

A photograph of a street scene in Southbridge, Massachusetts. The image shows a multi-lane road with cars driving. In the background, a prominent white church with a tall steeple is visible. The street is lined with brick buildings, and there are streetlights and signs. The overall atmosphere is that of a small town during the day.

Sustainable Southbridge

Michael Ashman - Albedith Diaz - Stephen Lima - Dimitris Saragas
with Robert Krueger - Dominic Golding - Peggy Middaugh

Sustainable Southbridge Initiative

A strategic plan for community development



These are some of the possible logos for the initiative. Others are spread throughout the rest of the booklet. All “Sustainable Southbridge” Initiative logos were created by Kim Noonan.



This report is a result of a collaboration between the Worcester Community Project Center at WPI and the community of Southbridge, Massachusetts.

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Sustainable Southbridge Initiative

Imagine the future. A picturesque downtown, with pedestrian activity connections between Southbridge's economic center and its enumerable amenities. A vibrant economy.

This report is a result of a town planning initiative called "Sustainable Southbridge." Research was undertaken by WPI students and faculty between October '08 and March '09. This project culminated in a charrette on February 6th, 2009.



Concept: Sustainable Southbridge

The purpose of the initiative was to create a list of priorities and develop action steps to promote urban development, maintain natural resources, and fulfill the community's broad needs. This effort is inclusive of the community and builds upon its core assets to develop pride and a vibrant economy. The sustainable Southbridge initiative will lead to more economic opportunities and a brighter future.



From the left: Dominic Golding, Margaret Morrissey, Lorraine Martinelle, Albedith Diaz, Dimitris Saragas, Robert Krueger, Michael Ashman, Stephen Lima and Peggy Middaugh at the Sustainable Southbridge's Charrette. Feb. 6, 2009

Sustainability and Economic Development

Sustainability improvement consists of the creation of new technologies, renovation of existing assets and the promotion of inclusiveness within the community. These aspects directly affect the local economy by improving the resident's quality of life and creating new job opportunities.



Sustainability in Action

Residents in Southbridge are already familiar with project-based sustainability. These projects have developed job opportunities and have provided the community with investment, jobs, and additional resources.



The Flat Iron Building was awarded the Smart Growth award by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission in 2005.

Smart Growth leads communities to preserve their history and existing infrastructure without interrupting their continuing development, based on the following principles:

- Creating housing opportunities
- Developing walkable neighborhoods
- Encouraging community collaboration
- Mixed land uses

When a community implements the Smart Growth principles, it is eligible to compete for the National Award for Smart Growth Achievement. Southbridge won this award in the Smart Growth and Green Building category when the Flat Iron building was recognized for using the Smart Growth principles.

Sustainability in Action



The 12 Crane building in Southbridge provides its residents with music, entertainment, fine art and distinctive dining. This building is a result of the transformation of an industrial site to an entertainment and housing complex, which required the labor of local skilled workers.

The 12 Crane Building was awarded the Silver Hammer Award in 2007.

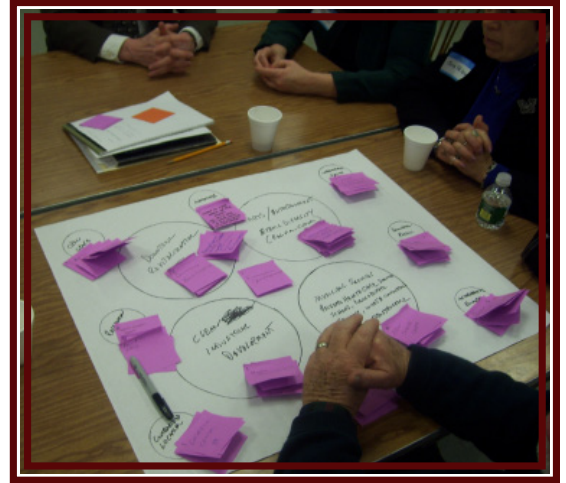
After the renovations of 12 Crane, the building was awarded the Silver Hammer Award by the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. This award recognizes construction and renovation projects that have an extraordinary visual and aesthetic impact on the physical landscape.



The Silver Hammer Award

Core Assets

Core assets are valuable resources of a town that create a sense of place among the residents and visitors. During the February 6th charrette over 30 residents identified four core assets of Southbridge.



Southbridge's core assets:

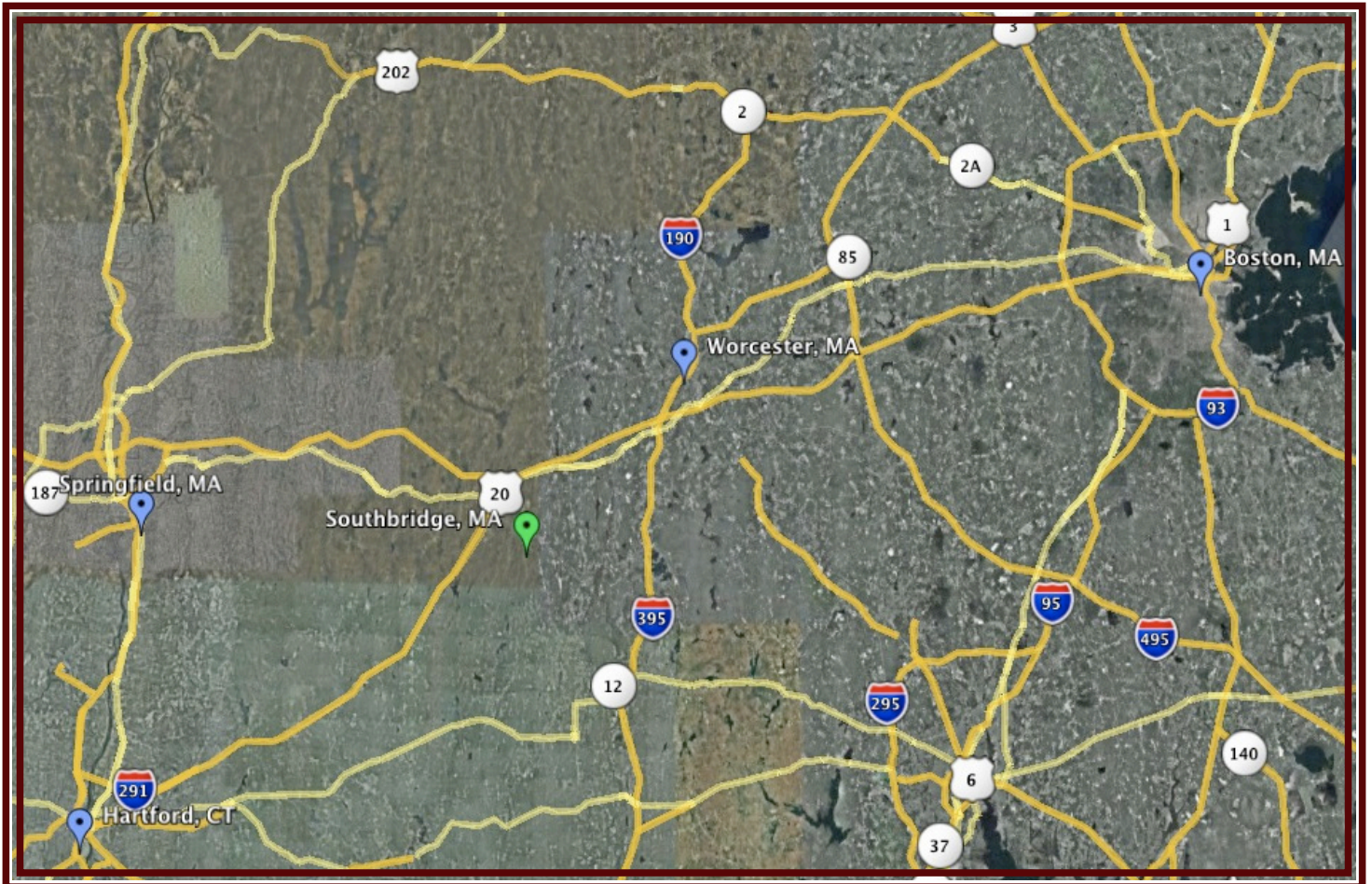
- Downtown Southbridge
- Public Services
- Diversity
- Industry

What is a charrette? A charrette is an activity where a group of people are brought together in order to discuss a topic of common interest. During a charrette the groups of people are divided in sub-groups where solutions and ideas about the problem in question are developed. Each sub-group presents their findings and a general dialogue where solutions are discussed, conclude the charrette.



Southbridge Charrette

Southbridge: A Centralized Location



Centrally located between Hartford, CT and the major cities in MA, Southbridge is just 6 miles from the Mass Pike, 4 miles from route 20 and 3 miles from I-84 and the Old Sturbridge Village.



Downtown Southbridge

Downtown Southbridge is a combination of restaurants and local businesses. The architecture is mainly a mix of Victorian façades that enhance the character of the town and captivate people's eyes. With affordable housing located at a close proximity to its businesses, Southbridge's downtown offers a city like atmosphere for residents and visitors.



Although Main Street has great walkability, there are many other attractions located near Main Street that are not easily accessible. This inconvenience is caused by the lack of sidewalks, cross walks, and road conditions. A great benefit for the town would be the implementation of sidewalks or walking trails that connect these points of interests, especially for the elderly and the disabled.

Public Services

The Harrington Memorial Hospital, has been offering quality clinical services and has provided job opportunities to the community, since 1931.

The Casella Recycling Center, invests in new technologies in order to improve sustainability, in Southbridge, and beyond.



“Southbridge has a small town feel with city amenities.”
- Christopher Clark, Town Manager



Harrington Memorial Hospital

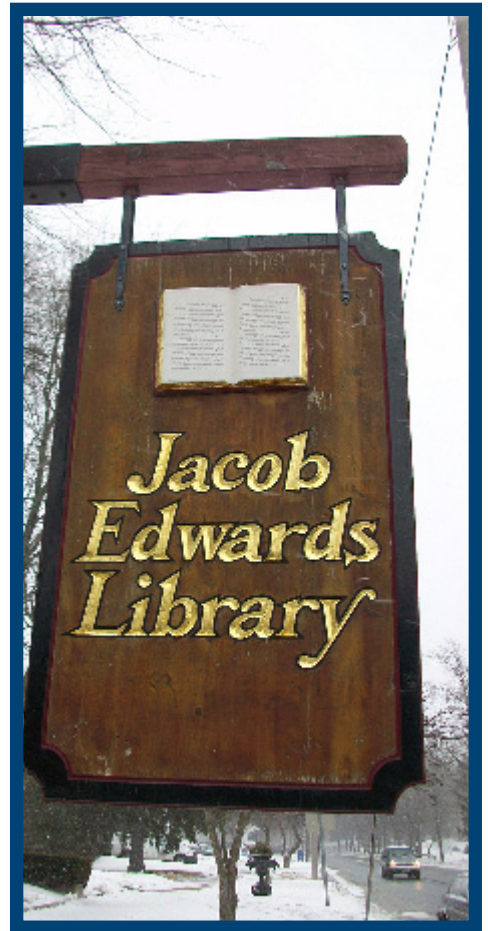


Public Services (Cont'd)

The Jacob Edwards Library, promotes education, culture and lifelong learning for the community of Southbridge.

The YMCA, provides the community with recreational activities, fitness programs and child care.

Public Schools, provides the community with a safe, inclusive learning environment.



Charlton St School



Kids at the YMCA



Diversity

Southbridge is home to a wide variety of ethnicities. Each ethnic group brings cultural novelties and development to the town. Cultural diversity growth has been a major goal of the community. For example, during the summer the town hosts a festival where the community gets together and learn about their different backgrounds.



Residents of Southbridge have expressed interest in a more diverse restaurant circuit. Restaurants that represent each ethnic group's culture would be a great business investment.

Industry

Southbridge has a rich industrial history that dates back to the early 1800's establishing the town's economy.

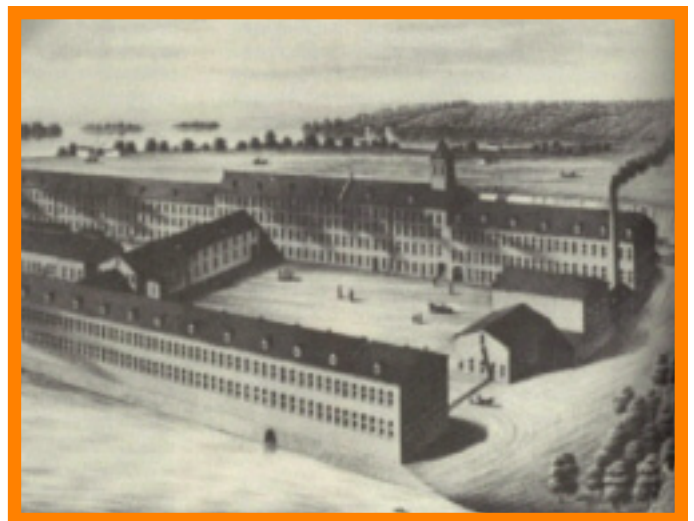
The Hyde tools manufacturing plant in Southbridge makes various home improvement tools such as paint scrapers, wire brushes and trowels.



The Dexter Russell Company is the largest producer of professional cutlery in the United States.



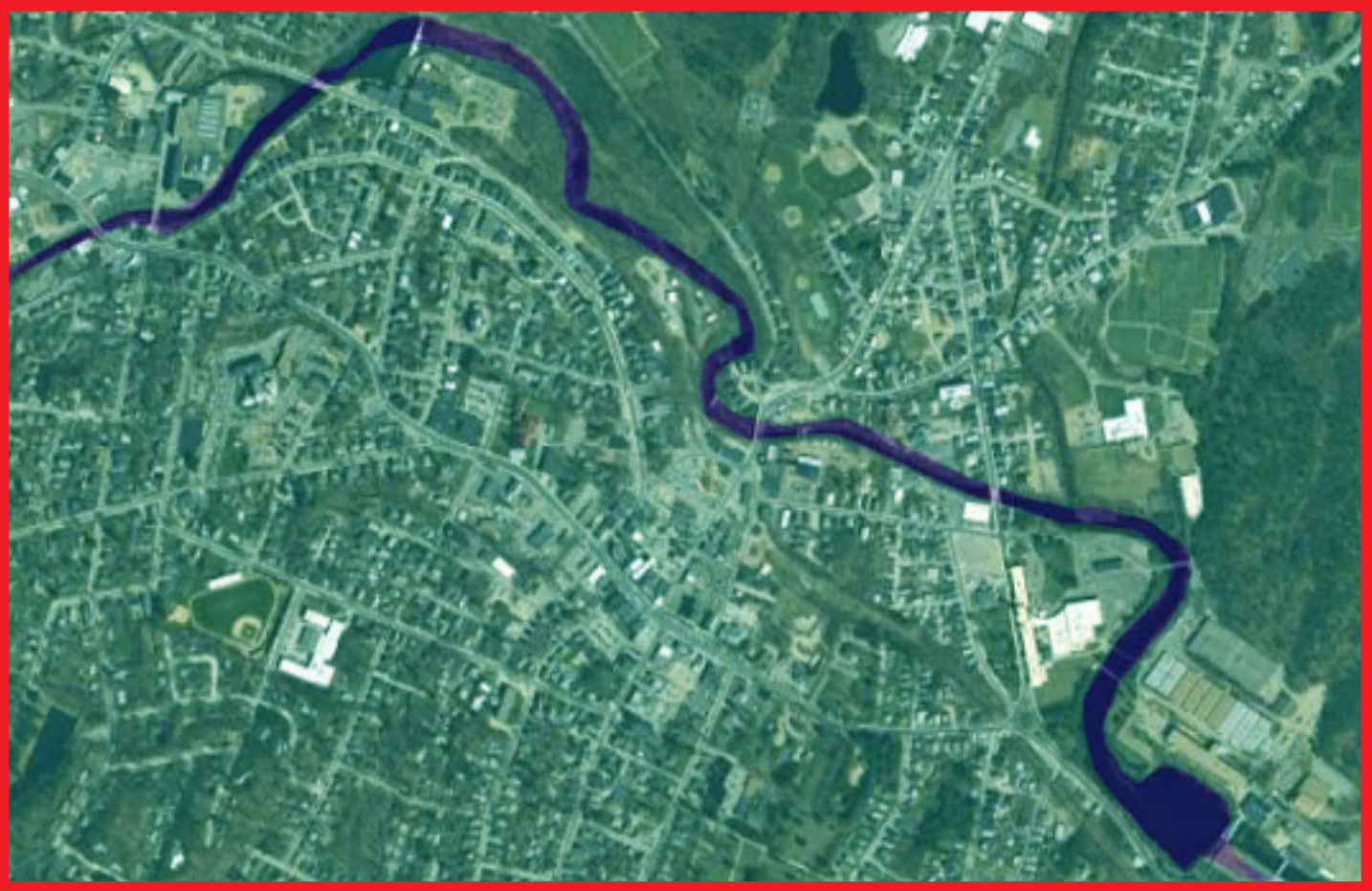
Industrial Southbridge, MA



Dexter Rusell Inc. 1818

Ancillary Assets: The Quinebaug River

The Quinebaug River is considered the heart of Southbridge. In the 1800's the water power of the river attracted textile mills, saw mills and grist mills to settle in the town, which increased the population and the economy.



The Quinebaug River

Ancillary Assets: Recreational Activities Opportunities

The Quinebaug River can be a source for many recreational activities. Kayaking, canoeing and fishing are some of the fun activities that the river could offer to the residents of Southbridge.



Bottling the water of the river could be an economic opportunity for the town. Southbridge could use the Casella Recycling Center as a great source in order to produce recyclable water bottles. This could be a source for new job opportunities.



Workers at the Casella Recycling Center

Community effort in collaboration with the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission could make this simple idea a reality.

Ancillary Assets: Information

Southbridge is widely connected through the website (<http://www.dickwhitney.net>) and its newspaper the Southbridge Evening News.

The Southbridge Evening News has been informing the community on current events of the town and its surrounding areas since 1923.

The Whitney web site upheld by Dick Whitney (a lens designer with Karl Zeiss) provides the community with a collection of historical documents, events calendar and pictures of the town since 1999.

Southbridge's Cable Television (SCTV) is another way of connecting the community. The Southbridge public access cable TV channel 12, provides the residents with the highlights of hosted events and information on upcoming events.



Ancillary Assets: Arts

The Southbridge community is characterized by its dedication to the arts and culture. Local artists like John Ferrara, Loretta Medeiros, Jean Murphy, Anna Ozolins and Lynn Wrona exhibit their work at the 12 Crane building.

The importance and history of the arts in Southbridge and the surrounding areas are preserved by The Quinebaug Valley Cultural Center. This membership association has been promoting the arts and humanities since 1977.



Painting by John Ferrara



Painting by Loretta Medeiros



Painting by Lynn Wrona

Ancillary Assets: Arts

The Gateway Players Theater Inc. is a community all volunteer theater that provides quality life performances and workshops to the residents of Southbridge and the surrounding areas.



The Art and Soul Studio in Southbridge is a destination where the community can explore their creativity by letting their imagination flow. This studio, located at the Flat Iron building, offers classes, workshops and events for both children and adults.

Since brick walls are very common in Southbridge's architecture, painted murals representing the town's history will be a major attraction for visitors. This idea could be accomplished by incorporating the local artist skills and the town resources.



Ancillary Assets: Hotel and Conference Center

The Southbridge Hotel and Conference Center is the renovated American Optical facility. This large facility provides a fitness center, ball room, restaurant, auditorium, and 203 guest rooms.



Although this center offers quality service with the new millennium technology, which can accommodate large business reunions, the facility remains under-utilized. Through an incentive that focuses on advertisement of the center's features the Southbridge Hotel and Conference Center could become a main attraction.

Action Steps: Business Improvement District

A sustainable alternative to increase Southbridge's economy and local businesses would be the establishment of a Business Improvement District (BID) A BID is a public-private partnership in which businesses of a designated area pay an additional tax in order to fund improvements to their district. Through a petition approved by the legislative governing body of the district a BID can be established. The additional taxes collected by the BIDs are used for maintenance of streets, sidewalks, parks, and open areas. The money can also be used for additional marketing, security, and other developmental projects.

The petition for a BID must contain the following:

- Signatures of the owners within the district.
- A site map outlining the boundaries of the proposed B.I.D.
- The proposed improvement plan.
- Identification and location of the management group.

Additionally a BID must have a Board of Directors with members elected by the BID property owners.

For further information on developing a BID contact the Division of Community Services, and the Department of Housing and Community Development. Supplemental information can be found in Massachusetts guide for developing a BID in the following website: <http://www.mass.gov>

Action Steps: Eco-Industrial Park

As mentioned earlier an effort within the community in collaboration with the local businesses, could improve Southbridge's sustainability. Through an Eco-Industrial Park (EIP) which is a group of businesses that cooperate with each other, the community could reduce waste, pollution, and improve efficiency.

Some recommendations and criteria to establish an Eco-Industrial Park are:

1. Location

- Close proximity to industries
- Easy access to transportation routes

2. Members

- Companies with potential symbiotic relationships to others
- Determine technical and economic feasibility for companies

3. Development

- Improve economic and environmental opportunities

The Casella recycling center could help the establishment of Eco- Industrial Parks by selling recycled plastics to local companies. This will help companies to cut down on material cost and waste.

For further information on establishing an EIP review the EIP handbook such as the one developed by the Earnest Lowe group for Asian developing countries.

Action Steps: Renewable Energy

Another way to improve sustainability in Southbridge could be through the use of renewable energy.



Renewable energy is energy generated from natural resources. Currently we are dependent on fossil fuels, a limited resource. Although with fossil fuels dwindling, renewable energy is becoming a priority. Some examples of renewable energy implementations are: biofuels, geothermal, water power, solar energy, and wind power.



Action Steps: Renewable Energy (Cont'd)

Some recommendations in order to involve the community of Southbridge in the use of renewable energy are:

- Identify renewable energy development areas
- Integrate solar panels into houses roofs
- Establish wind farms in windy open space areas
- Use biofuels for cooking and space heating home
- Establish biodiesel retail locations
- Investigate zoning ordinances

Southbridge can strongly benefit from the use of biofuels. Biofuels are materials obtained from dead biological materials. These materials can be solid, liquid or gaseous. Nowadays biofuels are a green alternative in order to produce energy and transportation fuels.



Action Steps: Environmental Recreational Activities

Southbridge's environment offers various opportunities for new recreational activities.

The Quinebaug River offers the community activities such as canoeing, kayaking, and fishing where an area designated for parking should be available.



Quinebaug River Southbridge, MA



Lyman Pond

Local ponds and other water bodies could be promoted as places for fishing and swimming where if regulations are met boat launches could be brought. Additionally snack shacks can be established near these areas. This incentive will open new job opportunities for the community.

The open spaces and hiking trails could be used as part of designated camp grounds where fairs and other local events could be held as long as the area is kept clear of litter.



Westville Dam

Action Steps: Green Buildings

Green buildings are designed by using natural resources with the purpose of protecting the community's health and environment. With the implementation of green building technologies, the community of Southbridge will save money in energy, water, and building operation costs.



Memorial Hall Building

Southbridge has started the implementation of green building technologies through the renovation of the Memorial Hall. The Memorial Hall will be Southbridge's first green building and will offer commercial units, residential housing, and office space.

Community motivation and collaboration is required in order to continue the development of sustainable projects and new businesses. Green building technologies should be Southbridge's basis when it comes to building designs, renovations, and constructions.

Action Steps: Slow Food

The Slow Food movement consists of serving food that is good, clean and fair. Good food that is made from healthy plants and animals, clean food grown by healthy and organic means which helps the eco-system and fair food which can be acquire by anyone regardless of their economic status. This movement was started in the late 1980's by Carlo Petrini in Bra, Italy.



The Southbridge's residents can integrate the Slow Food ideas into restaurants and their daily lives by:

- Obtaining organic food from local farms
- Encouraging the community to eat seasonal food
- Establishing trade networks with local farms
- Creating groups that share and discuss the Slow Food principles

Action Steps: Education and Transportation

The following aspects should be taken into consideration in order to complete the Sustainable Southbridge Initiative.



Education:

1. Promote public education
2. Promote educational excellence
3. Provide seminars (such as job finding or entrepreneurship)
4. Educate the community about regional connections

Transportation Management:

1. Promote bicycle use
 - Create bicycle trails, lanes
 - Provide bicycle racks
2. Improve parking
3. Improve downtown traffic light situation to maximize safety and traffic flow
4. Make sidewalks and crosswalks more pedestrian friendly
5. Incorporate selective vehicle control
6. Provide more public transportation



Action Steps: Building Design, Hotel and Arts

Building Design:

1. Reuse old buildings
2. Create low impact developments
3. Develop storm-water management and water conservation methods
4. Incorporate green building design and energy efficiency methods
 - Green roofs
 - Geothermal heating



Hotel and Conference Center:

1. Promote the hotel and conference center
 - Hold Seminars
 - Hold Government Meetings



Arts:

1. Expand artistic education
2. Maintain and create art venues (galleries, theaters, etc.)
3. Provide affordable living and work space for artists
4. Use art to improve the appearance of the town



Painting by John Ferrara

Action Steps: Downtown, Community and Diversity

Downtown Business Promotion:

1. Make a brochure with local businesses that can be distributed to increase outside interest
2. Make the downtown area more aesthetically pleasing
 - Custom trash barrels
 - Banners on lamp posts
 - Murals on brick faced buildings
3. Advertise the uniqueness of your business



Equal Opportunity:

1. Adequate health care for all
2. Living-wage jobs with a variety of incomes
3. Provide a range of affordable housing opportunities
4. Create/maintain shelters to minimize homelessness

Diversity:

1. Promote festivals and parades among the different ethnic groups
2. Establish more ethnic based restaurants to bring in outside customers



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