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# Town of Otis Revitalization Committee

## Quarterly Report: 2 (May – July 2025)

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The Town of Otis Select Board charged the Revitalization Committee with developing a comprehensive strategy to revitalize the Town which focuses on economic vitality, aesthetic appeal, and quality of life. The committee was given five responsibilities to support strategic planning: conduct a comprehensive assessment; develop a revitalization plan; implement revitalization strategies; foster partnerships; and promote the Town. The committee of seven members and one alternate shifted when Sue Brofman resigned. Hal Kobrin was made an official member, and Cynthia Fletcher was appointed as an alternate.

### **Comprehensive Assessment**

In the first quarter, the committee analyzed the current state of the Town. This review resulted in the formation of seven working groups: Needs Assessment Survey; Promotion & Community Events or Quick Wins; Business, Culture & Recreation; Downtown; Infrastructure; Services & Population Retention/Growth; Cost/Benefit.

This quarter, the committee began collecting community input through a Needs Assessment Survey, allowing residents, visitors, and non-resident employees/business owners to voice their concerns and priorities. The survey, designed in Survey Monkey with branching technology, was funded by committee member donations. Neighboring towns' master plan and business surveys were consulted and adapted for Otis-specific topics. Questions were cross-referenced with previously identified vitality categories and master plan action item sections. Input from Town representatives and community members shaped the final draft. The survey has been publicized through the Town news email blast, posted on the Town website under the Revitalization Committee tab, shared on social media, posted flyers, and at the Farmers Market. Area restaurants have placed QR codes at tables so patrons can scan and complete the survey. Direct mailing or other forms of outreach are being considered. At the time of this report more than 500 responses have been received. Survey data collection will conclude this fall. Results will be analyzed and presented in future reports.

To give context to priority items, the committee is beginning an environmental scan which entails analyzing internal and external factors, uncovering trends, or identifying influential forces. To organize this information, a narrative file template was developed. This format will be used in compiling information through interviews and research of prior efforts to preserve institutional knowledge and ease access to relevant work. By threading past planning projects, historical investigations, feasibility studies, building use assessments, and capital improvement plans, the committee hopes to gain strategic insight into best ways forward and learn from past investments.

To learn more about Otis' businesses, a local consultant volunteered to lead focus groups in September. Business owners will be invited to discuss starting, maintaining, and growing businesses in Otis. Drafts of a questionnaire for potential businesses and an Otis Facts sheet are being created to encourage the rebuilding of Otis' economic sector. Combined with the business-related survey data and anticipated economic development grant advice, the committee will use this information to outline strategies for improving or expanding business opportunities.

### **Revitalization Plan & Implementation Strategies Through Partnerships**

The first step the committee took in creating a revitalization plan was to apply for a District Redevelopment Technical Assistance grant through the MA Development office to review the downtown area assets and challenges. The grant was submitted with 16 letters of support from Senator Mark, Representative Davis, BRPC, 1Berkshire, Select Board, and community members. Grant selection and awards are processed in the fall. This grant will outline specific steps to address keystone properties near the intersection of routes 8 and 23. Survey data and environmental scan files will support this effort. This grant will dovetail into the Master Plan process when that takes place. Committee members supported the Planning Board in their application for a Master Planning Grant.

The group also recognized the need for momentum and community buy-in. In reviewing the Town's strengths, it was decided that reviving a once popular clean-up day event would be a good first step. This would generate active participation in the beautification of our town. Outreach to previous leaders was conducted, and a volunteer coordinator was identified to move the project forward. Fall and/or spring "Otis Clean • Otis Green" dates forthcoming.

The collaborative effort of Town requests to the State and advocacy from one of our members resulted in a public safety win for downtown. The speed limit reduction will help to draw attention to economic and municipal developments in the area and support revitalization. The committee has worked diligently with our Board of Health to provide additional dining options through Food Truck Tuesdays. Beginning in July and running through August, perhaps longer if

demand remains high, a variety of vendors will park at the Catholic Church. More than 150 patrons visited on the first Food Truck Tuesday. Live music by Larry Southard and seating provided by the library made for a successful event. The committee anticipates seasonal replication next year.

Additional revitalization strategies will build on what is or was existing, in conjunction with boards, committees, and departments, while aligning with the community's self-identified needs and preferences. These partnerships are highlighted in the committee's support for the Planning Board, partnering with the library, potential Otis Observer and school collaborations around local journalism, and sharing grant opportunities and application support with various municipal entities.

### **Promote the Town**

The Revitalization Committee has created a social media presence to draw attention to municipal and community initiatives. By sharing step-by-step guides on how to subscribe to Town news, links to the Town calendar, and increasing general awareness of all that Otis has to offer, people are coming together and encouraged to be involved. Sharing social media posts with neighboring town groups further promotes our Town. Transforming local information into short video clips and/or podcasts are the next steps.

A strong presence in the Otis Observer has been realized through monthly articles outlining revitalization efforts. Community and seasonal events are highlighted in a new section titled "Otis is the Place to Be" which leverages a popular 1980s slogan. Printed flyers posted across town helped to get the word out about Food Trucks and the Survey.

### **Visions & Goals**

As we continue crafting a strategic revitalization plan informed by our community and administration, we hope the character of our downtown will be re-established, volunteerism will increase, and growth will be realized because Otis is THE Place to Be.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our Town.

Respectfully Submitted by Stacey Schultze, Revitalization Committee chair on July 28, 2025.