

How to Review Public Facilities

A 5-Step Guide for Community Residents, Staff, and Officials

PURPOSE: Review and analyze public facilities for a new use

Public or community facilities reviews are intended to provide a starting point for discussion and decision-making.

This guide provides a step-by-step approach for residents to review their community's public facilities. Follow these steps to ensure a thorough and practical review.

STEP 1: Conduct Outreach and Engagement

- Recruit members to form a Working Group
- Set a meeting schedule, milestones, and timeline
- Engage your neighbors to build consensus

STEP 2: Prepare an Existing Conditions Report

- Discuss each building or site and analyze its current situation
- Identify health and safety issues, code violations, ADA compliance
- Assess capital needs

STEP 3: Develop a Long-Term Vision

- Programming and repurposing the facility
- Determine how to adapt the facility to change and upgrades
- Prepare a marketing plan to reach the desired users

STEP 4: Prepare a Guide for Decision-Making

- Research cost ranges for the high-priority improvements
- Rank and prioritize all the recommended improvements
- Organize an implementation strategy

STEP 5: Research Grants and Funding Mechanisms

- Identify grants and loans from State and Federal resources
- Collaborate with local non-profits and businesses
- Use public events to build critical support for local funding

STEP 1: Conduct Outreach and Engagement

Start by building a team and getting your community involved.

Recruit a Working Group

Invite residents, local leaders, and stakeholders. Elect a Chair and Vice Chair to lead. This group will be responsible for overseeing the entire review process. Having a diverse group ensures that multiple perspectives are considered.

⚠ Warning: Lack of early engagement can lead to resistance later.

Set a Schedule

Establish regular meetings, key milestones, and a timeline to stay on track. A clear schedule helps keep everyone on the same schedule and ensures that deadlines are met. Regular check-ins can help address any issues early on.

💡 Tip: Use flyers, social media, and local events to reach more people.

Engage Your Neighbors

To build consensus, spread the word and invite input early. Community input is crucial for a successful review. Use various methods to reach as many people as possible and gather their feedback. See Appendix 1 for outreach tools.

Consensus building can make or break a project that requires both funding and political support. This task requires hands-on engagement, creative techniques, and multiple touchpoints. The good thing: YOU control this piece!

STEP 2: Prepare an Existing Conditions Report

Document the current state of your facilities.

Analyze the Facility

Discuss each building or site and analyze its current situation. Conduct a walk-through with local experts and community staff with institutional knowledge. Take notes to compare later and compile a list of issues. Reach out to former employees or consultants from past projects, review old files and historical images.

💡 Tip: Take photos and gather input from facility users.

Identify Issues

Note any health and safety concerns, code violations, or ADA non-compliance. Big systems such as HVAC, electrical panels, elevators, foundation, and roofing require extra attention and may require paid consultants. Water intrusion must be identified at the source. Projects that require renovations exceeding 50% of the assessed value usually require a complete upgrade to address code violations.

🔗 Learn More: ADA Compliance Basics > www.ada.gov/resources/

Assess Capital Needs

Distinguish between routine maintenance and major upgrades. Capital projects last for decades (roof, siding, flooring) and can be funded by grants or loans; maintenance and modern upgrades can come from local sources.

Be alert for issues that may not be apparent during the walk-through but could be a problem if the use or users of the facility change. An old school house with individual classrooms may require removal of interior walls to accommodate large gatherings in the future; this may require structural reinforcement.

STEP 3: Develop a Long-Term Vision

Think big about the future of your facilities.

Programming and Repurposing

What will be the future use of the building, and who will be the future users? Reach out to local businesses and non-profits to learn their needs for function spaces and large gatherings. Look to local garden or advocacy groups and their needs for small group events. Maximize the rearrangement of furniture to accommodate as many groups as possible.

⚠ Warning: Before any major decisions, host a visioning session or conduct a survey to collect ideas and gauge interest. Build consensus.

Adapting the Facility

Renovations with upgrades to modern conveniences can better accommodate new users and uses. Consider energy efficiency, accessibility, and technology needs. Does the facility require separate bathrooms, a kitchen or food prep area? How many total occupants do you anticipate, and will the facility need tables, chairs, and other furniture? Devise a flexible lighting scheme based on the end-users (dimmers for presentations; bright lights for tasks; mood lighting for events).

💡 Tip: Buy lightweight and collapsible/stackable furnishings to ensure maximum flexibility and ease of use.

Prepare a Marketing Plan

To maximize the use and users, the community should prepare a marketing plan to let everyone know the facility is open for use. The community should determine if the new use requires zoning, regulatory, or policy changes. The plan should also consider expectations for using the facility – who turns off the lights and locks the doors; who cleans up; etc?

A marketing plan guides the community as it finds organizations that want to rent or use the space, and lays out the roles and responsibilities. Alternatively, the community could outsource to a wedding planner or events coordinator who manages these tasks.

STEP 4: Prepare a Guide for Decision-Making

Focus on what matters most.

Research Cost Ranges

For the high-priority improvements, this step determines the grants and loans to pursue. Reach out to the building inspector, public works director, or local experts to develop these cost ranges. Identify similar projects in neighboring communities to ask about costs, unexpected issues, or cost overruns. Be sure to carry 10-20% contingency during the initial estimating – better to over than under.

💡 Tip: Use a simple spreadsheet to organize information and track progress.

Prioritize the Improvements

Develop a scoring or rating system to prioritize the decision-making; address safety and health issues first. Review the potential timeline to complete as well as the costs. Separate the community “Wants” from the “Must Haves.” Talk to local organizations who may wish to use the facility about desired features; the community doesn’t want to spend funds on unnecessary amenities.

⚠️ Warning: Trying to do everything at once can overwhelm your budget and team, and may be unnecessary.

Organize an Implementation Strategy

Determine the who, what, and when for each recommended improvement to the facility and delegate the tasks to small groups. Use the community’s network to get expert advice and guidance.

💡 Tip: If the community formed a Working Group to conduct the first three steps, forming an Implementation Group to raise the funds and oversee the facility upgrades reduces burnout.

STEP 5: Research Grants and Funding

Find ways to pay for your project.

Identify Grants and Loans

State and Federal resources will be the best opportunity to fund your project. Typically, a large project requires multiple funding sources and many require a local match. Exhaust all of your options for outside funding before requesting local funds for maximum transparency.

💡 Tip: Partner with your community staff and leaders to meet with grantors as you identify which grants best fit your needs.

Collaborate

Local non-profits and businesses may want to use your repurposed facilities. Work together to build a strong grant application. Use local hobby groups or community groups to organize fundraising or writing letters of support for grant applications.

🔗 Learn More: Grant writing tips from UNH - libraryguides.unh.edu/grants1

Build Critical Support

We cannot stress enough how important it is to engage with the community and voters about the project regularly. Local funding is difficult to gain support due to the competing interests and limited resources. Engage often and early; set up tables at local events or high-traffic areas like grocery stores or popular restaurants.

Build consensus through listening, transparency, and flexibility. You, the citizens, control this critical Step in the process.

💡 Tip: Outreach. Outreach. Outreach.

Appendix 1: Outreach and Engagement

Meet with your community early and often!

New Hampshire Housing

[A Guide to Community Engagement and Grassroots Advocacy](#)

nhhfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/NHH-How-Do-We-Talk-About-Housing.pdf

UNH Extension

[Community Engagement Tools](#)

extension.unh.edu/resource/tools-community-engagement

The World Café

[World Café method of community engagement](#)

theworldcafe.com/

Appendix 2: Implementation Grants

Disclaimer: Program availability subject to change.

USDA Rural Development

[Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program](#)

Develop essential community facilities.

www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/

[Rural Community Development Initiative](#)

Supports housing, community facilities, and community and economic development projects in rural areas.

www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/rural-community-development-initiative-grants

[Business Programs](#)

Financial backing and technical assistance to stimulate business creation and growth through partnerships with community based organizations.

www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs

[Water and Environmental Programs](#)

Technical assistance and financing necessary to develop drinking water and waste disposal systems.

www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/water-environmental-programs

[Energy](#)

Renewable and bio-based energy programs.

www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/energy-programs

Community Development Finance Authority

[Public Facilities](#)

Finance water and sewer system improvements, transitional and homeless shelters, municipal infrastructure, handicapped access, and neighborhood or community centers that provide public services to low- and moderate-income people.

resources.nhcdfa.org/programs/community-development-block-grant/application/program-overview-objectives/

[Planning Grant](#)

Planning and feasibility related activities to determine whether a proposed project is viable, including income surveys, preliminary architectural and engineering design, cost estimates and market analysis.

resources.nhcdfa.org/programs/community-development-block-grant/

Pre-Development Program

Prepare local development projects for funding and implementation, studying the feasibility of renovating a downtown building, gathering public input on a project idea, developing a business plan for a new facility, must stand a reasonable chance of being financed and initiated within two years.

resources.nhcdfa.org/programs/pre-development-loan-program/

Northern Borders Regional Commission

Catalyst Program

Broad range of funding to support infrastructure modernization and expansion and economic development.

<https://www.nbrc.gov/content/program-areas>

Historic Preservation

Preservation Alliance

Planning grants for building assessments or re-use studies.

www.nhpreservation.org/community-landmarks-financial

Land and Community Heritage Investment Program

Historic preservation endeavors to protect and preserve buildings, structures, districts and sites.

www.lchip.org/index.php/for-applicants/historic-rehabilitation-grants

Historic Rehab Tax Incentives

Tax credit for rehabilitating historic buildings and placing them in service as income producing buildings.

www.nhdhr.dncr.nh.gov/grants-incentives/federal-historic-rehabilitation-tax-incentives