

3. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1. Background

To understand Sheffield's economic base, public input was sought through community workshops, public surveys, and the work of the Economic Development Sub-committee. The direct participation by local stakeholders not only resulted in an economic profile of the community but a realistic evaluation of Sheffield's economic strengths and weaknesses. Various data sources were used to create a profile, which illustrates the potential for and constraints to future economic growth in Sheffield.

In developing a plan for Sheffield's future economic development the broader notion of community development should be a strong underlying theme. Community development relates to Sheffield's well being and the quality of life of its residents as well as fundamental business retention and expansion goals. Economic development does not have to be at odds with other community goals. Attributes such as open space, agricultural lands, community character, or significant natural resources can and do enhance the Town's desire to increase income, employment, and fiscal strength, so should be supported by economic development not have economic development occur at the expense of these essential attributes. For this reason, the overall goal of this section is to identify economic growth opportunities in keeping with community character and quality of life in Sheffield.

Overall, the Sheffield economy has been steadily rising over the past 10 years as measured by total annual payroll (up 76% since 1991), by the number of business establishments (45% increase), and by total employment (37% increase). Since 1990, the average total growth in the trade and service sectors in the South Route 7 Corridor Subregion has been nearly 14%. Sheffield has accounted for a significant amount of this growth ranking 2nd only to Lee in percent increase in the Subregion. There has also been a steady resurgence of agriculture and related industries and the antiques and tourism-related industries remain strong.

2. Overview of Economic Issues

Facts: General Socio-Economic Statistics

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Sheffield</u>	<u>National</u>
Total Population, 2000	3,335	272,928,770
Total Housing Units, 2000	1,634	NA
Number of Households	1,358	102,437,178
Median HH Income, 1999	\$45,082	\$39,994
HH Income Under \$50K	19.4%	62.3%
HH Income \$50-\$100K	28.4%	28.4%
HH Income Over \$100K	13.8%	9.3%
Average Home Value	\$153,600	\$111,667
Average Rent	\$565	\$414

Source: Census 2000

South Berkshire's scenic beauty, equal proximity between Boston and New York City, and cultural opportunities define the area's attraction for visitors and second homeowners. These same qualities maintain a high quality of life for year-round residents, but also make it a challenging place for them to live and work. An overview of key local and regional economic trends follows:

- Overall, Sheffield's collection of businesses is well balanced for a small rural community with a broad distribution of employment in several sectors including agriculture, manufacturing and tourism related businesses and services.
- Sheffield's unemployment rate has consistently been lower than the state over the past 15 years, and in 2001 the town reached a 13-year low of only 2% unemployment.
- While some traditional sources of employment such as manufacturing have been steadily declining in Berkshire County and the State as well, others like agriculture and tourism have changed or moved with the times and continue to be an integral part of the economy.
- In most South County communities, including Sheffield, the economic base is small and comprised mostly of lower-wage service jobs.
- Economic development is a primary concern in Berkshire County as the loss in population and employers (although not in Sheffield) over several decades has resulted in a diminished regional workforce.
- The cost of housing regionally, somewhat driven by the strong second home demand, has climbed markedly, adding to the recent influx of year-round labor force.
- Sheffield was the only community in the South Berkshire Subregion where the ratio of jobs per establishment declined during the 1990s meaning that the average business in Sheffield is getting smaller (this likely reflects the number of people who are self-employed).
- Employers in the South County housing market pay the least competitive wages in Berkshire County.
- As of January 2003, a total of 188 employers were identified in Sheffield,¹ 158 private for-profit and non-profit businesses and 30 non-consumer services (i.e. organizations, private schools, government services, and religious institutions).
- Between 1992 and 2001, Sheffield residents employed in the trade sector increase by 28% and those in the service sector increased by over 73%.

¹ The Sheffield Business Inventory was obtained in September 2002 from InfoUSA, an online market analysis service, and reviewed for accuracy by the Sheffield Assessors Office in January, 2003.

- The median sales price for single-family homes has risen sharply in the last 5 years from \$124,750 in 1998 to \$212,000 in 2002 (an increase of 70%).
- The Rural District comprises the vast majority of land in Sheffield (94%) and contains the highest number of businesses of the 4 zoning districts in Town.
- Local residents were asked “what type of businesses would you like to see encouraged or discouraged in town?” and the highest responses were: Eating Establishments (89%), Agricultural Businesses (88%), Home Businesses (85%), and Professional and Personal Services (80%).

3. Guiding Principles for Economic Enhancement

In evaluating local and regional economic conditions, many new ideas were generated for Sheffield’s economic development. In order to formulate and carry out effective economic enhancement strategies the following guiding principles are recommended for Sheffield which were grouped under the following guiding principles to formalize and implement effective economic enhancement strategies 1) Provide business representation and support cottage industries; 2) Enhance town identity; 3) Update Business Park criteria; 4) Upgrade technology and reduce energy use; 5) Update zoning and bylaws; 6) Support agriculture and forestry industries; and 7) Develop tourism:

- Local economic development efforts should focus on maintaining/enhancing Sheffield’s diverse economy, its rural character and increasing wage levels for local residents
- Ensure that land use regulations and policies effectuate the type and location of business development desired by the community and supportable by the local market.
- Identify and seek out economic development programs aimed at balancing the desire to lessen the residential burden for local services while providing new incentives for targeted business investment and expansion.
- Plan for infrastructure improvements needed to support existing and attract new businesses to targeted areas.
- Involve local business leaders in developing and implementing marketing and business development programs; networking and coordinating among existing businesses; and working in partnership with town government and the community.
- Initiate programs for business retention, expansion and recruitment strategies which target employment opportunities for local residents at the same time, creating training opportunities to increase the skill levels of its labor force
- Build off Berkshire County’s reputation as “the nation’s premier cultural resort” in support of the many Sheffield businesses oriented toward visitors.
- Expand the local economy through eco-tourism opportunities, which has potential but which require an organized planning, marketing and infrastructure enhancement effort.

4. Regional Economic Trends

Sheffield’s business composition and labor force is closely tied to the regional economy. In fact, according to the 2000 Census an estimated two-thirds of the local workforce is employed at business establishments outside of Sheffield. The community is particularly tied to a 7-town region of South Berkshire County referred to in this section as the **South Route 7 Corridor Subregion**.² This area

² A fuller description of this Subregion and its socio-demographic trends are provided in [Section 2.1: Who We Are and How We Live of the Master Plan](#).

is comprised of the towns located directly or in close proximity to the Route 7 Corridor including Lenox, Lee, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge, Great Barrington, Egremont, and Sheffield. Additionally, Canaan and other points to the south provide employment opportunities to Sheffield residents. The economic lifeblood of the Subregion is Route 7 itself, which serves as the primary north-south gateway into the Berkshires for residents and visitors. However, in Sheffield the highest number of businesses in any of zoning areas are in the broad rural zone, likely cottage industries and home-based businesses and the self-employed that might not be so evident in the Census, indicating a broad economic base and perhaps one of the reasons for Sheffield's 2% unemployment rate.

Size of Employment Base in South Rt. 7 Corridor Subregion, 2000 ³					
Community	Total Establishments	Total Employment	Statewide Wage Rank in Est.	% Service Jobs	Ave. Jobs Per Establishment
Egremont	48	280	337	34.3%	5.8
G. Barrington	462	4,632	259	37.2%	10.0
Lee	277	3,507	171	23.0%	12.7
Lenox	282	3,650	276	52.0%	12.9
Sheffield	120	1,221	187	24.1%	10.2
Stockbridge	108	1,316	265	66.3%	12.2
W. Stockbridge	60	277	295	19.5%	4.6
Total & Avg.	1,357	14,883	256	0	9.8

Source: Mass. Dept. of Employment & Training

Employment Base

South County's employment base is comprised mainly of private-sector workers (including private schools). During the 1990s, the total number of establishments in the Subregion grew by over 30% while the employment base grew by 17%. Sheffield was

the only community in the Subregion where the ratio of jobs per establishment declined during the 1990's indicating a trend in small business development⁴, which may be somewhat attributable to self-employment and the high number of home-based businesses and cottage industries. The increasing number of smaller businesses, both locally and regionally, is consistent with a developing trend in the northeast United States where people are finding less employment opportunities in larger corporations and are electing to work for smaller businesses or to start new home-based businesses. Even so, Sheffield still has more jobs per establishment than the subregional average. (See chart on next page.)

³ The "Total Establishments" figure is an estimate from the Massachusetts Department of Employment & Training. This figure is significantly less than town estimates and marketing firm estimates used later in this report. Town data is considered to be the most accurate and should be in terms estimating the number and type of local businesses. (State information is used for consistency in regional comparisons only).

⁴ It must be pointed out that one factor that may lead to an underestimate of local jobs is the difficulty in obtaining accurate self-employment data, which may be a substantial component of the local and regional economy.

South Rt. 7 Subregion Employment and Housing Units, 1990-2000				
Town	1990		2000	
	Employment	Total Housing Units	Employment	Total Housing Units
Egremont	334	801	280	866
G. Barrington	4,035	3,168	4,632	3,352
Lee	2,946	2,675	3,507	2,927
Lenox	3,504	2,410	3,650	2,713
Sheffield	1,007	1,502	1,221	1,634
Stockbridge	1,322	1,551	1,316	1,571
W. Stockbridge	316	722	277	769
Total & Ave.	13,464	12,829	14,883	13,832

Source: Mass. Dept. of Employment & Training

Wages – Sheffield is also above the curve in a comparison of average wages, having the second highest in the Subregion. However, throughout the Subregion, including in Sheffield, the growing cost of housing has outpaced growth in wages. While business and jobs have expanded over the past 10 years in the seven-town area, wages remain generally flat compared with other areas of the State, including other resort areas. It is not surprising that wages in Berkshire County are lower than the statewide median given the rural character of the region and distance from major economic centers. However, the majority of communities fall well below the first quartile of the State’s wage hierarchy. Additionally, employers in the high-cost South County housing market pay the least competitive wages, although Sheffield is very close to the whole county average and well above the Subregion average. This statistic reinforces local and regional concerns that economic development strategies must include measures to expand affordable housing opportunities⁵.

Wages and Composition of Employment Base, 2000					
Town/County	Average Wage	Services Employment	Trade Employment	Total	% Services and Trade
Massachusetts	\$ 40,127	1,104,390	728,442	3,165,520	57.9%
Berkshire Area	\$ 29,579	21,933	15,283	61,595	60.4%
S. Rt. 7 Corridor Area					
Egremont	\$ 16,303	96	100	280	70.0%
Great Barrington	\$ 25,557	1,722	1,668	4,632	73.2%
Lee	\$ 29,403	806	1,187	3,507	56.8%
Lenox	\$ 24,414	1,898	858	3,650	75.5%
Sheffield	\$ 28,511	294	154	1,221	36.7%
Stockbridge	\$ 25,285	873	129	1,316	76.1%
W. Stockbridge	\$ 22,591	54	85	277	50.2%
Total	\$ 24,581	5,743	4,181	14,883	66.7%

Source: Mass. Dept. of Employment & Training

5. Housing for Everyone: Housing Needs, Barriers & Opportunities in South-Central Towns of Berkshire County. Community Opportunities Group, December 2002

While lower wages in South County are attributable to the prevalence of part-time or seasonal employment, an additional factor may also be the composition of the employment base. In other regions of the State, public sector jobs have driven up wage levels whereas most Berkshire County communities have low public sector employment and limited local municipal staff. Part-time employees and volunteers handle much of the public sector work in Sheffield.

Jobs-to-Housing Ratio - The seven-town Subregion has an inter-local employment base with a ratio of jobs to year-round housing units of 1.3 (i.e. there are 1.3 jobs for every year-round home within the Subregion). Economists consider a 1.5+ jobs-to-homes ratio to be optimal but the Subregion is reasonably adequate given its tourist orientation, rural nature and changing economy. Sheffield's jobs-to-homes ratio is less than the regional average and about ½ of neighboring Great Barrington, which is a regional employment center and has a significant amount of lower wage service and trade jobs. In fact, for towns employing more than 1,000 people, Sheffield has a lowest ratio of jobs to housing (0.859) than any other. This ratio grew slightly during the 1990s. While the ratio could be an indicator as to how the lack of lower cost housing may be impacting Sheffield's labor force it is likely also indicative of the strong and growing self-employment economy.

The jobs-to-housing ratio may also be influenced by the rise in average age of the Sheffield population from 34 to 41 years old over the past 20 years as more residents are reaching retirement age in town. (See *Section 2: "Who We Are and How We Live"* for demographic indicators). This change requires an examination as to why the young labor force is declining and what business demands are emerging. In light of the fact that Sheffield's population has grown 22% over the past 20 years and is expected to continue to grow at an even higher rate (25% from 1990-2010), Sheffield should consider how its changing needs would influence the business community and visa versa.

Employment, Labor Force and Housing Indicators, 2000					
Town/County	Jobs in Location	Total Labor Force	Ratio Jobs: Labor Force	Yr. Round Housing Units	Ratio Jobs: Housing
Massachusetts	3,165,520	3,277,908	0.966	252,818	1.252
Berkshire Area	61,595	65,411	0.942	60,046	1.026
S. Rt. 7 Corridor Area					
Egremont	280	744	0.376	624	0.449
Great Barrington	4,632	4,137	1.120	3,116	1.487
Lee	3,507	2,872	1.221	2,542	1.38
Lenox	3,650	2,341	1.559	2,354	1.551
Sheffield	1,221	1,684	0.725	1,422	0.859
Stockbridge	1,316	999	1.317	1,066	1.235
W. Stockbridge	277	814	0.340	632	0.438
Total	14,883	13,591	1.095	11,756	1.266

Source: Mass. Dept. of Employment & Training

Subregion Jobs-to-Labor Ratio - Compared to Berkshire County and the State as a whole, the South County Subregion appears to have a slightly higher jobs-to-labor ratio. Compared to the County as a whole, the region’s jobs-to-labor ratio implies a better balance between employment and place of residence – or more opportunities to work locally or within a small “commuter-shed”⁶. However, this area also has a substantial amount of lower-wage, part-time or seasonally dependant jobs suggesting that a job-to-labor ratio of 1.1 (which may be considered positive) may actually be indicative of a part-time economy where people must work more than one job to make a living. Multiple jobs are very common. It may also indicate that jobs are difficult to fill within the labor market, or a gap between local wages and the cost of living in the community.

5. **Sheffield’s Economic Base**

Business Inventory & Characteristics⁷ - As of January 2003, a total of 188 employers were identified in Sheffield including 158 private for-profit and non-profit businesses and 30 non-consumer services (i.e. organizations, private schools, government services, and religious institutions). A full inventory of Sheffield businesses is included in Appendix 5. As the table below indicates, the largest number of Sheffield businesses fall into the retail and services categories, which also provides the highest number of local jobs. The largest number of jobs in Sheffield is in the public administration category with 198 employed in 2003. In all, the public sector accounts for nearly 23% of all jobs in town primarily through the South Berkshire Regional School District and town government services.

□ *Please see Map # 12:
‘Town of Sheffield
Economic Development Inventory’
behind the MAPS tab.*

For-Profit Businesses - Retail trade businesses have the highest sales volume in Sheffield with over \$25 million in sales in 2002. Wholesale trade and manufacturing businesses also represent a significant portion of the local economy with over \$22 million and \$13 million in sales volume, respectively. However, as is the trend in the rest of the country, manufacturing is expected to taper off somewhat as this industry sector as a whole continues to decline, consolidate, and relocate, often out of the country. Sheffield, having a higher component of manufacturing jobs than neighboring towns, could experience greater impact if this occurs. A mitigating factor is that the vast majority of those working at the largest manufacturing employer do not live in Sheffield.

The typical Sheffield business is small and owner-operated. On average, local businesses employ just over 5 people and two of the key business sectors – retail trade and services – average even less.

⁶ See Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

⁷ The Sheffield Business Inventory was obtained in September 2002 from InfoUSA, an online market analysis service, and reviewed for accuracy by the Sheffield Assessors Office in April 2003. Town records indicate there are approximately 117 additional businesses registered with the Town, which may include small cottage industries, home occupations, self-employed workers, those with business mailing addresses in town, and new businesses.

This may be a factor in future economic strategy as the vast majority of these businesses are located along Route 7 and utilize much of the commercially-zoned land in the corridor. However, small businesses have been emerging as cottage industries throughout town, most notably in the rural zones, and are a concern to residents who wish to maintain their neighborhoods as fully residential. Current regulations allow for this transition as long as businesses create a physical façade that conforms to residential housing. However, more consideration should be given to increased traffic, noise, lights, facades and the potential impact on the environment, and parameters for those be included in the regulations as well to maximize compatibility. Agricultural, forestry and antiques-related businesses are also important in these areas.

Most of the larger employers in the South County Subregion are located in Great Barrington, Lenox and Lee. The two largest employers are Canyon Ranch of the Berkshires in Lenox and Fairview Hospital in Great Barrington. In Sheffield the largest employers are Sheffield Plastics, Inc., although very few Sheffield residents work there, Mt. Everett Regional School District, and Berkshire School.

Size of Private Businesses in Sheffield		
Square Feet	Number	% of Total
0-2,499	72	44%
2,500-9,999	62	40%
10,000-39,999	22	14%
40,000+	3	2%

As is expected in a local economy with a high percentage of retail trade and service businesses, the average size of private businesses (in terms of square footage) in Sheffield is quite small. In fact, of the 158 private business establishments in town, 134 (or 84%) are less than 10,000 square feet. Only 3 industries in town exceed 40,000 square feet in floor space. This is an important

consideration for establishing dimensional zoning requirements on commercial and industrially zoned land such as minimum lot sizes, frontage, and setbacks. Generally, minimum lot sizes and frontage requirements in Sheffield General Business (GB) and Commercial (C) districts tend to be larger than necessary for the average business operation. At the same time, few regulations prevent large business lots from emerging in rural districts.

Retail trade, construction and service industries have been growing in Sheffield and are expected to continue to grow over the next 10 years. The total number of agricultural operations had declined slowly, but in recent years has begun to grow again and employment has increased steadily as a result of a new diversity in the field such as tree farmers, organic growers, and landscaping suppliers. Agricultural businesses represent 7% of local businesses and 9% of local employment and remain a very important part of the Sheffield economy with growing potential.

Private Businesses on the Route 7 Corridor		
Route 7	No. of Bus.	% of Total
Main Street	18	11%
N. Main Street	35	22%
S. Main Street	18	11%
Sheffield Plain Rd.	9	6%
Subtotal	80	50%

Sheffield's primary business corridor is along Route 7 but the entire rural landscape supports the economy through tourism, agriculture and second-home development. As illustrated on the Sheffield Business Inventory & Economic Opportunities Map, the major concentrations of businesses in town are located either directly on Route 7 or within ½ mile of the

roadway with many of the smaller home-based and cottage industries sprinkled throughout the rural district. This is consistent with the community's growing retail and service sectors, which are reliant on this major regional highway for traffic volumes and visibility and the proliferation of home-based businesses. Much of the retail trade sector is tourist-oriented and people visiting the Berkshires for vacations or weekend retreats heavily travel the Route 7 corridor.

Along the Route 7 corridor, the highest concentration of business are dispersed between the Great Barrington border at the North end of town and Silver Street with the highest percentage of businesses located in the Town Center. Access on the southern half of the corridor is controlled by the State and is largely undeveloped and undevelopable. However, much of this land is in agricultural use and serves as a rural gateway for tourists heading to the Berkshires. It is a critical part of the local economy as well as the regional economy.

Overall, Sheffield's inventory of businesses is well balanced for a small rural community with a broad distribution of employment in several sectors including agriculture, tourism-related and some manufacturing. However, business growth over the past 10 years has not kept pace with residential growth. This is reflected in the tax base, which shows marginal increase in commercial and industrial property values. (Residents have cited "high taxes" as an area of concern in the community survey although they are not high in comparison to surrounding communities.)

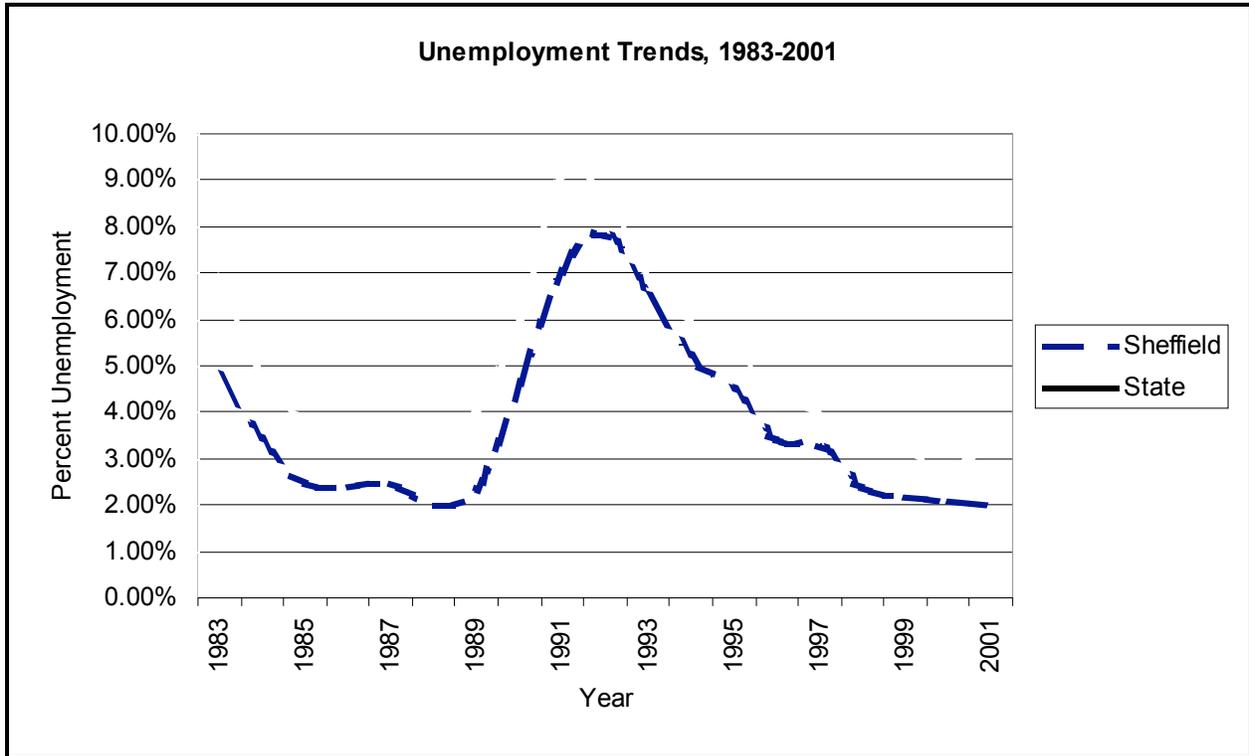
Non-Profit Sector - Sheffield has become a significant center of non-profit organizations, which provide employment as well as promote cultural and ecological tourism. Besides eight churches and a large private preparatory school, Berkshire School, these include:

- Landmark Volunteers, a national organization headquartered in Sheffield, attracting high school students to nationwide summer volunteer programs
- Bartholomew's Cobble and Colonel Ashley House, (Berkshire Center of a state-wide organization, Trustees of the Reservations)
- The Nature Conservancy (Berkshire Center of a large international organization) which employs a staff as well as volunteers from other geographies
- Sheffield Land Trust, a driving force for land and farm protection, sponsors numerous programs.
- Sweet Water Trust, a wilderness conservation foundation.
- Barrington Stage, a once seasonal theatre organization, performs at the Consolati Performing Arts Center at Mt. Everett High School, has expanded to year-round programs in town although their primary season remains the summer.
- Berkshire Choral Festival draws in over eleven hundred choristers each summer for five separate performances along with roughly 4000 concert goers, headquartered in Sheffield, with additional international performances after the Sheffield season.

- Sheffield Art League, a southern Berkshires organization whose art shows are based in Sheffield all summer long
- Sheffield Historical Society which owns several buildings open for tourism and sponsors lectures
- Sheffield Friendly Union, which owns and operates Dewey Hall, sponsors lectures and community events and has housed the Sheffield Senior Center for many years. The Hall is available for rent for additional activities.

In addition, many other organizations including the New York City Bicyclists Association and other bicycling groups, Appalachian Mountain Club, and informal hiking groups flock to Sheffield for eco-tourism. Sheffield can benefit from filling the needs of those who come for eco-tourism pursuits. However there are voids that need to be filled to fully capture the opportunities. These include public restroom facilities (there are none, not even at gas stations), public transportation, additional high quality restaurants, town brochures and coordinated programs.

The Labor Force - Over the past 20 years, Sheffield's labor force has declined and then steadily risen as the local and regional economy has changed and adjusted over time. From a high of 1,741 people in the labor force in 1984, this number dropped to 1,552 in 1990. During the same period of time, there was a national recession, and regional manufacturers that employed many Sheffield residents were rapidly scaling back or closing altogether. The drop in the labor force was coupled with a rise in unemployment, peaking in 1991 and 1992 with levels over 7%.



Labor force & Unemployment Trends in Sheffield; 1990-2001					
Year	Labor force	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment	Statewide
				Rate	Rate
1990	1,552	1,480	72	4.60%	6.00%
1991	1,555	1,446	109	7.00%	9.10%
1992	1,573	1,451	122	7.80%	8.60%
1993	1,655	1,547	108	6.50%	6.90%
1994	1,668	1,582	86	5.20%	6.00%
1995	1,671	1,596	75	4.50%	5.40%
1996	1,687	1,630	57	3.40%	4.30%
1997	1,740	1,683	57	3.30%	4.00%
1998	1,717	1,676	41	2.40%	3.30%
1999	1,698	1,661	37	2.20%	3.20%
2000	1,640	1,605	35	2.10%	2.60%
2001	1,712	1,678	34	2.00%	3.70%

Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Division of Employment and Training
(Local Area Statistics)

Since 1990 Sheffield's labor force has rebounded and steadily grown. With a full two-thirds of the 2000 population over the age of 16 (1,789) included, the Town's labor force exceeds the county and state levels as a percentage. Unemployment levels in Sheffield have also dropped significantly since 1991. While Sheffield's unemployment rate has consistently been lower than the state over the past 15 years, in 2001 the town reached a 13-year low of only 2% unemployment.

Employment by Business Sector

Overall, the Sheffield economy has been steadily rising over the past 10 years as measured by total annual payroll (up 76% since 1991), by the number of business establishments (45% increase), and by total employment (37% increase). However, a number of the individual business sectors have changed significantly as regional and national trends have affected Sheffield.

While government services, TCPU (transportation, communication, and public utilities), and FIRE (finance, insurance and real estate) have grown slowly and steadily over the past 15 years, the service and trade sectors have risen rapidly. Between 1992 and 2001, Sheffield residents employed in the trade sector increased by 28% and those in the service sector increased by over 73%.

In 1985 manufacturing industries employed the most Sheffield residents followed by government services. In 2001, manufacturing was still a significant employer with job numbers slightly above the 1985 levels. However, this sector has been declining over the past 5 years while, at the same time, the service sector has become Sheffield's largest employer. (See chart on next page.)

Trends in Employment and Wages in Sheffield, 1985-2001												
Year	Total Annual Payroll	Average Annual Wage	Establishments	Total Employment	Agriculture Forestry Fishing	Govt.	Const.	Manu.	TCPU	Trade	FIRE	Services
1985	13,784,900	14,854	83	928	Confidential	223	96	241	40	119	Conf.	185
1986	14,593,100	16,433	88	888	Confidential	199	99	218	41	119	Conf.	201
1987	16,104,200	17,409	97	925	Confidential	196	112	209	50	132	Conf.	205
1988	18,838,801	19,145	108	984	16	207	124	222	53	146	4	204
1989	20,690,740	20,265	110	1,021	29	Conf.	132	217	51	171	Conf.	212
1990	21,660,232	21,510	110	1,007	34	Conf.	114	240	52	136	Conf.	202
1991	21,797,951	22,589	102	965	30	Conf.	98	234	46	114	Conf.	199
1992	22,778,883	24,003	94	949	27	Conf.	77	243	41	132	16	192
1993			97	973	24	Conf.	65	268	44	134	15	197

	23,332,503	23,980										
1994	25,247,188	23,999	103	1,052	24	Conf.	72	289	48	142	14	223
1995	26,149,581	24,577	105	1,064	27	Conf.	73	280	46	152	Conf.	236
1996	28,248,443	24,867	118	1,136	33	Conf.	72	287	51	162	16	247
1997	31,056,648	25,709	118	1,208	47	Conf.	80	309	Conf.	145	16	265
1998	34,515,755	28,361	119	1,217	50	250	80	305	57	163	17	294
1999	34,812,126	28,511	120	1,221	57	239	101	300	57	154	19	294
2000	38,930,584	30,630	130	1271	64	58	117	297	50	183	15	300
2001	40,166,798	30,898	136	1300	69	248	145	272	49	169	15	333

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training; TCPU = Transportation, Communication and Public Utilities; FIRE = Finance, Insurance and Real Estate; Conf = data suppressed due to confidentiality; Note: Changes in industry definitions occurred in 1988, so data prior to that year are not strictly comparable to the more recent data.

As in the rest of the country, some traditional sources of employment such as manufacturing have been steadily declining in Berkshire County and the State. Conversely, residential growth, particularly in the South County Region, has spurred significant employment opportunities in the construction, retail trade, and service sectors. In Sheffield there has also been a steady resurgence of agriculture and related industries and the antiques and tourism related industries remain strong. Since 1990, the average total growth in the trade and service sectors in the South Route 7 Corridor Subregion has been nearly 14%. Sheffield has accounted for a significant amount of this growth ranking 2nd only to Lee in percent increase in the Subregion.

Employment Change in South Rt. 7 Corridor Communities ⁸					
Town/County	Total Employment			% Change	
	1990	1999	% Change	Trade Employment	Service Employment
Massachusetts	2,929,475	3,165,520	8.1%	4.1%	26.9%
Berkshire Area	61,023	61,595	0.9%	4.0%	13.9%
South Rt.7 Corridor Area					
Egremont	334	280	-16.2%	-11.5%	-22.0%
Great Barrington	4,035	4,632	14.8%	23.5%	4.6%
Lee	2,946	3,507	19.0%	39.6%	51.5%
Lenox	3,504	3,650	4.2%	-4.5%	3.7%
Sheffield	1,007	1,221	21.3%	13.2%	45.5%
Stockbridge	1,322	1,316	-0.5%	-37.7%	43.3%
W. Stockbridge	316	277	-12.3%	-27.4%	-43.8%
Total	13,464	14,883	10.5%	13.9%	13.9%

s. This table does not
elsewhere in Massachusetts.
ds of reporting of state
ying agency. This change
government employment

Since the late 1990s, the number of government jobs attributed to Berkshire County increased by 672 in one year – 1996-1997, when the reporting change went into effect.

Employment in the construction industry has also risen steadily in Sheffield over the past 10 years to an all-time high in 2001. This sector dropped off substantially in the early 1990s as the recession took hold and fewer homes were built. Since then, first and second home development has increased rapidly and the local construction industry has followed. It is also interesting to note that a direct result of the fast-paced residential development has been a surge in the number of small lawn care, landscaping, and other home service enterprises.

6. Real Estate Trends

Commercial & Industrial Property Values - Taxable commercial and industrial property value has gained little over the past 10 years in Sheffield due primarily to limited construction in these areas. The most common types of commercial and industrial building stock in Sheffield are warehousing, distribution facilities, and smaller and older retail establishments. These properties do not typically appreciate at a very high rate, and are not expected to increase the local tax base.

Residential Property Values & Home Sales - Unlike commercial and industrial property, residential property values have risen steadily since the early 1990s. Much of the residential development in Sheffield is categorized as second home development with generally lesser demands for municipal facilities and services. While second home development has buffered the overall burden from residential development over the past 10 years, without an appreciable increase in commercial and industrial property values, the effect on the overall municipal tax rate has not been significant and it continues to rise. Additionally, more second homes are being converted into full-time residences as more part-time residents reach retirement age or are able to conduct their business from Sheffield due to technological advances and telecommuting. This trend may also place more demand on local services.

The median sales price for homes in Sheffield has increased significantly over the past 10 years. Adding all residential property together (single family and multi-family), the median sales price has doubled from \$85,000 to \$170,000. The vast majority of homes sold over the past 5 years in Sheffield have been single-family homes. The median sales price for single-family homes has also risen sharply in the last 5 years from \$124,750 in 1998 to \$212,000 in 2002 (an increase of 70%).

There are at least two significant relationships between businesses and residents relative to real estate: (1) In the community survey, respondents noted that “high taxes” were what they “liked least” about living in Sheffield. It is important for residents to understand that high taxes are partly a result of having such a small business base with which to share municipal costs and of the increased residential development, which typically costs the town more in services than it pays in taxes. They will need to make trade-offs about whether to encourage businesses (although not all businesses provide significant tax base so careful analysis of what to encourage should be done) or to continue to shoulder the tax base; (2) Businesses indicate being hampered in recruiting personnel by the high cost of housing.

7. Economic Opportunities by Zoning District

Commercial & Industrial Properties by Zoning District					
Zoning District	Total Acreage	Percent of Total Land	Existing Bus.*	% of Total Businesses	Ratio of Acres to Businesses
Rural	28,178	94%	61	38%	462
Commercial	537	2%	37	23%	15
General Business	827	2%	12	7%	69
Village Center	760	2%	52	32%	15

* Based on interpretation of Sheffield GIS Maps and review by the Assessors Office

Sheffield is divided into four (4) zoning districts:

- Commercial (C)
- Rural (R)
- General Business (GB)
- Village Center (VC).

Approximately 2,124 acres of land are zoned for commercial and industrial uses (or 6% of all lands in Town). A fair amount of land remains available in Sheffield to accommodate future development between the Commercial, General Business, and Village Center Zoning Districts. Most of this land is centered on Route 7 and within a ¼ mile of the highway except for the Sheffield Business Park. There are also substantial opportunities for infill development and redevelopment in the C, GB and VC Districts, and small home-based businesses in various parts of Town, primarily in the Rural District where numerous cottage and home-based businesses already exist.

Rural District - The Rural District comprises the vast majority of land in Sheffield (94%) and contains the highest number of businesses of the 4 zoning districts in Town. Several types of business including many traditional commercial and industrial uses are allowed by right or special permit. A number of well-established Sheffield businesses are located in the Rural District. Examples such as farms, sand and gravel operations, small distribution centers, manufacturing, landscaping and nursery operations and in-home businesses are scattered throughout Town.

While some existing commercial and industrial uses may not be compatible with newer residential development, they are grandfathered and permitted to continue as they are. However, non-residential uses permitted by right and special permit in the Rural District should be carefully

reviewed to prevent potential negative impacts on the surrounding areas in terms of traffic, noise, lighting, pollution, aesthetic impacts, and property values. Upwards limits might be established in terms of noise, light, traffic, etc. as standing guidelines for the Town. As noted above, 38% of Sheffield's businesses are located in the Rural District (a predominately residential zone), which is more than in each of the Commercial, Village Center and General Business Districts.

The Rural District is well positioned for economic development in terms of agricultural businesses, low key home-based businesses, and discrete recreational and ecotourism businesses, all of which could play a major role in the Town's future economy. The residential areas along the Housatonic River and Taconic Ridge offer many opportunities for passive recreational uses such as canoeing, camping, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and a variety of other activities that would expand and diversify the local economy.

There are also few areas within the Rural District that may provide opportunities for small-scale commercial development serving the surrounding neighborhood area. Providing basic services (i.e. food and other necessities) would be a convenience to residents and possibly reduce the number of vehicle trips and length of travel for everyday needs. There is potential for these small nodes along Route 41 and in the Ashley Falls Village Area.

Node Development

Nodes are small scale mixed use districts that provide basic services and conveniences to the surrounding neighborhood such as a small grocery, restaurant, pharmacy, or cleaning service.

A significant economic opportunity in the Rural District exists for home-based occupations. There is a growing national trend in "work at home" and small in-home businesses. Sheffield has home occupation regulations permitting small scale and discrete in-home businesses. Home businesses provide an important opportunity for small entrepreneurs and should be encouraged. They can often serve as business incubators for small growing operations that eventually may relocate to established commercial and industrial

districts without a great deal of recruitment effort by the community. Home-based businesses also keep local and talented business people in the community.

General Business District - The four (4) General Business Districts (GB) comprise 827 acres (or 2% of the land in town) and are dispersed along or in close proximity of Route 7. In all, only 12 businesses (including agricultural operations) were identified in this zoning district. Two sections are located in the northern part of Sheffield: on the west side of Route 7 between Lime Kiln Road and South Egremont Road; and east of Route 7 between the Housatonic River, Kellogg Road and Boardman Street. There are only 9 businesses located in these two areas and several development constraints are present including wetlands, valuable farmlands and the close proximity of the railroad tracks parallel to Route 7 on the west side.

Another area zoned GB is located just south of the Town Center on the east side of Route 7 and bordered by the Housatonic River. While this area constitutes the largest section of the GB District, several constraints exist including the floodplain along the Housatonic River, wetlands, and a large percentage of lands located in the Water Supply Protection District. Most of this land is also actively farmed, which is probably the best long-term economic use of the area.

The **Sheffield Business Park** is included in the GB District and located in the southeast section of town between East Stahl Road and Hewins Street. The Park was previously a working farm and enrolled in the Chapter 61 Program. The Town created the Park in 1994 when it exercised its “right of first refusal” and bought the property, which had been planned for a residential subdivision. The Town subsequently received a Public Works Economic Development (PWED) grant from the State to construct the roadway and install utilities.

The Sheffield Business Park was subdivided into 5 parcels each just over 4 acres. The original intention of the Town was to provide an opportunity for light manufacturing and other clean industries that would add to the tax base, create employment opportunities for local residents and be compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood. The buildout projections for the park were anticipated at 30 years with the first tenant perhaps in 7-10 years, since it was more important to have the “right” first tenant to set the tone for the Business Park than to quickly get just any tenant. The Town is still looking for that right tenant, although a number of inquiries have been made over the years by various businesses, and changes in the business and economic climate since the Park was initiated, create a need to update some of the criteria to recognize the full potential of this resource. Some of the potential constraints to attracting light industry and manufacturing are as follows:

Update and revise the criteria used to consider and accept tenants for the Business Park, to bring in jobs and tax revenues. Changes in the business and economic climate since the Business Park was created nearly 10 years ago (recognizing the local constraints to attracting light industry and clean manufacturing, in addition to the national trend of such jobs moving overseas), create a need to update some of the criteria to recognize the full potential of this resource..

- Manufacturing and related industries have been declining in Sheffield, the region and the nation with much of the industry moving overseas.
- Sheffield has a relatively small labor market to support manufacturing and only 2% unemployment, so many prospective businesses would have to bring/relocate their workforce with them.
- Sheffield housing prices have been rising dramatically over the past 5 years making it more difficult for those employed by manufacturing industries to find affordable housing locally.
- The lack of public water and sewer services sharply narrows the types of businesses that can locate in the Park
- The minimum lot size of 4 acres is fairly restrictive and may be more than necessary or desired by smaller businesses.
- The remote location is less desirable for industries that rely on good access to major highways such as the Massachusetts Turnpike and railroad service and other business parks closer to the Turnpike and railroad are still looking for tenants and will draw them first.
- Several other cities and towns in Berkshire County have a surplus of existing Town land and buildings targeted locally and by the state for economic development. Most also have an advantage over Sheffield in attracting manufacturing and light industry in terms of labor force, housing prices, infrastructure, and highway access.

The Town should reexamine the long-term goals for the Sheffield Business Park. It may be that the land is better suited to attract smaller businesses in growing local industry sectors such as services and construction, or to support growth sectors such as agriculture, retail and tourism. For example, there are several types of businesses located on Route 7 that are not reliant on traffic and visibility for businesses. Some examples include construction, wholesale landscaping, agricultural processing,

warehousing and distribution, automobile repair and services, and storage facilities. If these types of business were to relocate into the Sheffield Business Park, lands on Route 7 could be reused for growing business sectors such as retail and services. Any plans to expand the types of uses in the Park, however, must consider the needs of surrounding residential areas in terms of traffic, landscaping, screening, and other potential impacts. In concert with plans for the Business Park, Sheffield should plan for low-cost housing to attract potential employees in order to increase the attractiveness of the Park. The Town also needs to keep the Park attractive to maintain the appeal to a diverse group of high-quality businesses.

Commercial District – The Commercial District is located along Route 7 in three locations including the northern boundary between the town line and Lime Kiln Road; the area south of Sheffield-Egremont Road and north of Cook Road; and on the west side of Route 7 south of Root Lane to Rannapo Road. There are generally scattered commercial developments in this district between open spaces, wetland areas, farm fields, and the existing tree line.

Existing development in the area consists primarily of agriculture, landscaping businesses, storage facilities contractor yards, auto service and repair, light industrial uses, and storage operations. There are retail establishments mostly in the middle and southern areas of the district. While the district permits a variety of retail, service and light industrial uses, there is a lack of consistency in the types of development existing and desired in the district.

While there are a number of undeveloped or underdeveloped parcels in the Commercial district, the lack of utilities, existing wetland and floodplain issues, and limited depth on the west side due to the proximity of the rail line limit development opportunities. Under the existing scenario, this area is likely to grow as a low-density, mixed-use area with limited retail, auto services, storage, and light industrial uses. However, its best potential may be for low-density, well landscaped/screened light industrial (i.e. distribution) and medium-density residential uses that require limited utilities, protect the corridor's natural resources, enhance the existing tree line, and preserve farmlands.

Village Center District - The Village Center District (VC) is located in two (2) areas of Town, the Town Center in the central portion of the Route 7 corridor and Ashley Falls Village Area. In total, there are approximately 760 acres of land between these two portions of the district.

The Town Center portion of the VC includes lands along Route 7 from Cook Road to approximately 1,000 feet south of Root Lane. It is bordered to the east by the Housatonic River and to the west by Hubbard Brook, Schenob Brook, the north side of Berkshire School Road, east side of Salisbury Road and north side of Root Lane. The heart of the district is the Town Center, which includes a number of well-preserved historic buildings around Main Street. This portion of the VC district includes a variety of residential, commercial, religious and public uses. At the beginning of 2003, there were approximately 52 businesses of which most are in the service or retail (including restaurants) category. These are mostly small shops, restaurants, antique stores and other limited commercial uses.

The speed of traffic along Main Street is a concern in the district as this portion of Route 7 is generally wide and flat as it bisects the Town Center. However, the high traffic volumes provide excellent exposure to local businesses and with high quality signage (both public and private) as well as visibility, business operators may be able to take better advantage of passing motorists if speeds were reduced.

Several public improvements have been made to the Town Center over the past 10 years including new street trees, sidewalks, public parking, landscaping, rehabilitation of historic buildings and pedestrian amenities (the town has completed the first part of a town green enhancement project, but is waiting for the remaining funds from the state). However, of critical importance in the near future is enhancing pedestrian safety at crosswalks and improving the pedestrian connection between businesses across Route 7, the Sheffield Public Library and public schools located on Berkshire School Road.

There is limited space for future development in the VC District. The lack of public sewerage in Town is also a limiting factor in terms of business expansion in the VC District. However, infill development opportunities exist along the street frontage of Main Street, Maple Avenue, Berkshire School Road and Root Lane. In the Ashley Falls Village Center there are also infill and reuse opportunities for existing building along East Main Street, Railroad Street and School Street. The best development and redevelopment potential for both village centers is to expand small retail, restaurant, and service type uses that accommodate both resident needs and tourist desires.

Expanding Land Area for Economic Development - Increasing the amount of commercial-industrial land in Sheffield may not generate significant additional tax revenue. The Sheffield Industrial Park was established in 1994 and remains entirely vacant. The trend in local business growth is in second home and tourist-related industries, primarily located along or in close proximity to Route 7. It may be more beneficial to focus economic development efforts on enhancing this corridor through recycling, reusing and infill development on existing land and buildings.

An area of opportunity could also be in providing more transportation facilities to and from the various parts of Sheffield and Ashley Falls. Train stops, such as expanding the Berkshire Scenic Railroad, or mini-bus stops might provide synergies between tourist and shopping locales.

Additionally, small cottage and home-based businesses are an important and growing segment of the local economy. Providing incentives for these types of businesses would reduce the consumption of land, enhance the value of existing commercial-industrial properties, and increase the tax base. This strategy would also complement the Town's interest in expanding eco-tourism business in the community, which is reliant on Sheffield's vast natural resources, farms, rural character and developing visitor amenities.

8. Local Preferences for Business Development

The Community-wide Survey conducted by the Master Plan Steering Committee in the fall of 2002 included responses on local economic issues, shopping habits, business development suggestions, and geographic preferences for new development and redevelopment.

When asked "*Which type of businesses do you currently use in Sheffield and/or elsewhere?*",

about 53% of the businesses listed below were used by respondents outside of Sheffield, and only 17% were used both in Sheffield and in other locations as can be expected in a rural community of

Sheffield's size. As shown in the table below, the most frequented location by respondents for business services outside Sheffield was by far Great Barrington:

Type of Business Used	In Sheffield	%	Elsewhere	%	Both	%
a. General Retail	7	3%	229	92%	14	5%
b. Financial Service	136	52%	75	29%	52	20%
c. Automobile Services	150	63%	62	26%	25	11%
d. Food and Eating Est.	45	17%	126	49%	87	34%
e. House/Home Improvement	34	19%	125	68%	24	13%
f. Tourist Related	17	20%	59	71%	7	9%
g. Agricultural	88	54%	41	25%	34	21%
h. Pro and Personal	30	15%	134	66%	38	19%
i. Other Merchandise or Services	13	12%	70	64%	26	24%
Total	520	30%	921	53%	307	17%

Local residents were asked “*What type of businesses would you like to see encouraged or discouraged in town?*”,

and the highest responses were: Eating Establishments (89%), Agricultural Businesses (88%), Home Businesses (85%), and Professional and Personal Services (80%). Of the 12 businesses categories listed in the responses, a narrow majority of respondents identified 4 that should be discouraged including: Gravel Removal (83%), Industrial (63%), Manufacturing (53%), and House & Home Improvement Businesses (51%).

Type of Business	Encourage	%	Discourage	%	Total
a. General Retail	111	60%	73	40%	184
b. Financial Service	95	62%	59	38%	154
c. Automobile Services	94	53%	82	47%	176
d. Food and Eating Establishments	179	89%	23	11%	202
e. House/Home Improvement	70	49%	74	51%	144
f. Tourist Related	107	63%	62	37%	169
g. Agricultural	154	88%	22	12%	176
h. Professional & Personal Services	128	80%	32	20%	160
i. Home Business	141	85%	24	15%	165
j. Manufacturing	89	47%	99	53%	188
k. Industrial	69	37%	119	63%	188
l. Gravel Removal	29	17%	142	83%	171
Total	1,266	61%	811	39%	2077

In terms of the specific placement of different types of businesses in Sheffield, residents identified the Town Center as the best location for most types of businesses including: General Retail, Financial Services, Automotive Services, Food and Eating Establishments, Home Improvement Businesses, and Tourist Related Businesses. Agricultural uses were recommended to be allowed anywhere in town as were home businesses. (However, in subsequent public forums, individuals were concerned with home businesses expanding to the size where trucks and traffic may create problems but are then “grandfathered.”) Industrial and manufacturing businesses were recommended for placement in the Sheffield Business Park.

Townpeople were asked *“What other types of businesses, if any, would you like to see encouraged or discouraged?”*

The most common businesses supported by residents were restaurants, “nothing”, grocery stores, manufacturing, and community/outdoor activity. Those most commonly discouraged by respondents were antiques, retail outlets, and large franchise businesses.

9. Existing Support for Economic Development

Public Infrastructure - The limited public water system (Sheffield Water Company) and lack of public sewer in Sheffield constrain the types of economic development that are viable. The Rural District, Sheffield Business Park, and large portions of Route 7 are reliant on private on-site septic and water systems. This significantly limits the location and density of commercial and industrial development.

While the community survey indicates support for building up businesses in the Town Center, Ashley Falls Village, and Sheffield Business Park, it may be difficult without the availability of public sewer. Even in the Rural District where home occupations are encouraged, it may be difficult to accommodate certain types of uses because of limited sewage capacity. Alternatives to public sewers that have been used in other rural communities include soils-based zoning, smaller communal septic systems, and package treatment plants. These treatment systems (which are further described in Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms) could be explored for potential applications in Sheffield.

Transportation – The location of Route 7 in Sheffield and the proximity to other major highways (the Massachusetts Turnpike is approximately 20 miles north of Town) provide some economic opportunity for commercial, light industrial, and distribution type businesses. However, the speed of traffic and several potentially dangerous intersections in Town is a concern of the community and needs to be addressed. There is currently no regular transit service in Sheffield but taxi service is available through companies in Great Barrington. There is no passenger rail service in Town to support the tourist trade in town and only limited freight service. Regionally, the largest commercial airport is the Bradley International Airport in Hartford, Connecticut, about an hour from Sheffield and Albany International Airport, about an hour and a quarter.

Organizational Support – There are a number of local and regional organizations that support Sheffield business development in various ways. The Sheffield Industrial Development Commission was established in the early 1990s to support the development of the Sheffield Business Park. Along with the Town Administration, the Commission’s primary role is assisting local businesses to expand, attracting new industry, seeking supporting grants and other incentives, creating new job opportunities, expanding the tax base, and generally guiding commercial and industrial growth to appropriate areas.

Many Sheffield businesses are members of the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce located in Great Barrington. This non-profit organization includes members from 8 communities in South County as well as portions of northwest Connecticut and eastern New York State. The Chamber’s primary purpose is to promote the Southern Berkshire Area, to provide information for existing and prospective businesses about economic opportunities in the region, and to facilitate networking and “business to business” development within the region.

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) provides social-economic data, mapping, and grant assistance to all communities in Berkshire County. BRPC is also responsible for developing the regional economic development plan and guiding its implementation. They have assisted many communities in the region, including Sheffield, in preparing for economic development and obtaining grant funding for various related activities. Other regional organizations that can offer economic development assistance to Sheffield are the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce in Pittsfield and the Berkshire Council for Growth, which is dedicated to the recruitment of skilled labor, job retention, expansion of existing businesses, and new business development in the region.

The Sheffield Association, which was created in 2001, assists local residents and businesses through promotion and events. The Sheffield Times provides a vehicle by which businesses can advertise to customers and be profiled. The September Sheffield in Celebration Week highlights businesses through two village fairs on consecutive weekends whereby farmers, crafts people, local businesses and organizations can market their products and services. The Farmers Market, created by a Farmers Market Association was established in 2001 and is held on Fridays in Town Center. The market offers a venue through which the agricultural community can reach its customers directly.

While existing local and regional economic development organizations can provide Sheffield with a variety of assistance, the local business community should consider creating an organization that could specifically and most effectively address the needs of Sheffield. The Economic Development Sub-Committee held the Sheffield Business Forum in April 2003, where a need surfaced for creating a business association. The purpose would be to learn from each other, thereby increasing efficiency and exploring cooperative ventures. Such efforts might be extensions or jointly sponsored programs of existing organizations such as the South Berkshire Chamber of Commerce or the Sheffield Association, or, possibly a new organization.

Given existing economic conditions, trends, and resident preferences, there appear to be opportunities and support for expanding agriculture, eco-tourism, and small retail and service sector businesses in Town. However, making it happen will require a sustained effort driven by the private sector in partnership with the community.

Economic Development Action Plan

Overall Goal

To identify economic growth opportunities in keeping with community character and quality of life in Sheffield.

Economic Development Objectives

- 1. Ensure that the community and town boards are involved in the economic development process.**
- 2. Guide economic development toward targeted locations where it is most appropriate and desired.**
- 3. Foster cooperation between the public sector and business communities.**

The benefits of a successful economic development program go well beyond those who own property or businesses. Economic success is felt throughout the entire community in terms of: new employment, shopping and cultural opportunities; improved property values and an increased tax base; preservation of historic buildings and heritage; and general financial stability.

Economic Development Recommendations

The following economic development strategies and actions are based on the overall goals, the business inventory, survey and analysis; the hard work of the Steering Committee and Economic Development Subcommittee, and extensive public input.

Recommendation 1. Establish an advocacy group for Sheffield's Business Community.

Quickly form a Committee made up of both public and private sector representatives. The Selectmen might do this with the South Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, or perhaps begin with the Business Park Committee as a base and expand. It will be essential to include farms and forest industries. It is recommended that a vehicle be established to advocate for Sheffield's business community: both small and large, for profit and not-for-profit. See more discussion below in the Agricultural and Tourism sections.

- a. Promote Sheffield and Ashley Falls businesses.**
- b. Assist businesses to understand and comply with town regulations.**
- c. Increase communication between town officials and businesses.**

- d. Create a forum for businesses to share ideas and resources and develop cooperative programs.
- e. Support interaction between local youths and the business community, especially for mentoring, training and employment.

Recommendation 2. Enhance town identity by developing its Village Centers

Sheffield's location on Rte 7, a major north-south interstate highway, has tacitly encouraged people to speed through the town and business development has spread out away from the village centers. Yet Sheffield has a great deal to offer and needs to make changes in order to redevelop its sense of community and identity and revitalize those centers.

- a. With residents, business owners and property owners review and enhance the existing plan for Sheffield Center; evaluate an updated Ashley Falls Village Center Plan and a Neighborhood Enhancement Plan for the Clayton area.
- b. Encourage a "Historical New England Town" aesthetic in architecture, landscaping and signage.
- c. Create a plan to improve traffic flow and parking on Main Street.
- d. Redesign the town green to improve spaces for gatherings, recreations and walking.
- e. Promote the sale and consumption of locally produced or grown products in local stores.
- f. Create a town bulletin board, brochure and website.
- g. Explore alternative sewage treatment systems.
- h. Create a beautification committee.

Recommendation 3. Support local industries.

- a. Redefine by-laws to govern business in residential neighborhoods.
- b. Support home based businesses, which are appropriate to their neighborhoods by providing incubator and mentoring services.

- c. **Promote a ‘Sheffield’ brand.**
- d. **Establish a centralized, year-round agricultural and crafts market for local products.**
- e. **Support, without devaluing abutting properties, cottage industries by creating suitable guidelines.**

Recommendation 4. Support agriculture and forestry.

This is a top priority because these industries are responsible for the vast majority of Sheffield’s landscape & the stewardship of our land; Action: Create Agricultural Commission (include farm and forest land); When: Immediate & Ongoing: Work with Dept. of Agriculture.

- a. **Encourage the development of businesses which process, market and distribute local agricultural or forestry products.**
- b. **Promote the ‘branding’ and purchasing of such products.**
- c. **Support best management practices, organic farming and environmentally sensitive forestry methods through technical training and education.**
- d. **Encourage the use of Chapter 61, 61A and 61B designations.**
- e. **Encourage the town to exercise its options on Chapter land.**
- f. **Encourage ‘Right to Farm’ by-laws, including seasonal signage.**
- g. **Explore state tax relief on farm animals and equipment.**

Recommendation 5. Welcome tourism.

It is recommended that growth in the tourism industry be directed so as to maintain the historic and rural character of Sheffield. Current major players in Sheffield’s tourism industry include cultural, recreational and historical enterprises (i.e. Berkshire Choral Festival, Barrington Stage, the Appalachian Trail, Bartholomew’s Cobble, the Sheffield Historical Society, etc.) and its famous antiques businesses. In turn, these enable other local businesses, such as bed and breakfasts, restaurants and other accommodations to attract more visitors. On a larger scale, these businesses have nurtured the landscaping and building trades sectors as new homes are built and Sheffield’s old homes are given new life through renovation and re-use in the form of antiques stores and historical

sites. These activities are important to Sheffield employment and to its retention of history and beauty.

Also recommended is further development of eco-tourism and agri-tourism businesses such as hiking, biking, canoeing, bird-watching, farm and history and garden tours. Likewise, further development and diversity of outdoor recreational facilities and programs in Sheffield would make the town increasingly desirable as a destination. This should be very feasible since Sheffield already has several nationally recognized natural environments within its borders, as well as nationally recognized historical sites.

- a. Develop a campaign to attract and welcome tourists.**
- b. Provide visitor services in the town center including bathroom and telephone facilities, maps and brochures.**
- c. Enhance access to and promotion of recreational facilities with improved signs, parking areas for hiking trails and upgraded canoe launches to the Housatonic River.**
- d. Explore public and private funding to achieve these objectives.**

Recommendation 6. Review all By-Laws.

- a. Hire an outside specialist to review and update Sheffield's zoning and town by-laws to ensure they are consistent and supportive of town goals.**
- b. Examine and update by-laws for consistency with the findings, goals and objectives of the Master Plan.**
- c. Evaluate separate residential districts within the current rural district.**

Poll the town as to its desire to create a separate Residential District or consider areas within the Rural District with more parameters to limit conflicts between residential uses and business uses. Currently, the Rural District permits retail businesses, public utility facilities, country clubs, commercial kennels, commercial greenhouses, commercial radio and television towers, nursing and related facilities. (In some ways, it is easier to establish a business in the Rural District than in the Commercial and General Business District. The Rural District has had more business growth than any other area.)

Recommendation 7. Review Business Park criteria.

- a. Review criteria to consider and accept tenants for the Business Park.**

Changes in the business and economic climate since the Business Park was created nearly 10 years ago have made the initial criteria out-dated. For example, the 4-acre minimum lot size limits small business use of the Business Park.

- b. Consider local and regional agriculturally related activities.**
- c. Consider broadening the type of businesses that would be allowed to purchase space.**
- d. Consider allowing a developer to own, build and manage appropriate spaces and rent to smaller businesses.**

Recommendation 8. Upgrade technology and reduce energy use.

Improve Sheffield's technological infrastructure and reduce energy use. These changes would enhance opportunities for Sheffield's current businesses and make the town more attractive to businesses considering relocating to Sheffield.

- a. Pursue high-speed Internet and cellular telephone access.**
- b. Identify ways to reduce energy use throughout the town.**
- c. Investigate funding to bury power and telephone lines.**
- d. Investigate alternative energy sources for private or public use.**