

# Main Street

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*One of the most significant findings of the Comprehensive Plan is that the central part of Main Street can be joined to the natural resource of the reservoir in a logical and convenient manner by expanding the existing Mill District. As will be noted later, it is proposed that a Mill District Association (formed either as a non-profit corporation or a local development corporation) be established to help promote and market the Mill District.*

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## Project Area

For the purposes of this report, the Main Street area can be divided into three distinct components. Each of the three segments can be distinguished by the property uses that are found in each. The sections are separated as follows:

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### West Main Street

West Main Street begins at the western border of the Village and continuing easterly to Rock Street. West Main Street can be described as primarily residential in nature, although there are some commercial activities (a garage, a monument, and a tavern, etc.).

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### Central Main Street

This section begins at Rock Street and continues in an easterly direction to Martindale Road. This section of Main Street can best be described as typical small town Main Street. It contains a mix of commercial and retail establishments as well as some residential use. Most commercial activity within the Village can be found on Main Street. Contrary to popular belief, there is very little vacant space within this section of Main Street. Unfortunately, several property owners have previously converted commercial space on the first floor to residential space. While this may have alleviated short term vacancy problems, it is not conducive to developing a thriving, attractive Main Street. This area would benefit from a housing rehabilitation program and a façade improvement program for commercial properties.

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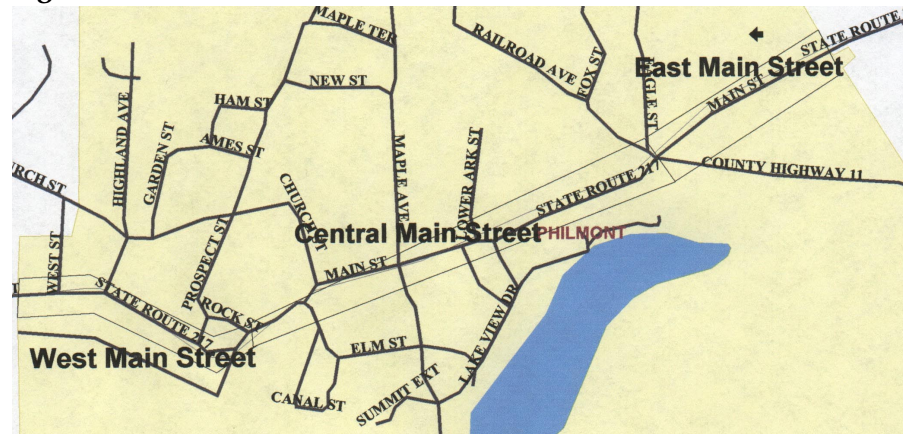
### East Main Street

The final section begins at Martindale Road and continues east to the eastern border of the Village. Unlike the other two sections of Main Street, this area is almost exclusively made up of residential use (including Pine Haven). There are some single family homes as well as multiple dwelling clusters. The housing stock in this area is generally

sound but would benefit from an improvement program of some type including a housing rehabilitation program.

Figure 1 provides a view of the three segments of the Main Street area.

**Figure 1: Main Street Sections**



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## Perceptions

Figure 2 shows the recently completed Richardson Hall, a subsidized residence for senior citizens located in the Central Main Street section of Philmont.

**Figure 2: Richardson Hall**



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## Main Street is the Focal Point of the Village

Philmont is similar to many small communities in that “Main Street” serves as the focal point of the Village. Much of commerce, retail and food related activity is found on Main Street. A significant portion of social interaction also takes place in the Main Street area, particularly

in and around the post office, library, bank, the Village hall, Stewart's, and Richardson Hall.

Philmont recognizes that a healthy Main Street is more often than not indicative of a strong community. An initial inspection of Main Street, within the identified boundaries (with the exception of the Mill District), may lead one to conclude that Philmont's Main Street is indeed unhealthy. In fact, anecdotal evidence supports this conclusion. Many residents were of the opinion that the Main Street area was filled with old, unkempt, dilapidated, buildings and unattractive, storefronts. These subjective, conversational observations are supported by responses to the residential opinion survey conducted in the summer of 2001.

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### Gap Between Data and Perceptions About Main Street

Empirical data collected during the summer and fall of 2001 contradicts the opinions espoused by the majority of respondents to the survey. A building condition survey indicates that only 22 of the 108 buildings (23%) in the three sections of Main Street area are substandard. While there may be some truth to the perception that the Main Street area and Mill District has some negative aesthetic issues, it includes many attractive buildings that can easily be revitalized into attractive spaces that will be more conducive to shoppers and visitors to the area.

Also, recent events have begun to change the appearance and direction of Main Street. One only needs to look at the recently completed Richardson Hall to understand that Philmont is a viable community and is worth investing in. Several properties within the Central Section of Main Street have recently changed hands and will soon be revitalized with new commercial uses. While the change is subtle, with a measured pace, there can be no argument that the face of Main Street is changing for the better.

The Comprehensive Plan Board recognizes the vast misconceptions that undermine the positive aspects of Main Street and will recommend the implementation of an aggressive marketing strategy that will be focused on changing impressions from within and without Philmont. The goal of this strategy is to improve the image of Philmont to increase community pride among residents and to encourage non-residents that Philmont is an opportune place to live, work, and visit.

**RECOMMENDATION** Implement an aggressive marketing strategy to change impressions about Philmont.

**RECOMMENDATION** Philmont will continue to monitor public opinion relative to the perceptions of Main Street and will take actions to address any identified deficiencies, either real or perceived.

**RECOMMENDATION** Philmont will attempt to identify and secure funding through Federal, State and regional agencies to implement community im-

provement projects that will address building façades, economic development, parking, and other related Main Street issues.

## Businesses on Main Street

Contrary to the views expressed during the opinion survey, there are few vacant commercial/retail spaces available in the Main Street area. In fact, an analysis of local businesses conducted in 2001 indicates that there are a total of 26 businesses located on Main Street in Philmont. Figure 3 offers a snapshot of the business activity as it now exists within Main Street Philmont.

The businesses located on Main Street make up approximately 32% of the businesses in Philmont. The majority of these businesses are related to the food industry. The Mill District, which is contiguous to Main Street, contains—in addition to many residences—a number of home-based, craft, and other businesses.

**Figure 3: Business Representation on Main Street**



**RECOMMENDATION** The Mill District Association should recommend aid to local crafts and art-related businesses in the establishment of an artists' cooperative that will provide space for local artists and craftsman to display and sell their work. The co-op will also provide an excellent space for visitors and shoppers to see a sample of the goods produced in the area and will also give people an opportunity to purchase these products.

## **Business and Economic Development**

2000 Census data indicates a Median Household Income of \$24,583 and a poverty rate of 17%. 62% of the Village's population over the age of 24 possess a High School diploma, while 31% have some level of post high school education. Given these statistics, the Village of Philmont has an able, trainable work force and is attractive to smaller, specialty businesses. The Village has adopted legislation encouraging this type of business, and has shown a willingness to continue to do so.

Data collection for the entire Village revealed some interesting facts about Philmont. According to the research conducted for this document, the Village contained a total of 91 businesses. It is likely that there are even more businesses in Philmont that were not identified during the research phase of the Comprehensive Plan. The majority of these existing ventures were small, home based businesses. While analyzing the businesses within Philmont, a very specific trend began to materialize. Many of these businesses are rooted in activities that are associated, either directly or indirectly, with artist and craftsmen trades. This business activity is consistent with the Village's history of light industry and the mills of Philmont's past. Clearly, if the Village of Philmont can be identified with any type of specific industry, arts and crafts must be considered the dominant form of commerce.

Several of these shops can indeed be found in storefronts located along the Main Street corridor. However, through research and anecdotal information, a number of businesses operating in this cottage industry are actually located near the vicinity of the reservoir and the boundaries of the proposed Mill District.

**RECOMMENDATION** A marketing strategy should be developed to encourage business growth by touting the small business friendly atmosphere of the Village and of the existence of an educated and trainable existing work force.

**RECOMMENDATION** A central location should be identified to be used as an arts and crafts cooperative. This facility will serve several functions. It will be used as a display area where visitors can examine the goods produced by the artists and crafts persons within the Mill District. People will also have the opportunity to purchase these goods either from the shops themselves or from the cooperative.

**RECOMMENDATION** Prepare legislation that will prevent owners of commercial property on Main Street from converting commercial space on the first floor to residential space. The new laws will also consider offering incentives to property owners on Main Street that convert first floor residential space into commercial space.

## Philmont's Existing Niche – Economic Development in the Mill District

As indicated in Business and Economic Development section, data was collected that showed that 91 businesses were located within Philmont. 15 (16%) of those businesses are related, either directly or indirectly, to the arts and crafts and performing arts industry. This type of business represents that largest segment of businesses within Philmont. This discovery is significant in that Philmont has never been able to lay claim as the home of any one type of industry. Without any involvement from the Village, other than collecting data, a community of thriving cottage industries has been identified.

The area of focus includes the expanded Mill District that is bordered by the south side of Main Street, Martindale Road to the east, Lakeview Drive (the reservoir and the Ockawamick Creek) to the south, Summit Street, and a small but important block that is created by the inclusion of Elm Street. The following image provides a map of the enlarged Mill District.

**Figure 4: Proposed Mill District**



The Mill District is a strategic area that is easy to navigate and provides a number of beautiful views and points of interest including the reservoir, parks, and specialty shops. The area promotes pedestrian traffic and is especially suited for use as an arts and crafts district.

It should be noted that the Mill District is already in existence. Its size is limited to the Summit Mill building which is located on Summit Street, in the southwest corner of the Main Street/Mill District area. The Comprehensive Plan Board has proposed the expansion of the Mill District to include the area described previously. The mill building itself is now vacant, but it is in very good condition and will no doubt play a prominent role as the Mill District realizes its full potential.

After further analysis, members of the Comprehensive Plan Board realized that a number of arts and crafts related businesses are already located in the Main Street area as described previously. Thus, the expansion of the Mill District that would capitalize on the existence of so many complementary businesses was the next logical step in revitalizing Main Street.

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### Advantages of Expanding the Mill District

- The location of the expanded Mill District is of particular benefit. The district is contiguous to Main Street and allows for easy access to the streets located within the District boundaries. This will be especially helpful when installing signage in the area to show visitors where the district is located.
- Many of the businesses that will gain from the implementation of this district are already located there.
- Creation of the Mill District will provide a greater profile for existing resources within the District, including the reservoir, the Village recreation area and the children's playground and park.
- The Mill District is contiguous to Main Street and many of the businesses in both areas are similar in nature and complement one another.

The Mill District currently is made up mostly of residential, home based business and civic uses. The Mill District will allow those uses to continue, but will also encourage the development of new businesses, including arts and crafts related businesses and supporting businesses, such as coffee houses and bed and breakfast establishments.

Creating the Mill District in the specific location identified will in effect create a niche for the Village that is now so sorely lacking. People will have a reason to come to Philmont, instead of just passing through. Owners of shops within the Main Street and Mill District will have a vested interest in the appearance of the area and will keep their properties neat and clean of debris. With little public investment, the area will continue to improve and transform into a desirable area that will continue to be a viable engine for Philmont's economy

**RECOMMENDATION** The Comprehensive Plan Board recommends the expansion of the Mill District to include the south side of Main Street, from Elm and Canal Streets to the west to Martindale Road to the east. The area also is bordered by Martindale Road to the east, Lakeview Drive (the reservoir and Ockawamick Creek) to the south, and Summit Street to the east, which includes a small block created by the inclusion of Elm Street.

**RECOMMENDATION** Philmont, in association with the Comprehensive Plan Board, should develop the Mill District Association, a not-for-profit organization that will be charged with overseeing and managing all aspects of the Mill District, including promoting the district, managing any special events



that are planned for the Mill District, and related responsibilities.

**RECOMMENDATION** Encourage appropriate new business growth within the Main Street and Mill District area. Businesses will include artists and craftsmen and other ventures that could be utilized in complementary and supporting roles. These could be described as food and restaurant businesses, bed and breakfast establishments, and other related industries.

**RECOMMENDATION** Develop a marketing strategy that will highlight the Mill District as a place to come and visit high end specialty shops that cater to arts and crafts buyers. The marketing plan will also publicize the other resources within the district, including the reservoir, recreational facilities and other related businesses.

**RECOMMENDATION** Seek to secure grant funds to assist in developing the Mill District. This will include implementing projects that will offer low interest loans to new and existing businesses to develop and grow. Efforts will also be made to secure funds to improve housing conditions and facades within the Mill District.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Mill District Association will encourage the addition of appropriate signage along Main Street to help draw attention to and identify the commercial area within the Central Main Street section.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Mill District Association will seek grant funds through the Small Cities, HOME, AHC and other related funding programs to introduce building improvement and façade restoration programs for properties along Main Street.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Mill District Association will work with existing commercial property owners to encourage beautification projects, including landscaping, lighting, and façade improvements.

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## Building Conditions

In August of 2001, the Comprehensive Plan Board commissioned a building condition survey to determine, in an objective manner, the condition and usage of all buildings within Philmont. It is important to remember that this survey was conducted to determine the condition of the exterior of the building. No interior inspection was conducted on these buildings. The Village ordered this study so that an inventory of buildings could be established and a determination of area needs could be articulated.

The Main Street and Mill District areas include a total of 82 buildings. A breakdown of these buildings, along with use, is included in the following table:

**Table 3: Building Conditions and Mill District and Main Street**

CONDITION	RESIDENTIAL	COMMERCIAL
Standard	63	
Moderately Substandard	15	1
Severely Substandard	2	1
Dilapidated		
	80	2

By percentage, residential buildings represent the majority of structures in the area. The overwhelming majority of buildings are in standard condition. However, many buildings require substantial cosmetic improvements to improve the overall aesthetics of the area.

**Figure 5: Main Street Façades**



The photograph on the left indicates that indeed, some of the facades located directly on Main Street are in less than desirable condition; however, the structural integrity of these same buildings appears to be in excellent condition. Thus, the concern identified with the facades is easily addressed and rectified by the introduction of a façade improvement program. The retouched photograph on the right gives a glimpse of the impact some simple façade improvements would have on Main Street.

The buildings located within the Mill District, while containing different styles and uses, are for the most part in very good condition. Many buildings would benefit from a fresh coat of paint and other routine maintenance, but the structures located in the Mill District are stable. There are two notable exceptions to this observation. Specifically, two buildings located on Ark Street are in various stages of disrepair and desperately need attention. Each of the buildings can be saved but careful consideration must be given when calculating the cost of repair versus the value of the rehabilitated building.

**Figure 6: Mill District House in Need of Repair**



Figure 6 shows the existing condition of one of two buildings on Ellsworth Street that are considered to be severely substandard.

**RECOMMENDATION** Continue to actively pursue funding to implement building improvement programs. Specifically, Philmont will access the Governor's Office for Small Cities, The New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, The Rural Development Administration, and any other agencies that can offer financial assistance to the Village to introduce building improvement programs that will address the negative aspects of buildings within the Main Street area.

**RECOMMENDATION** Develop guidelines for growth within the Mill District. Specifically, the Comprehensive Plan recommends passage of legislation that will foster the growth of arts and crafts and related businesses within the Mill District. This may include adopting zoning laws that will be less restrictive regarding the number uses permitted and on site parking required by current zoning laws.

