

LIVE THE NEW FOREST FUTURE

# Northern Forest Center

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## Community Case Study: **Elizabethtown, New York**

Elizabethtown is a town of just over 1,200 people in the eastern part of the Adirondack Park and is the county seat of Essex County. While some Northern Forest communities are aging and struggling to attract young families, Elizabethtown, New York bucks that trend. In “e’town,” many recent home sales have been to individuals under the age of 40 who intend to make Elizabethtown their home. In 2021, when the Northern Forest Center released the Attracting New Residents Strategy, a strategy to guide communities in the Adirondacks in an effort to attract and retain young people to the region, Elizabethtown was already well on its way to attracting the next generation.

Part of Elizabethtown’s appeal for younger transplants is the abundant outdoor recreation. For over two decades, dozens of passionate residents have acted as the de facto trail crew and have built miles upon miles of hiking and mountain biking trails throughout the town, elevating it to one of the largest mountain bike networks in the region. When a couple of the trail-building veterans attended the Center’s symposium on the outdoor recreation economy in 2018, they were inspired to ask if the Center could help them address some of the town’s recreation connectivity challenges.

Since that meeting, Center staff have worked with a dedicated advisory group of residents to identify projects we could help advance as well as new opportunities to help E’town achieve its goals. While E’town has a long history of successful grassroots efforts in the town completed by residents, the Center has been able to elevate these efforts to the next level by bringing a new perspective grounded in regional experience, providing professional project management, and assisting the town and local groups navigate the complicated world of grant funding. Some highlights from the recent years include:

### Outdoor Recreation

- » The Center supported the already strong work related to recreation amenities in the town, including facilitating planning around trail connectivity, writing grants to fund materials for a new trail center, and providing a grant for outdoor ice rink improvements.



Construction of new trail center and pavilion.

## Municipal Wastewater

- » Our assistance reignited the long-stalled effort to fund and construct a municipal sewer in Elizabethtown, which the advisory group had flagged as necessary to unlock the full potential of the downtown and opportunities for housing development. The Center continues to facilitate a committee including town officials, county planners, local institutions, and engineers to prove the eligibility of the project for state funding and to raise public support for the project.

## Community Branding and Web Presence

- » Understanding that communities need a clear marketing message and strong digital presence to compete for residents and attract visitors, the Center has worked with the advisory group to develop the “town” brand and a new website for the town to promote local events, amenities, and culture.

## Supporting the Elizabethtown Social Center

- » A unique community resource is the Elizabethtown Social Center, a non-profit organization that provides family-friendly programming, recreation spaces, and a robust teen recreation program that offers after-school and summertime programming for students in Elizabethtown and surrounding communities. Recognizing the importance of the Social Center for local families, the Center has advised the Social Center on potential funding sources and assisted with grant applications.



Volunteer Work Day at the Elizabethtown Social Center.



E'town Day Fireworks.

## Housing

- » As in many Northern Forest communities, Elizabethtown’s lack of quality housing that is affordable for middle-income families is an obstacle to attracting young residents despite ample local jobs at the hospital and in county agencies, all located in town. With the help of the local advisory group to identify potential properties, the Center is in the process of developing rental housing within the community.

The Center’s involvement in Elizabethtown demonstrates the many ways the Center can help a community advance its revitalization goals. Residents have responded with gratitude and appreciation for the Center’s assistance to date. The Center hopes that its work with Elizabethtown can serve as an example for other communities and organizations that it is possible to create the conditions to attract and retain new residents.

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