

TOWN OF OTIS REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE

Progress & Findings | January 2025 – April 2026

MISSION & ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

- Appointed by the Select Board to develop a comprehensive revitalization strategy focused on **economic vitality, aesthetic appeal, and quality of life**, the seven-member Committee and one alternate have completed the following over the past year:
- **Conducted a town-wide Needs Assessment Survey** — 661 responses from full-time residents, second homeowners, visitors, and businesses (June 2025–April 2026).
 - **Facilitated two business focus groups** at Town Hall (October 2025) led by DeLevie Group Research, capturing qualitative input from owners across hospitality, trades, recreation, and retail.
 - **Applied/Received two grants** through MA Executive Office of Economic Development and BRPC; engaged RKG Associates for downtown market analysis covering Harmony Hall, Old Otis Inn, and Terranova’s Market sites (reuse recommendations due June 2026). Support for implementing the suggestions will follow from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC).
 - **Completed a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis and TOWS Matrix** aligned to six vitality categories (Social Cohesion / Social Capital, Infrastructure, Services, Economic Opportunities, Environment, Ability to Adapt to Change / Resiliency), plus a full assessment of 2015 Master Plan action items to inform Master Plan renewal advocacy. Assisted in securing a Master Plan grant.
 - **Launched community programs:** Food Truck Tuesdays (100s attended summer 2025, transitioning to Recreation Commission), helped revive Otis Clean • Otis Green Day with the Recreation Commission, Otis Observer column, social media presence, & upcoming Otis Community Day at Otis Ridge June 13th, 1-8 pm.
 - **Infrastructure investigation:** Supported Rte 8 speed-limit reduction through state advocacy; promoted BRPC Housing Rehabilitation Program; coordinated with Habitat for Humanity & Construct exploring housing.

TOP SURVEY FINDINGS

SHARED PRIORITIES (254 voters + 403 non-Otis voters)	Voters	Non-Otis Voters	KEY DIVERGENCES & STRUCTURAL FINDINGS
Top 2 priorities: Clean up contaminated/abandoned properties & Beautification of downtown	48% & 44%	34% & 39%	Nature & scenic beauty are the top reasons people come to and live in Otis
Expand: Medical Services as a top priority	29%	20%	Housing urgency is a voter priority: Single-Family Homes (61%), First-time Homes (48%), ADUs (46%), Senior Housing (41%)
Action on the Terranova site	77%	89%	
Expand: Library, Town Communications, Economic Development & Outdoor Recreation services	strong majority across both groups		Tourism tension: Non-Otis voters support encouraging tourism (76%) more than voters (64%); voters are more cautious on visitor reservoir access, but 32% list resident access as a top 5 priority
Oppose: Route 8/23 roundabout	87%	77%	Communications gap: Voters use official Town channels at ~2× the rate of 2 nd homeowners
Support: Village district expansion	62%	77%	

BUSINESS FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS (DELEVIE GROUP RESEARCH, OCT 2025)

- **Owners love doing business in Otis** — driven by neighborly community, customer loyalty across both seasonal and year-round clientele, and proximity to where they live.
- **Staffing is the top concern**, especially in summer; some businesses use the J-1 visa program to fill positions previously held by younger residents.
- **Frustration about growth** in a community that is not itself growing — owners said the town must attract younger families to thrive.
- **Strong interest in a business association / chamber-of-commerce model** to share information and resources; owners want continued direct dialogue with the Revitalization Committee.

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) ANALYSIS SUMMARY

STRENGTHS • Otis Reservoir, lakes, ponds, town beach, and 100-acre park — natural recreation assets • Otis Ski Ridge, hiking/snowmobile trails, Knox Trail (Revolutionary War history) • #7-rated public elementary school in Berkshire County (B+ rating) • Reliable, affordable high-speed internet • Low taxes, AA bond rating, • Competent town administration, low crime rate, strong social safety net (Food Pantry, COA, Library) • Active civic culture: Cultural Council, Farmer's Market, Otis Observer, Community Garden	WEAKNESSES • Unappealing downtown with empty buildings & deferred property maintenance • Lack of affordable housing — the dominant constraint on hiring and young-family retention • Aging population; limited childcare, before/after school care, and senior housing • Outdated Master Plan; insufficient parking; lack of sidewalks; aging sewer system • Limited restaurants & no retail; not a quaint walking town • Speeding on Routes 8; limited communication • “If it ain't broke don't fix it” mentality limits adaptability
OPPORTUNITIES • Transform downtown center; new Library; reuse Harmony Hall, Old Otis Inn, and Terranova sites • Mixed residential/commercial development; expand Village district designation • Leverage Otis Ridge, lakes, and historical assets to attract younger families and tourism • Develop unique annual Otis events; expand and interconnect trail network • Sewer expansion, town water in select areas, industrial compost station, EV chargers, microgrid • Update Master Plan; regionalized EMT and microbus service	THREATS • Further degradation of downtown • Alienation of seasonal homeowners • Possible opposition to change; missed funding due to fear of losing local control • Low service-population often disqualifies Otis from state/federal subsidies • Aging population + dwindling school-age population threatens school viability • Cost of living doesn't match cost of doing business; limited skilled workforce • Dirt roads, climate vulnerability, and skyrocketing infrastructure upgrade costs

For further updates, visit <https://townofotisma.com/> and click on Revitalization Committee.