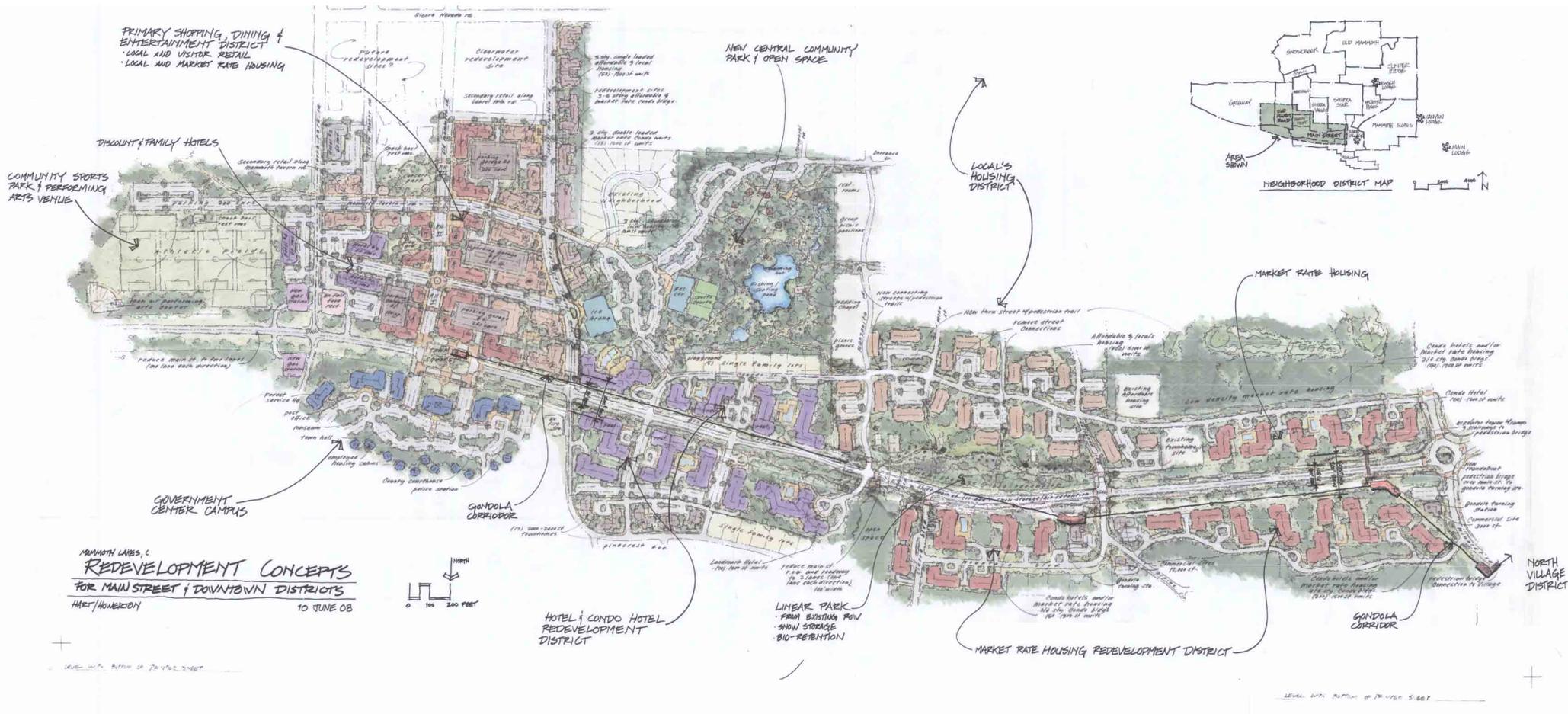


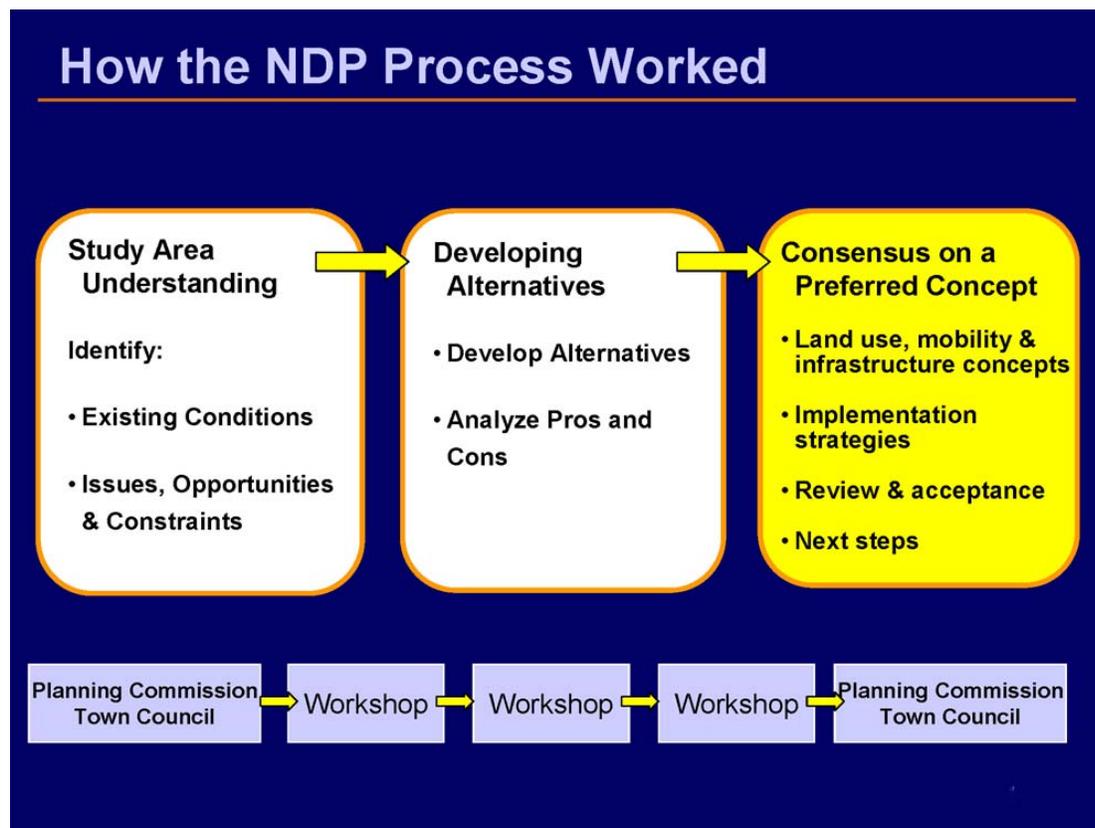
Figure 2-1: Hart Howerton Concept

### C. Downtown NDP Process

Figure 2-2 shows the series of steps that were followed to develop the Preferred Concept. The steps follow those outlined in the Town Council's policy on district planning which was adopted in April 2007, and provide the organizing framework for this report. The process steps include:

1. DNDP Framework, including identification of the study area boundary, guiding principles and initial issues.
2. Existing Issues, Opportunities and Constraints.
3. Alternatives Development and Refinement.
4. Preferred Alternative Selection.

Chapter 3 of this report describes the Framework, existing conditions, issues, opportunities and constraints. The process to develop and review alternatives for the DNDP study area is described in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a complete description of the DNDP Preferred Concept and related recommendations.



**Figure 2-2: NDP Process**

**D. Community and Agency Engagement**

One of the important goals of district planning is to involve the public and key stakeholders, to ensure that relevant issues and concerns are addressed, and that the planning outcomes are based on community consensus to the extent possible. The DNNDP process included a significant community engagement process, through the involvement of a Focus Group, public workshops, meetings with the Planning Commission and Town Council, and consultation with various agencies with interests in the study area.

**1. Community and Focus Group Meetings**

The meetings that were held during the course of the NDP process are listed in

**Table 2-1** below. As shown in the table, a total of five focus group meetings, three community workshops, an open house held over the course of two days, and six meetings with Planning Commission or Town Council were held. Two week advanced notification of each community workshop ensured a broad and inclusive public process. The public was also able to comment via internet surveys created by MMSA throughout the process.

The DNNDP Focus Group was an extremely important component of the planning process. The Focus Group consisted of 15 members with varied interests that represented a cross section of the community, including property and business owners along Main Street. Appendix A lists the members of the Focus Group, and includes notes from each of the meetings that were held with this group. In general, the role of the Focus Group was to provide direction, comments, and initial feedback on materials prior to broader public review.

**Table 2-1: Key NDP Meetings and Workshops**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Workshop/Meeting</b>	<b>Meeting Subject</b>
August 26, 2009	Planning Commission Meeting	Review Framework and make recommendation to Town Council
September 16, 2009	Town Council Meeting	Approve Framework
September 17, 2009	Focus Group Kick-Off Meeting (# 1)	Review Framework Guiding Principles and critique Hart Howerton Concept
October 13, 2009	Focus Group Meet (# 2) & Community Workshop	Discuss existing conditions, issues, opportunities and constraints analysis; Provide input on preliminary alternatives

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<b>Date</b>	<b>Workshop/Meeting</b>	<b>Meeting Subject</b>
November 5, 2009	Community Workshop	Discuss existing conditions, issues, opportunities and constraints analysis; Provide input on preliminary alternatives
December 15, 2009	Focus Group Meet (# 3)	Discuss preliminary alternative concepts
January 29, 2010	Focus Group Meet (# 4)	Confirm two Alternatives: Greenway and Downtown
February 19 & 22, 2010	Open Houses	Review DNDP progress to date, ask questions, provide comments
February 23, 2010	Community Workshop	Discuss two Alternatives: Greenway and Downtown
March 23, 2010	Mobility Commission Meeting	Presentation of DNDP progress to date, ask questions, provide comments
May 12, 2010	Planning Commission Presentation	Presentation on progress to date, including preliminary information on the preferred concept
May 24, 2010	Focus Group Meet (# 5)	Review Synthesis Alternative and DNDP Recommendations
June 23, July 14 & 28, 2010	Planning Commission Meeting	Review DNDP Report and make recommendation to Town Council
September 1, 2010	Town Council Meeting	Consider and Accept DNDP Report

**2. Agency Consultation**

A number of different agencies have property ownership and other interests within the study area; consultation with these agencies during the course of the process was therefore critical. These agencies include:

- **California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)**, who owns the majority of the right-of-way for Main Street/State Route 203 and is responsible for the design, construction, maintenance, and operation of the California State Highway System. In addition to these jurisdictional responsibilities, the Town was awarded a significant grant through Caltrans' Community Based Transportation Planning (CBTP) program, to engage in planning for Main Street and other commercial corridors, which has funded a significant portion of this NDP Planning effort.
- **The United States Forest Service (USFS)**, a Federal land management agency, controls a substantial amount of property at the east end of Main Street, mostly outside of the Town's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). The USFS was involved in the development and discussion of DNDP alternatives.

- **Mono County** and the Town own the majority of the Civic Center site, at the southeast corner of Sierra Park Road and Main Street. Mammoth Hospital, located south of the Civic Center site, has an option for a portion of this property.
- **Mammoth Unified School District (MUSD)** operates the public school system in Mammoth Lakes, and owns property north of the schools that abuts the DNDP study area.
- Utility and service providers, such as **Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District (MLFPD)**, **Mammoth Community Water District (MCWD)**, **Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA)**, and **MMSA**, have a considerable interest in the planning process because recommendations of the DNDP may have implications for the services they provide.

Table 2-2 summarizes the key agency meetings held throughout the DNDP process.

**Table 2-2: Agency Meetings**

Date	Agency Meeting
September 28, 2009	US Forest Service
October 7, 2009	Caltrans District 9
On-going (every Thursday as needed)	Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA)
November 17, 2009	Caltrans District 9
January 7, 2010	Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District (MLFPD) and Mammoth Lakes Police Department (MLPD)
January 15, 2010	Mammoth Unified School District (MUSD)
January 19, 2010	Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA)
January 19, 2010	Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access (MLTPA)
January 27, 2010	Mammoth Community Water District (MCWD)
February 11, 2010	Caltrans District 9
May 10, 2010	Caltrans District 9

**E. Related Plans and Studies**

A number of related documents, studies and plans were referenced during the preparation of the Downtown NDP. In addition to the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance, these include district planning studies developed for neighboring districts, as well as town-wide strategic planning documents.

## **1. General Plan and Zoning Ordinance**

All of the properties within the DNDP Study Area are subject to the Town's General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. Relevant standards and other guidance for the study area established by the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance are outlined in Chapter 3.

As noted above and in Chapter 3, district planning is called for in the General Plan. The General Plan also describes the town's various planning districts and their characteristics, which are used as a basis for the Framework approved by the Town Council and Planning Commission that guides the development of each district plan.

## **2. District Studies**

The DNDP study area extends over multiple districts, including the Main Street and Shady Rest districts and portions of the Old Mammoth Road and Gateway districts. District planning has been completed for the North Old Mammoth Road District through the North Old Mammoth Road Special Study (NOMRSS). The Shady Rest District Study (SRDS) was initiated in spring 2008, but was not completed because the applicant was unable to pursue the proposed Shady Rest Master Plan update. No separate district planning effort, other than the DNDP, has been initiated for the Main Street or Gateway districts. A brief outline of each of these studies is provided below. Consideration of each of these studies was included during the development of the DNDP study and in the formulation of the Preferred Concept.

### *a. Shady Rest District Study*

The SRDS completed an analysis of opportunities and constraints and the development of preliminary alternative concepts for the Shady Rest Site. The preliminary alternative concepts included a range of densities, unit types, parks/open space, and services such as child care and transit. The SRDS work was considered in the DNDP, and recommendations specific to the Shady Rest District are included.

### *b. North Old Mammoth Road District Special Study (NOMRDSS)*

The NOMRDSS encompasses approximately 48 acres along Old Mammoth Road from Main Street to Sierra Nevada Road. The northerly portion of the North Old Mammoth Road area (from Main Street to Tavern Road) is included in the DNDP study area. The recommendation of the NOMRDSS was for the NOMR area to remain as a mixed-use district with ground floor retail and residential above, public gathering spaces, and feet-first design. The NOMRDSS was accepted by Town Council in November. It is not the intent of the DNDP to modify or change the recommendations of accepted district plans; therefore, the NOMRDSS recommendations are incorporated into the DNDP.

*c. North Village District Planning Study (NVDPS)*

The NVDPS includes the North Village Specific Plan area that is included in the DNDP sphere of influence. This study recommended a place- and character-based “transect” approach for the study area. The most intensive development of commercial and lodging would be encouraged along both sides of Minaret Road and at the “four corners” intersection of Main Street and Minaret Road. The NVDPS was accepted by Town Council in mid-2009. The recommendations from the NVDPS were considered during the DNDP process.

*d. Sierra Star Master Plan Planning Study (SSMPPS)*

The SSMPPS includes the Sierra Star Master Plan area, which is partially within the DNDP sphere of influence. The SSMPPS was developed as a draft, but the process was placed on hold by the applicant in 2008, along with the Sierra Star Master Plan Update, due to the economic downturn. Relevant information from the SSMPPS was considered during the DNDP process.

### **3. Destination Resort Community and Economic Development Strategy (DRCEDS)**

DRCEDS is a three year strategic and operational plan for the Town, directed toward implementation of the General Plan community vision of becoming a premier, year-round resort community. With an economic focus, the DRCEDS implements the 2007 General Plan, emphasizing the “triple-bottom line.” As stated in the General Plan: “The values of the community also encompass making decisions that benefit the community’s social, natural, and economic capital – the triple bottom line.” The DRCEDS establishes a blueprint to be used to guide actions and the allocation of Town resources toward destination resort goals, including the identification and refinement of place-specific urban design, facilities and economic investment opportunities through district planning.

### **4. Draft Facilities Planning Documents**

Three draft Town of Mammoth Lakes planning documents are referenced in this report.

*a. Draft Trail System Master Plan (TSMP) (February 2009)*

The Draft TSMP includes recommendations to achieve an integrated system of infrastructure and programs to support recreation and mobility while connecting various nodes throughout town. The Draft TSMP incorporates MLTPA’s GIC points, which are key public access and trail points. Trails planning for internal trails systems within specific districts are deferred to the district planning process. The Town will be undertaking CEQA review of the TSMP in 2010, with a goal of adopting the Plan by mid-2011.

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*b. Draft Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP) (April 2008)*

The Draft PRMP outlines the vision for developing parks and recreation within Mammoth Lakes for the next 18 years. Once adopted, the Draft PRMP will update the existing Parks and Recreation Element of the General Plan.

*c. Draft Mobility Diagram*

The Draft Mobility Diagram was prepared in 2006 to start looking at opportunities to expand and improve the Town's circulation system, including pedestrian, bicycle, transit, parking, and automobile infrastructure. The Draft Mobility Diagram was considered in developing recommendations for the DNDP study area's circulation system.