

4 | West Lebanon Central Business District

4 | A **Vision & Purpose**

Downtown West Lebanon shall be a vibrant village - a crossroads where residents and visitors work, meet, shop, and share in a good quality of life and a firm sense of community and belonging. The City of Lebanon seeks to promote and enhance downtown West Lebanon as a historic center offering a “small-town” atmosphere, serving the commercial, service and recreational needs of residents in surrounding neighborhoods, and providing opportunities for professional and similar businesses seeking the benefits of a downtown location.

4 | B **Issues & Priorities**

4 | B-1 Downtown Revitalization

The area that is now the West Lebanon Central Business District developed as a linear village along the Connecticut River with what is now Route 4 as its main street. The village’s historic fabric has experienced considerable fraying during the past half century, but its role as a center for surrounding neighborhoods and key gateway location remain strong incentives for revitalization. There are ample opportunities to redevelop single-use sites within the district with higher-density, mixed-use projects. Such development, along with traffic calming, access management, streetscape and pedestrian improvements, and related amenities, would enhance the vitality and economic viability of the district. An active and coordinated group of stakeholders is needed to assist the City with planning and implementing revitalization efforts.

4 | C **Existing Conditions & Trends**

4 | C-1 General Description

Currently, the West Lebanon Central Business District covers approximately 50 acres along Main Street from Seminary Hill to just north of Bridge Street, and from the Connecticut River east to an approximate boundary midway between Main Street and Maple Street. The pattern of commercial development within this area is primarily linear, occurring along both sides of Main Street.

Within this area, there is a fair amount of diversity as to the businesses and related services for local residents, some of which are expanding. However, some central lots continue to be vacant or under-utilized despite the CBD’s in-place infrastructure, available services, and familiarity among local and neighboring clientele, which provide a cost-effective environment for businesses to locate and grow.

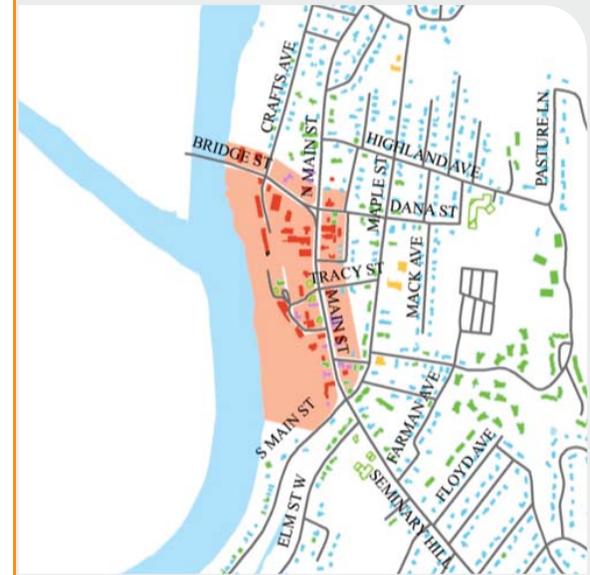
The City re-zoned the 38-acre area to the north of the existing CBD, located between the Connecticut River and North Main Street, in 2010 and the Planning Board subsequently approved a mixed-use project in that area to include life sciences office and research space, service retail stores, single-family homes and rental housing.

[key points](#) | [vision & purpose](#)

- Enhance downtown West Lebanon’s role as a vibrant village
- Preserve West Lebanon’s historic and small-town character

[key points](#) | [issues & priorities](#)

- Promote revitalization of the West Lebanon CBD to improve the viability of its businesses and vitality of surrounding community



west lebanon CBD and surrounding neighborhoods

key points | existing conditions & trends

- West Lebanon CBD developed as a linear village, and has potential for redevelopment and infill at higher densities
- Historic, primarily single-family, residential neighborhoods extend outward from the CBD.
- The new Kilton library is a center for community activities and there are a number of recreation areas within walking distance of the CBD.
- West Lebanon's main street is a heavily traveled state highway and the CBD experiences traffic congestion at peak travel times.



kilton public library

4|C-2 Surrounding Residential Neighborhoods

The residential areas adjacent to the West Lebanon CBD consist primarily of single-family homes, with a mix of two-family and multi-family buildings. Seminary Hill, Maple Street, North Main Street, Crafts Avenue, and South Main Street are all within walking distance of the downtown area. The Maple Street and Crafts Avenue residential areas have been considered for Historic District designation, which would preserve the area's historic characteristics and design elements. A historic resources inventory of a part of the West Lebanon Village area was completed in 1997 and should serve as a basis for ongoing historic preservation in the area.

4|C-3 Cultural and Recreation Resources

The new Kilton Library located on Main Street has the opportunity to serve as a community center, helping to promote the revitalization of the West Lebanon.

Recreation areas near downtown West Lebanon include Civic Memorial Field behind Seminary Hill School, walking trails behind "The Falls" development on Route 10, and the Little League Park at Smith Field on Maple Street. Playgrounds at Mt. Lebanon and Seminary Hill schools also serve as recreation areas.

4|C-4 Traffic

The traffic on Main Street, averaging 15,000 vehicles per day, is likely to be detrimental to some downtown businesses as the congestion can discourage and inhibit customers, but may be beneficial to others, as it relates to the number of travelers exposed to this area.

The peak commuting times and Saturdays are most problematic. Congestion is particularly a problem at the intersections of Seminary Hill Road/Route 12A/Maple Street and Main Street/Bridge Street/Dana Street. This congestion increases the conflict between vehicles parking in the West Lebanon CBD and those traveling through to Route 12A or Route 4 towards Lebanon. Extensive curb cuts along the roadway add to the problem.

4|D **Future Challenges & Opportunities**

4|D-1 Downtown Revitalization

The revitalization of the West Lebanon Central Business District can flourish if there is a concerted effort among City officials, business owners, and residents to address community needs, traffic and parking concerns, and the preservation of historic assets, economic vitality, and small-town character. Continued rehabilitation, reuse of older buildings, and plans for new construction will improve the area for business uses. Additionally, the reopening of the Claremont-Concord Rail Line for freight service may open new economic opportunities in this area.

The focus should be on infill and redevelopment rather than developing new properties which would compete with existing commercially-zoned properties. Making better use of existing retail space in the City's downtown areas was an issue repeatedly emphasized at the January 2009 Master Plan Forum. A comprehensive inventory

of both vacant and under-utilized downtown buildings and sites would be a good first step in an overall strategy to increase infill and redevelopment.

Any new developments within the West Lebanon CBD should be compatible with existing uses and be attractive and complementary to the community's history. In general, mixed use should be encouraged, such as combining commercial storefronts with upper-story residential units. This will help maintain and expand housing opportunities in the downtown.

The current mix of businesses in the district could provide a more consistent identity or unified vision for the downtown. In order for the CBD to remain a viable downtown center, serving the needs of residents and attracting regular customers, a coordinated plan will be needed that assesses its economic viability and business market potential, preserves its historic features and appearance, and takes into account the many needs of local residents.

As there is a critical mass of residents of all ages who live within and just outside of the West Lebanon CBD, community-oriented services and shopping (such as civic services, grocery, restaurants, pharmacy, day care, or a farmers' market) should be encouraged to stay in or move to the West Lebanon CBD to meet the needs of the people who work and live in or near the downtown. School-aged children should specifically be included among those to be served by community facilities and commercial establishments. The proximity and concentration of different services to surrounding residential neighborhoods and public transit allow more tasks and activities to be accomplished with significantly less vehicular traffic generated. Providing additional recreation, park, or enhanced community center functions is essential to the vitality of this area, completing the symbiotic relationship between the existing businesses in the core, and the nearby residents.

The 1989 West Lebanon Downtown Study, prepared by the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Council (now Regional Planning Commission) for the West Lebanon Downtown Study Committee may provide a good foundation for a plan for the West Lebanon CBD. The desired revitalization work cannot be done without a coordinated planning effort, involving businesses, the City, and residents, as well as the help of organizations and agencies. The New Hampshire Main Street Program, which is part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is one resource available to communities who are willing to make a commitment to downtown revitalization.

4 | D-2 Civic Oversight

The West Lebanon Civic Association was recently created to work with the City, the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses and other interested parties to develop a comprehensive plan for the West Lebanon CBD that addresses market potential, design, traffic, parking, and a host of other issues, as described within this chapter. The civic association could also develop a strategy for recruiting the types of businesses that would complement the existing mix, build on the area's assets, and provide the services residents want and need.

4 | D-3 Relationship with the Route 12A Commercial District

One key element to retaining the village identity and character of the West Lebanon CBD is to maintain the current transition area between the West Lebanon CBD and the Route 12A Commercial District. The current mix of residential and professional uses on South Main Street serve as an effective buffer and should be maintained

key points | future challenges & opportunities

- Downtown revitalization efforts should focus on redevelopment and infill at higher densities, and on maintaining stable businesses that provide neighborhood residents with basic goods and services.
- The recently created West Lebanon Civic Association should work with the City, the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses and other interested parties, is needed to develop a comprehensive plan for the West Lebanon CBD.
- To retain the village identity and character of the West Lebanon CBD, the current transition area between the West Lebanon CBD and the Route 12A Commercial District must be maintained.
- Given the proximity of the West Lebanon CBD and White River Junction to each other and to the river, both communities might benefit from coordinated planning and development strategies.
- There are opportunities to reestablish an attractive and functional streetscape in the West Lebanon CBD, which could be an important economic development tool.
- The Westboro Rail Yard property is perhaps the West Lebanon CBD's single greatest obstacle and its greatest opportunity, and its future redevelopment will have a major impact on the village.
- West Lebanon CBD needs a variety of improvements to its transportation infrastructure including: better traffic flow and circulation, increased access management, safe routes for pedestrian and bicyclists, additional parking, better public transit facilities to meet growing demand, and accommodations for renewed rail service.
- The preservation and re-use of historic structures within the CBD could be an integral piece of a downtown revitalization plan, and would strengthen community pride and identity.
- Areas adjacent to the West Lebanon CBD provide much needed workforce housing, and encouraging additional workforce housing opportunities in this area would benefit the village.

without introducing more commercial uses. Restricting commercial uses will also protect the potential aquifer site located in this area, which the City may need as a back-up water supply source (see 2001 Wright/Pierce Study). Maintaining a compact West Lebanon CBD with well-established boundaries, and a village scale and pattern of development, will help maintain its character and ensure a continued sense of community for West Lebanon residents and business owners.

4|D-4 Relationship with White River Junction

The 1989 West Lebanon Downtown Study recommended that certain components of a downtown revitalization study might be more successful if they were addressed cooperatively between the White River Junction, Vermont and West Lebanon business districts. This observation remains true today, and perhaps even more relevant as White River Junction is planning for significant redevelopment of the under-utilized properties along Route 4 just across the river from the West Lebanon CBD. Given the proximity of both historic villages to each other and to the river, both communities might benefit from coordinated planning and development strategies, and be better positioned to successfully compete with other commercial areas. The 1989 study listed several examples of potential cooperation, including:

- Route 4/Bridge Street improvements
- Joint advertising and branding, such as “The River Towns”
- Creating a Railroad Bridge walkway

The 2007 study, *Pedestrian / Bicycle Trail Linking Lebanon and Hartford via the Railroad Bridge over the Connecticut River*, assessed the feasibility of a rails-with-trails connection between the two communities and concluded that a multi-use trail over the existing railroad bridge appeared feasible provided sufficient funding is available.

4|D-5 Architecture, Landscape & Urban Design

Another component of a downtown revitalization plan addresses design improvements. There are opportunities to reestablish an attractive and functional streetscape in the West Lebanon CBD. Providing physical continuity along the street, signs and building facades in character with the village’s history, as well as appropriate landscaping can all improve the downtown streetscape. Design should not be overlooked as an important economic development tool. The City of Lebanon Heritage Commission could assist both the City and private enterprise to plan and evaluate new development for design that is compatible with the character of the City.

4|D-6 Westboro Rail Yard

The Westboro Rail Yard property is perhaps the West Lebanon CBD’s single greatest obstacle and its greatest opportunity. The property, by itself, constitutes about 40 percent of the land in the district, so its future redevelopment will have a major impact on the village. In addition to its economic and transportation opportunities, the property contains river frontage, including an opportunity to complete a proposed Brownfield-to-Greenfield project on the north end of this property where the City of Lebanon has purchased three acres of property, for a community “green space” and river “car-top” boat launch.

Many of the existing buildings in the Westboro Yard are deteriorating, unsightly, and potentially unsafe. Although they are a physical reminder of West Lebanon's railroad heritage, residents and property owners have expressed the opinion that those buildings which cannot be restored for historic value should perhaps be condemned and demolished to prevent potential hazards and to improve the overall appearance of the downtown area.

The state leases the Westboro Yard to a private freight operator and the New Hampshire Department of Transportation has indicated its intention to maintain the rail uses on the property for the foreseeable future. However, continued active rail use and limited public access to the property and adjoining riverfront conflict with some of the stated goals of the community.

Many ideas for using the property have been expressed by the public, including commercial, residential, and/or recreational development. The idea for a riverfront park in West Lebanon and the residents' overall desire for more green space and parks have been discussed for many years. Also, there is still a potential to link with the riverfront and the railroad museum in White River Junction, Vermont for a bi-state park. All of these ideas should continue to be explored by the City Council's Westboro Yard committee in cooperation with residents, business owners, the state, and the railroad operator.

4|D-7 Transportation Coordination

Traffic Management. If the City decides to continue building out Route 12A, the traffic impacts to West Lebanon CBD will need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner.

Any reactivation of uses of the Westboro Yard as described previously, could contribute to additional traffic. The railroad operator estimated that their plan to restore freight use would bring 3,600 trucks to the Westboro Yard per year, or about 10 per day. Opportunities to divert heavy truck traffic from Main Street should be evaluated to help minimize its negative impact on the roadways and the pedestrian experience. Even the creation of a riverfront park would generate increased traffic. A thorough study should be conducted on potential impacts to traffic of any future redevelopment of the Westboro Yard.

The City and state are in the process of designing a new bridge to replace the current one over the rail tracks near the intersection of Routes 4 and 12A. This is a complex and important intersection, both logistically and aesthetically, especially if the new design is to include access into the southern end of the Westboro Rail Yard. The state is also designing a new bridge over the Connecticut River to White River Junction, Vermont to replace the current bridge, which has been found to be structurally deficient. Care should be taken to ensure that these new bridges are an asset to the West Lebanon CBD, rather than just efficient arteries for through traffic.

Traffic flow must be accommodated and improved while drivers are encouraged to stop and do business, rather than just travel through the village to other commercial areas. Limiting new curb cuts and providing a centralized parking lot or parking garage downtown would limit the number of vehicles turning and entering in a number of locations along the street, and would likely decrease congestion. Synchronized traffic lights or solutions that do not require stoplights, such as a "roundabout" (a smaller and safer version of a rotary), might help relieve congestion.



main street, west lebanon



west lebanon transit stop

Public Transit. Use of public transit should be encouraged since multiple bus routes in the Advance Transit network meet at the Kilton Library site. Also, in response to very strong ridership, Advance Transit has begun a second bus on the “Red Route”, which provides more frequent bus service between the Route 12A plazas and downtown West Lebanon. Developing and improving amenities for public transit use, such as shelters, benches, trash barrels and access to public rest rooms, often encourages increased usage. These amenities can be developed when planning public facilities and roadway modifications. All of these alternatives should be explored in greater depth, perhaps as part of an overall downtown revitalization plan.

Pedestrians and Bicyclists. There are many fairly low-cost and measurable improvements that can be implemented to enhance both community character and business in the West Lebanon CBD. Still greatly needed in the West Lebanon CBD are pedestrian amenities, such as benches, sidewalks, landscaping, and bike paths for connection to adjacent neighborhoods. Pedestrian and bicycle circulation can be improved by creating a network of connecting pathways in and around the West Lebanon CBD, as well as connections to the surrounding residential neighborhoods, schools, and recreational areas. This is an issue that was repeatedly raised by members of the public during the master planning process. Developing a citywide system of pedestrian paths, bikeways and bike lanes, as well as bike racks, will encourage residents and employees living and working in or near the West Lebanon CBD to walk or bike more frequently, lessening the extent and impact of vehicular traffic, creating recreational opportunities, and bringing in more pedestrian business to the downtown.

The extension of the Northern Rail Trail/Mascoma River Greenway from the Lebanon CBD to the West Lebanon CBD (and on to the 12A commercial area and to White River Junction) would be extremely beneficial to provide linkages for pedestrians and bicyclists. Improved pedestrian and bicycle access from Lebanon to West Lebanon and White River Junction is an issue often raised at public meetings.

The Upper Valley Trails Alliance has created the Upper Valley Loop Trail, a continuous and safe bicycle route connecting Lebanon, Hanover, Norwich, and Hartford. The Westboro Rail Yard Bridge is one potential option for pedestrian and bicycle crossings to connect this trail. In addition, the new Route 4 bridge over the Connecticut River being designed by the state is expected to have improved bike lanes and a sidewalk which will improve the Loop Trail concept.

Curb extensions at crosswalk locations, raised and/or textured crosswalks, or segregated sidewalks with landscape buffers are all potential measures to improve pedestrian safety and provide a more pleasant experience for the pedestrian. In addition, crossing guards should be considered for the crosswalks near the Kilton Library site as a significant afternoon destination for school-aged children. The sidewalk network should be well maintained and interconnected, and provide benches, landscaping and shade trees, and attractive, non-obtrusive lighting. Although some of these measures can be implemented in the short-term, they should all be part of an overall revitalization plan, as described earlier in this chapter.

4 | D-8 Historic Resources

The Lebanon Historical Society also has a keen interest in the preservation of the Roundhouse, Sand House, and Bunk House in Westboro Rail Yard, if possible. The preservation of these structures would provide opportunities for heritage tourism. Additionally, the Heritage Commission will evaluate the possibility of creating a new historic district in West Lebanon’s Maple Street/Crafts Avenue residential area, which would recognize

and preserve the historic nature of these neighborhoods. The preservation and usage of all of these historic features could be an integral piece of a downtown revitalization plan, and support existing community pride and identity.

4 | D-9

Housing

Areas adjacent to the West Lebanon CBD provide much needed workforce housing. Residents of these areas contribute significantly to the financial well-being of businesses within the West Lebanon CBD, provide a continuing employee base for area businesses, and create a diverse and lively community. Appropriate housing that should be encouraged in or adjacent to the West Lebanon CBD including multi-family housing, upper-story apartments above retail or office storefronts, and accessory apartments. Co-locating compatible professional, residential, and commercial uses encourages people to live where they work, fostering a vibrant downtown and healthy local economy. Encouraging additional workforce housing opportunities in this area would benefit this area as well as the overall community of Lebanon.

OUTCOME 1 Promote revitalization of the West Lebanon CBD to improve the viability of its businesses and vitality of surrounding community.

STRATEGIES

- 1 Support interested residents, business, and property owners to develop a vision and strategy for downtown revitalization.
- 2 Work to maintain or draw in governmental offices and social service agencies in the CBD as well as other community-oriented services and shops, such as groceries, cafes, and pharmacies.
- 3 Invest in the downtown by constructing and upgrading the infrastructure, such as including centrally located public parking, sidewalks, decorative street lighting, benches, public transit shelters, and parks, street trees, and other streetscape amenities.
- 4 Plan and develop, over time, a citywide system of pedestrian paths, bikeways, and bike lanes that connect neighborhoods, recreational areas, and the West Lebanon CBD.
- 5 Maintain and promote the mixed use of buildings within the CBD to maximize use of space and provide a diversity of housing opportunities.
- 6 Plan for the continued use of the former West Lebanon library building.
- 7 Encourage the Heritage Commission to explore the creation of an Historic District in West Lebanon, with Maple Street and Crafts Avenue as its core.
- 8 Encourage the Heritage Commission and Lebanon Historical Society partnership to preserve West Lebanon's many historic structures, including those that were identified in the West Lebanon Historic Resources Survey.
- 9 Consider joining forces with downtown White River Junction to jointly promote the two downtowns, to more successfully compete with larger commercial areas.
- 10 Restore riparian attributes and preserve aquifers.
- 11 Reorient downtown toward the river.
- 12 Promote the redevelopment of the Westboro Rail Yard.
- 13 Work to acquire all or part of the Westboro Rail Yard property from the State of New Hampshire for redevelopment.
- 14 Implement plans for recreation facilities including boating access as described in the 1989 West Lebanon Downtown Study and the 1998 Recreational Facilities Master Plan.
- 15 Continue negotiations with the state, Claremont-Concord, civic leaders, residents, and business owners to create a riverfront park, including boating access, while ensuring that the park is developed in an environmentally sensitive manner.
- 16 Promote a sense of community in the West Lebanon CBD by providing improved recreational facilities and gathering places.

ACTIONS

- 1 Develop a site area implementation plan, including urban design components, as a starting point for revitalizing the West Lebanon CBD.
- 2 Develop a marketing survey or similar tool, as part of an overall revitalization plan, to examine the area's existing strengths and determine the kinds of businesses, restaurants, and services that residents and visitors want and need.
- 3 Develop design guidelines for the downtown area such as appropriate signage, building front facades, and landscaping to ensure compatibility with the vision for the downtown. Provide these design guidelines to landowners and encourage their implementation.
- 4 Investigate placing overhead utilities underground to improve the area's aesthetic appearance.
- 5 Investigate the New Hampshire Main Street Program to help revitalize downtown West Lebanon.
- 6 Investigate the potential of a business development tax credit program to encourage development and redevelopment within the West Lebanon CBD.
- 7 Begin redevelopment of the Westboro Rail Yard by focusing on clean-up efforts including demolition of unsafe structures that cannot be restored for historic value and removal of contamination and other hazardous materials on the site.
- 8 Identify properties in the West Lebanon CBD for a centrally located park and/or community center facility, as well as pocket parks. Coordinate any land banking with the most recent recreation master plan and NRI report.
- 9 Increase the police presence in West Lebanon, possibly including bicycle or foot patrols, to provide a greater sense of safety and security for businesses and patrons.
- 10 Develop a plan for a safe, convenient, and attractive network of pedestrian paths, bikeways, and bike lanes, including connections to parks and transit stops, as well as bike racks.
- 11 Improve crosswalks, by considering curb extensions and raised, textured or colored crosswalks.
- 12 Provide benches, landscaping, and shade trees, and attractive, non-obtrusive lighting.
- 13 Develop a plan for traffic improvements in the West Lebanon CBD.
- 14 Study potential impacts on traffic that may result from redevelopment/reuse of the Westboro Rail Yard.
- 15 Develop and improve accessibility to and amenities for mass transit use, such as shelters, benches, and access to public rest rooms. These amenities can be developed when planning public facilities and roadway modifications.

OUTCOME 1

Promote revitalization of the West Lebanon CBD to improve the viability of its businesses and vitality of surrounding community.

STRATEGIES

- 17 Promote linkages within the West Lebanon CBD as well as to other recreational areas and the Lebanon CBD, for pedestrian and bicycle activity, including both planning and subsequent development of an interconnected system of pedestrian and bicycle ways.
- 18 Provide a safer and more pleasant environment for pedestrians in the West Lebanon CBD.
- 19 Consider separating sidewalks from the roadway with landscape buffers, and ensure that the sidewalk network and streetscape improvements are well maintained and interconnected.
- 20 Work to re-route or otherwise limit the amount of heavy truck traffic passing through the CBD.
- 21 Limit new curb cuts along South Main Street.
- 22 Provide sufficient centrally located public parking areas downtown.
- 23 Consider improving traffic lights at the problematic intersections, including Seminary Hill/South Main St and Main St/Bridge St, and also consider roundabouts or other solutions, where appropriate.
- 24 Ensure that the new bridges on South Main Street and Bridge Street are well-designed and become assets to the West Lebanon CBD area.
- 25 Maintain a diversity of housing types in or adjacent to the CBD, including multi-family housing, upper-story apartments above retail storefronts, and accessory apartments, to provide needed housing and to foster a vibrant downtown with a healthy economy.
- 26 Provide higher density housing while protecting the historical character and scale of the CBD.
- 27 Encourage and work with the Lebanon Housing Authority and other organizations working on housing issues to concentrate new housing for all ages, income categories, and physical abilities within or close to the West Lebanon CBD.
- 28 Provide good sidewalks and separate bike/pedestrian paths to encourage safe use of these alternatives to driving from nearby neighborhoods to the WLCBD.
- 29 Explore incentives for creating housing opportunities on upper level floors of CBD businesses.
- 30 Encourage accessory apartments and multiple-family dwellings in areas around the CBD.
- 31 Consider allowing taller mixed-use buildings within the CBD to offset the costs of code requirements while maintaining compatibility with existing residential uses.

ACTIONS

- 16 Develop a plan for bikeways/pedestrian paths connecting neighborhoods to the CBD core.
- 17 Develop additional public parking in West Lebanon.