

Northeastern University
Dukakis Center *for* Urban & Regional Policy

REPORT
JULY 2014

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL (EDSAT)

RESULTS FOR THE TOWN OF
ASHLAND, MASSACHUSETTS
JULY 2014



The Partners

About the Kitty and Michael Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy

The Kitty and Michael Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy at Northeastern University conducts interdisciplinary research, in collaboration with civic leaders and scholars both within and beyond Northeastern University, to identify and implement real solutions to the critical challenges facing urban areas throughout Greater Boston, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the nation. Founded in 1999 as a “think and do” tank, the Dukakis Center’s collaborative research and problem-solving model applies powerful data analysis, a bevy of multidisciplinary research and evaluation techniques, and a policy-driven perspective to address a wide range of issues facing cities and towns. These issues include affordable housing, local economic development, workforce development, transportation, public finance, and environmental sustainability. The staff of the Dukakis Center works to catalyze broad-based efforts to solve urban problems, acting as both a convener and a trusted and committed partner to local, state, and national agencies and organizations. The Dukakis Center is housed within Northeastern University’s innovative School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs.

About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities is the nation’s oldest and largest organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership, and governance. NLC is a resource and advocate for more than 1,600 member cities and the 49 state municipal leagues, representing 19,000 cities and towns and more than 218 million Americans. Through its Center for Research and Innovation, NLC provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities, creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities, inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in tackling tough issues and opportunities for city and town leaders to connect with peers, share experiences, and learn about innovative approaches in cities.

For additional information about the Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool (EDSAT), please visit <http://www.northeastern.edu/dukakiscenter/econdev/edsat> or contact:

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INTRODUCTION

A robust, sustainable, and adaptable local economy heavily depends on officials who can lead in the formulation and implementation of an economic development strategy. A thorough strategy is developed with an understanding of local business interests, regional resource availability, and a careful assessment of the community's ability to attract new business investment and jobs. The *Economic Development Self-Assessment Tool* (EDSAT) is an important step that public officials can take to assess their jurisdictions'¹ strengths and weaknesses with respect to expanding and sustaining economic growth. Through EDSAT, public officials and business leaders collaborate as a team, assessing each of their roles in creating a business-friendly climate.

By participating in this self-assessment, Ashland will not simply better understand its economic development assets and challenges, but learn to build upon strengths and overcome weaknesses. This report contains a thorough analysis of the responses provided by Ashland to the EDSAT questionnaire.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Since 2005, the Dukakis Center has sought to identify the “deal-breakers” impeding private investment in local municipalities. Based upon research on the resurgence of older industrial cities, the Dukakis Center has identified two of the crucial factors in economic development. First is a municipality's capability in responding to ever-changing market forces. Second is the ability of local government to work with regional agencies, business leaders, and academic institutions to work collaboratively to solve municipal weaknesses and market the city or town's strengths. These conclusions led to the development of EDSAT as well as the creation of an analytical framework for providing practical and actionable feedback to public officials. EDSAT is the first tool that resulted from the partnership between Northeastern University's Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy (Dukakis Center) and the National League of Cities (NLC).

Methodology

The foundation for the 200-plus questions that make up the EDSAT questionnaire was established when the Dukakis Center surveyed more than 240 members of the *National Association of Industrial and Office Properties*, now known as *NAIOP* and *CoreNet Global*. These leading professional associations represent site and location experts, whose members research new sites for businesses and other institutions. Members were asked to identify those factors that are most important to businesses and developers when evaluating locations. This process generated a set of 38 broad themes relevant to economic growth and development. Examples of themes include highway access, available workforce, and the timeliness of permit reviews. Based on rankings by these location experts, EDSAT themes are identified as “*Very Important*,” “*Important*,” or “*Less Important*” to businesses and developers.

¹ Jurisdictions are usually categorized as individual towns and/or cities. Each can be several small municipalities, a geographic region, or a county—as long as each plans and strategizes as a single entity in its economic development efforts.

EDSAT Themes

<p>Very Important ●</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highway Access • Parking • Traffic • Infrastructure • Rents • Workforce Composition • Labor • Timeliness of Approvals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing Follow-Up • Quality of Available Space • Land • Labor Cost • Industry Sensitivity • Sites Available • Predictable Permits • Fast Track Permits • Citizen Participation in the Review Process • Cultural and Recreational Amenities • Crime • Housing • Local Schools • Amenities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Business Incentives • Local Business Incentives • Local Tax Rates • Tax Delinquency <p>Less Important ○</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airports • Rail • Water Transportation • Proximities to Universities & Research • Unions • Workforce Training • Permitting Ombudsman • Jurisdiction’s Website
<p>Important ◐</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Transit • Physical Attractiveness • Complementary/ Supplemental Business Services • Critical Mass Firms • Cross Marketing 		

Each question in EDSAT addresses a particular location factor and provides three ways to interpret that factor relative to the response in your own community:

1. The level of importance businesses and developers place on that location factor
2. How other jurisdictions participating in EDSAT have typically responded to that question
3. How your jurisdiction’s response compares to the typical response and the importance of the location factor



FIGURE 1: IMPORTANCE AND PERFORMANCE LEVELS

For example, through the EDSAT analysis, officials may discover that the efficiency of the municipal permitting process is both *Very Important* to businesses and developers and that their jurisdiction is taking several months to review a permit application, rather than a few weeks as in the case of other jurisdictions. According to our location experts, this can be a serious weakness or potential “deal-breaker.” Knowing this, municipal officials may choose to hone in on the permitting process to understand where the inefficiencies lie and how the process could be improved and/or simplified. Even if a jurisdiction is quite efficient in reviewing permits, it may be worth the effort to further improve the process, as the timeliness of the process is of such significance to businesses and developers. Staff, review boards, or commissions could streamline their work or provide more technical support to applicants to streamline the process. This permitting example outlines the degree to which the EDSAT analysis provides an opportunity for revisiting and redeveloping a jurisdiction’s economic development strategies and processes.

E. Airports			
		Report of	as compared to all jurisdictions
Question			Comparison Group
27: Do you have a local (municipal/ general aviation) airport?	yes		no

FIGURE 2: SAMPLE RESPONSE

The EDSAT analysis compares your jurisdiction’s response to that of Comparison Group Municipalities (CGM).² With regard to the aforementioned permitting process, your jurisdiction may offer significantly shorter review times than the CGM. In this case, the EDSAT analysis suggests that on this measure your jurisdiction may possess a relative advantage in what is a *Very Important* location factor. However, if permit reviews take significantly longer, then your jurisdiction may be at a disadvantage. While local and regional regulations or processes affect the review process, businesses are interested in “time-to-market” – the time it takes to get up and running in an ever-increasing competitive environment.

EDSAT assigns a color code to highlight the results of your jurisdiction compared to the median response among the CGM. Colors—green, yellow, and red—indicate a municipality’s relative strength on each specific location factor. Green indicates that your jurisdiction is quantitatively or qualitatively stronger than the CGM response; yellow indicates that your jurisdiction is average or typical; and red indicates a relative deficiency.

The interaction between the importance of a location factor and your jurisdiction’s relative strength yields powerful information. With respect to businesses and developers, a comparison yielding “red” for a *Very Important* factor represents the potential for a “deal-breaker,” while a comparison resulting in “green” for a *Very Important* factor represents the likelihood of a “deal-maker.” There are several important considerations to keep in mind when reviewing a jurisdiction’s EDSAT results:

1. If your jurisdiction is at a disadvantage in certain *Very Important* location factors, such as possessing a slow permitting process, a workforce that lacks the necessary skills, and infrastructure that lacks the capacity to support growth, it is considered to have three distinct “deal-breakers,” regardless of its geographic location.
2. Your jurisdiction should look at its EDSAT results as an overview, and not focus on a particular factor. One “deal-breaker” does not mean that your jurisdiction should abandon its economic development efforts. At the same time, your jurisdiction cannot solely rely on one or two “deal-makers.” Economic development is a dynamic process and should be managed in such a way that a community continually responds to the changing needs of local and prospective businesses.
3. The interpretation of comparisons and color assignments depends on your jurisdiction’s context in answering the question and its objectives for economic development. For example, if there are significantly more square feet of vacant commercial space than the CGM median, EDSAT assigns “red” because large amounts of space may indicate outdated facilities in a stagnant local economy. However, the empty space may actually be an asset if your jurisdiction is focusing on attracting businesses that would benefit from large spaces, such as a creative mixed-use complex. Thus, your jurisdiction’s context is important in understanding EDSAT results.

² The term Comparison Group Municipalities (CGM) is used in this report to represent jurisdictions that have completed the EDSAT.

For some questions, the red and green color assignments serve to highlight the response for further consideration within the context of your jurisdiction’s objectives and circumstances. Several questions have no comparison at all. They tend to be lists of potential incentives, resources, or regulations associated with the municipality and will be discussed in corresponding sections of the report.

SUMMARY AND ORGANIZATION OF RELATIVE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

This section highlights Ashland’s primary strengths and weaknesses in the realm of economic development. EDSAT does not provide an overall grade for a jurisdiction, but rather assesses a jurisdiction’s unique set of strengths, weaknesses, and economic development objectives.

The Dukakis Center staff creates a list of significant or notable responses for each of the *Very Important*, *Important*, and *Less Important* location factors, emphasizing strengths and “deal-makers,” which are not organized in any particular order of importance. Dukakis Center staff suggests that your municipality review these lists and use them to highlight, enhance, and market your city or town’s strengths.

Tasks on the weakness and “deal-breaker” lists, however, are prioritized to emphasize the importance of their mitigation. The Dukakis Center staff arranges the tasks according to feasibility, with consideration of the latitude and abilities of local, county, or regional levels of government. For example, in a jurisdiction with limited highway access, building a new highway interchange or connector would likely be cost-prohibitive, time-consuming, and an inefficient use of local resources. However, other tasks are more feasible with modest investments in time and resources. For example, streamlining the permitting process and making related development information readily accessible to both location experts and businesses can be accomplished without significant capital investments. Although location experts rank both highway access and the timeliness of permitting as *Very Important* location factors, in the prioritized list of potential “deal-breakers,” the permitting process is given a higher priority due to its feasibility in implementation.

Ashland’s Strengths or Potential “Deal-Makers”

The following lists of Ashland’s strengths are its powerful economic development assets. The town should build upon these assets and promote them to prospective businesses and developers. Ashland should first consider those in the *Very Important* group, then the *Important*, and finally the *Less Important* group. Please note that strengths are **not listed in any particular order** within the three lists.

Strengths among Very Important Location Factors

- **Workforce Composition:** Ashland has a much higher percentage of professional workers than the CGM.
- **Labor (available):** More than half of Ashland’s available labor has earned at least a bachelor’s degree.

Strengths among Important Location Factors

- **Public Transit:** Ashland has a transit-oriented development strategy to attract new firms, shuttle service to public commuting stations, and most (75% or greater) of its development sites within a quarter mile of public bus or rail rapid transit.
- **Physical Attractiveness:** Ashland has a higher percentage of acreage reserved parks than the CGM and is overall an attractive community.

- **Predictable Permits:** Unlike the CGM, Ashland provides a flowchart of the permitting process and a development handbook to prospective developers.
- **Fast Track Permits:** Ashland’s overlay district and participation in Chapter 43D for fast-track permitting helps spur development in desired areas.
- **Crime:** Crime is lower for most categories in Ashland than the CGM.
- **Local Schools:** Ashland features a higher percentage of high school graduates who go on to attend a four-year college than the CGM. The town’s students also have higher SAT scores than the state average.

Strengths among Less Important Location Factors

- **Rail:** Ashland has a commuter rail stop within its jurisdiction.
- **Proximity to Universities and Research:** Four major four-year institutions of higher education are located within 10 miles of Ashland.
- **Website:** Ashland’s website includes more information related to economic development and municipal process than the CGM, and the town has a designated webmaster for timely updates.

Ashland’s Weaknesses or Potential “Deal-Breakers”

Despite sizable advantages, Ashland has a number of apparent weaknesses which can pose a challenge to successful development. The factors in the *Very Important* group are the ones that the town should consider addressing first because they are the most critical potential “deal-breakers.” Again, the town should next consider those in the *Important* group, and finally the *Less Important* group.

Unlike the strengths or deal-makers, the list of weaknesses is **arranged in order of priority**. It is suggested that Ashland review the prioritized lists and the detailed narrative about all location factors, while keeping in mind its economic development objectives and the resources available for addressing “deal-breakers” and other weaknesses. This report is an opportunity for an informed dialogue among colleagues and for establishing a roadmap to turn “deal-breakers” into “deal-makers.”

Weaknesses among Very Important Location Factors

- **Timeliness of Approvals:** Site plan reviews, zoning variances, and the appeals process take an average of four to eight weeks longer in Ashland than in the CGM.
- **Workforce Composition:** The town has a higher percentage of its workforce that consists of English language learners than the CGM.
- **Rents:** Rents in Ashland for all asset types and classes other than manufacturing space is higher than the CGM. In addition, the town has no Class A office space.
- **Highway Access:** None of Ashland’s available retail, manufacturing, or general office space sites are located within 2 miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway.

Weaknesses among Important Location Factors

- **Critical Mass Firms:** Ashland lacks an up-to-date economic development plan or comprehensive strategy, has targeted no specific industry sectors, and does not have an industrial attraction policy.
- **Sites Available:** The town of Ashland does not own sites that it markets for development.
- **State Business Incentives.** Though the state of Massachusetts offers a variety of special tax incentives, the town of Ashland takes very little advantage of them.

- **Local Business Incentives:** Ashland does not offer any local business incentives, pursue federal or state programs, and does not use Tax Increment Financing or other tax breaks to attract and retain businesses. In addition, the town does not participate in a regional brownfield revolving loan fund or offer its own.
- **Local Tax Rates:** Ashland’s single tax rate for industrial, commercial, and residential properties is higher than the CGM.
- **Tax Delinquency:** The town of Ashland chooses to auction tax title properties later than the CGM and has no clear process for conducting such auctions and ensuring that they are successful.
- **Citizen Participation in the Review Process:** In Ashland, abutters and neighborhood groups slow the permitting process “very much” and the town does not have a specific time frame and procedure for response to initial stages of the development process.
- **Housing:** The cost of housing is higher than the CGM, and few major officers of firms reside within the community.

Weaknesses among Less Important Location Factors

- **Permitting Ombudsman:** Unlike the CGM, Ashland does not get involved in or provide technical assistance for the state or federal licensing/permitting process on behalf of businesses.
- **Airports:** The town of Ashland is further from a regional and an international airport than most of the CGM.
- **Rail:** Ashland does not have freight rail service available whereas most of the CGM does.

These weaknesses that surfaced in the EDSAT analysis provide guidelines to where Ashland could exert more effort to improve its ability to attract business and build its tax base.

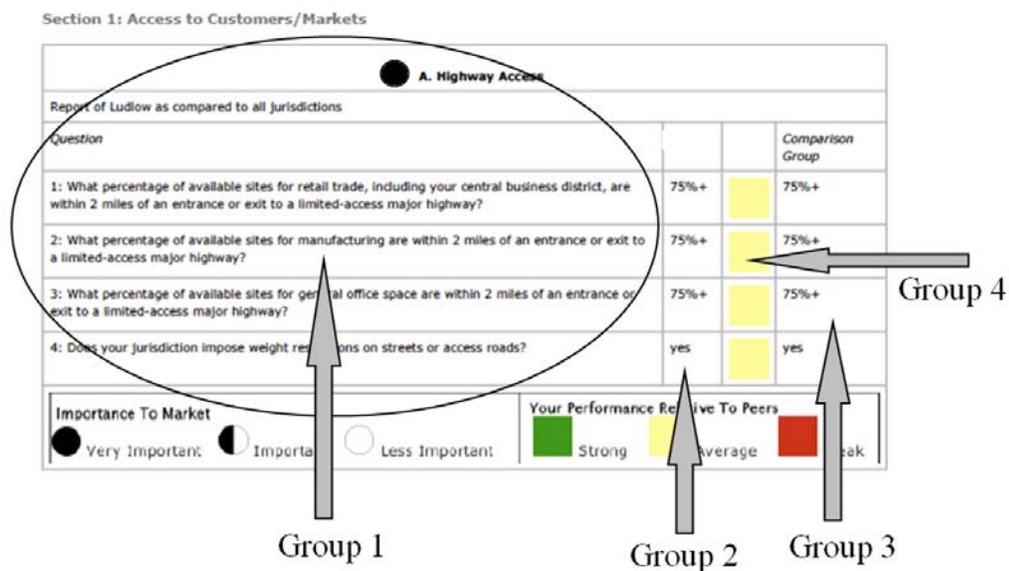
DETAILED ANALYSIS AND QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The following is a section-by-section analysis of the EDSAT results comparing Ashland’s self-reported responses to both the overall importance of each location factor and the median response among the CGM. Within each section are several related themes, where the symbols ●, ◐, and ○ indicate the relative importance of the theme to developers and businesses, as ranked by NAIOP and CoreNet Global location experts. The shaded circle (●) denotes a *Very Important* factor, the half-shaded circle (◐) denotes an *Important* factor, and the unshaded circle (○) denotes a *Less Important* factor.

Importance To Market Very Important Important Less Important	Your Performance Relative To Peers Strong Average Weak No Comparison
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This section of the report presents a tabular printout from the EDSAT. The results are displayed in four primary groupings of information:

- **Group 1** identifies location themes, such as Highway Access, and questions about specific location factors related to that theme. At the top of each table is a circle that represents the relative importance of a theme to location experts and businesses. A filled circle (●) indicates “Very Important,” a half-filled circle (◐) indicates “Important,” and an unfilled circle (○) indicates “Less Important.”
- **Group 2** shows Ashland’s responses to the EDSAT questions.
- **Group 3** is the median or majority (for yes/no questions) response among the municipalities that have completed the EDSAT questionnaire (the comparison group or CGM).
- **Group 4** is a series of green, yellow, or red blocks indicating how Ashland compares to the CGM. There is a built-in function in EDSAT that allows a municipality to compare itself against a subset of the CGM by other criteria such as population, median income, or size of operating budget. For purposes of this analysis, however, Ashland is compared with all the CGM.



Section 1. Access to Customers/Markets

In order to minimize transportation costs and time-to-market, businesses want adequate access to uncongested transportation corridors for their shipping needs, customers, and employees. Highway access, congestion, and parking are *Very Important* factors in location decisions. Public transportation is *Important*, while proximity to airports, rail, and water transport are *Less Important*. The overall physical attractiveness of public spaces, enforcement of codes, and condition of housing and commercial real estate are *Important*, as they are indications of general economic health and quality of life in a community.

A. Highway Access ●

Ashland is located “off the beaten path,” resulting in limited highway access to commercial and industrial locations. None of the town’s retail, manufacturing, or general office space is located within two miles of a limited-access major highway. Though a factor that is very important to location specialists, Ashland is close to the highway and should not be a problem given the low to moderate traffic congestion. Town Hall is located 5.5 miles from I-495 in Hopkinton, and 3.4 miles from I-90 in Framingham. Though I-90 passes through the northwest corner of town, no access is available from Oak Hill Road. Ashland does not impose weight restrictions on roads, which could reduce transport costs for shipping-reliant industries.

Question	Ashland		CGM
1: What percentage of available sites for retail trade, including your central business district, is within 2 miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway?	0%		75% or greater
2: What percentage of available sites for manufacturing is within 2 miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway?	0%		75% or greater
3: What percentage of available sites for general office space is within 2 miles of an entrance or exit to a limited-access major highway?	0%		75% or greater
4: Does your jurisdiction impose weight restrictions on streets or access roads?	no		no

B. Public Transit ◐

Ashland is on par with or at an advantage with its public transit system. Seventy-five percent or more of available sites for retail, manufacturing, and general office space are within 1/4 mile of public bus and/or rapid rail transit. Ashland is served by the Framingham/Worcester commuter line and MetroWest Regional Transit Authority’s bus route #5 along state highway 135. The bus runs every 65 to 75 minutes and stops approximately 1.2 miles from the commuter rail station. Unlike the CGM, Ashland offers shuttle services to the public commuting station. The available bus route is available Monday through Friday, and commuter rail service is available seven days a week. The town should consider additional shuttle van or bus services to connect more residents with public transit opportunities. The town’s transit-oriented development strategy puts it at an advantage by catalyzing smart growth around identified commercial and industrial areas.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
5: What percentage of available sites for retail trade is within 1/4 mile of public bus or rail rapid transit?	75% or greater		between 50-74% and 75% or greater
6: What percentage of available sites for manufacturing is within 1/4 mile of public bus or rail rapid transit?	75% or greater		50-74%
7: What percentage of available sites for general office space is within 1/4 mile of public bus or rail rapid transit?	75% or greater		50-74%
8: Is there a transit-oriented development strategy in your plans for attracting new firms?	yes		no
9: Is there a commuter rail or bus stop within 5 miles of your jurisdiction's boundaries?	yes		yes
10: Do you offer any shuttle services to other public commuting stations?	yes		no
11: Is public transit service available on nights and weekends?	yes		yes

C. Parking ●

Parking in Ashland is comparable to CGM communities. Seventy-five percent or more of available retail, manufacturing, and general office space has on-site parking. Like the CGM, the town does not offer parking facilities near development sites, nor does it use state or federal infrastructure grants to improve parking. The need for parking structures might be limited at this time, though development on the Nyanza site and along Cherry and Front Streets might necessitate long-term parking planning. At this time, the town does not charge for parking, though it might want to consider timed and/or metered parking once commercial density increases.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
12: What percentage of available sites for retail trade has on-site parking?	75% or greater		75% or greater
13: What percentage of available sites for manufacturing has on-site parking?	75% or greater		75% or greater
14: What percentage of available sites for general office space has on-site parking?	75% or greater		75% or greater

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
15: Does your jurisdiction offer parking facilities near development sites?	no		no
16: Have you used state or federal infrastructure grants to improve parking in your jurisdiction?	no		no
17: How much is typically charged for parking in your central business district? \$ Hourly	0		0
18: How much is typically charged for parking in your central business district? \$ Daily	0		0
19: How much is typically charged for parking in your central business district? \$ Monthly	0		0

D. Traffic ●

Ashland matches or outperforms the CGM in all traffic considerations. Residents rate the town's traffic as moderately congested, and the average speed of commuter rush hour traffic matches the CGM at 11–25 mph. Ashland has regular access to a traffic engineer and a transportation planner, routinely uses the services of a transportation consultant, has access to traffic count data, and requires that large-scale developments must conduct a traffic impact analysis. Unlike the CGM, traffic mitigation is not required by firms and developers, which gives Ashland an advantage in attracting commercial development.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
20: Do you have regular access to a traffic engineer or transportation planner, such as one who is on staff or with a regional organization to which your jurisdiction is a member?	no		no
21: Do you routinely use the services of a transportation consultant?	yes		yes
22: Do you have access to traffic count data for the major roadways in your jurisdiction?	yes		yes
23: Do you require firms or developers to provide traffic mitigation beyond the streets adjacent to the site? (e.g. installing traffic signals, metering flow)	no		yes
24: How would you rate traffic into and out of your jurisdiction during a typical weekday	Moderately congested		Moderately congested

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
rush hour?			
25: What is the average speed of automobile commuter traffic during a typical weekday rush hour?	11–25 mph		11–25 mph
26: Do you require a traffic impact analysis for large-scale development or redevelopment projects?	yes		yes

E. Airport O

Ashland is located more than 30 miles from Boston’s Logan International Airport and 31 miles from Worcester Regional Airport. The distance from an international and regional airport puts Ashland at a disadvantage in attracting most industry sectors relative to the CGM. Both Worcester and Logan are accessible by public transit. By car, Worcester is more than 40 minutes, whereas Logan requires 61 to 90 minutes of travel time by car, depending on the time of day. Both airports require more than 90 minutes of travel by public transit.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
27: Do you have a local (municipal/ general aviation) airport?	no		no
28: The closest regional airport is how many miles away?	31 miles or more		11-20 miles
29: The closest major/international airport is how many miles away?	31 miles or more		20-30 miles
30: Is the major/international airport accessible by public transportation?	yes		yes
31: How long does it take to drive to the major/international airport from your downtown?	61 minutes to 90 minutes		61 minutes to 90 minutes

F. Rail O

Ashland has an advantage in that it has a commuter rail stop at Ashland Station; however it lacks an intercity or interstate rail system like Amtrak. Unlike other jurisdictions, the town does not have freight rail service available, which puts it at a disadvantage for industries that require rail freight service to transport goods.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
32: Do you have rail freight service available?	no		yes
33: Do you have intercity passenger rail service? Check all that apply.			

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
- Commuter	yes		no
- Intercity/Interstate(Amtrak)	no		no
- no	no		yes

G. Physical Attractiveness

Though a desirable community, Ashland could improve upon its actions to maintain its physical attractiveness. The town weakly enforces codes and regulations on abandoned properties, abandoned vehicles, and trash/rubbish disposal. In addition, the town moderately maintains streets, sidewalks, parks, and other features near available development sites. Like other jurisdictions, the town has not implemented a quick-feedback interface for reporting public works issues (like a citizen connect application or a prominent email submittal button or phone number on the town’s website home page), nor a system for measuring the timeliness and quality of responses to reported violations. Also similar to the CGM, the town does not involve the arts community in the design of open space. Ashland outperforms the CGM in that more than 20 percent of its land is reserved for parks. These park lands include Ashland State Park, Aikens Land, and various riverfront and community parks.

Ashland is at an advantage to other communities in that between 11 and 15 percent of commercial space is presently vacant. Though this might at first glance seem a disadvantage, a higher percentage of developable sites makes Ashland more attractive to location experts. To ensure that these empty spaces do not contribute to blight in the community, the town should accelerate the development of a system for rapid reporting and monitoring for its residents. This will engage the town in maintaining attractive properties along the main arterials and commercial corridors, which services as a window to the community and can make or break a relocation deal. Like other communities, the percentages of housing stock considered dilapidated, commercial and industrial buildings boarded up or closed down, and vacant industrial space is between 6 and 10 percent.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
34: To what extent do you enforce codes and regulations on abandoned properties / abandoned vehicles / trash and rubbish disposal within your jurisdiction?	Weakly		Moderately
35: To what extent does your jurisdiction maintain streets, sidewalks, parks, etc., near available development sites?	Moderately		Moderately
36: Is there a hotline available for reporting code violations and maintenance needs within your jurisdiction?	no		no
37: Is there a system for monitoring the timeliness and quality of responses to reported violations within your jurisdiction?	no		no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
38: Do you involve the arts community in the design of open space (street furniture, murals, etc.)?	no		no
39: What percentage of the acreage within your jurisdiction is reserved for parks?	21% or greater		6-10%
40: What percentage of your housing stock is considered dilapidated?	0-5%		0-5%
41: What percentage of your commercial buildings are boarded up or closed down and would need renovations to reopen?	0-5%		0-5%
42: What percentage of commercial space is presently vacant (not currently occupied)?	11-15%		6-10%
43: What percentage of your industrial buildings are boarded up or closed down and would need renovations to reopen?	0-5%		0-5%
44: What percentage of industrial space is presently vacant (not currently occupied)?	6-10%		6-10%

H. Water Transportation O

Ashland does not have water-based transportation facilities.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
45: Do you have water based transportation facilities within your jurisdiction? Check all that apply.			

Section 2. Concentration of Businesses (Agglomeration)

Agglomeration refers to the number of complementary and supplemental services and related firms—including academic institutions—that are available within a jurisdiction to support new or existing companies. A concentration of similar or supporting companies creates a critical mass of businesses within an industry, making it easier for that industry to thrive in the local community, regionally, or on the state level. The scale of agglomeration within a jurisdiction can be enhanced by the intensity of its efforts to attract companies, its coordination of marketing plans with regional or state efforts, cross marketing among stakeholder organizations, and follow-up with existing and potential businesses.

A. Complementary/Supplemental Business Services ◀

Ashland is strong in its offerings of complementary and supplemental business services. The Ashland Business Association and MetroWest Chamber of Commerce are moderately involved, which is similar to local chamber and business association activity across the CGM. The town also features an active volunteer economic development committee.

Ashland aligns with the CGM in that business services (venture capital, specialized recruiting, business consulting, etc.) within the town are moderately capable of working with emerging technical and scientific firms. Moreover, with CPA, business advisory as well as specialized law and financial firms conveniently located within the city’s boundaries, businesses are able to conduct their operations without leaving Ashland. The town does not have an incubator or cooperative space for start-up businesses, which is on par with the CGM.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
1: Is your local chamber of commerce or business association actively involved in the economic development activities of your jurisdiction?	Moderately		Moderately
2: Does your jurisdiction have an active volunteer economic development committee or nonprofit center for economic development?	yes		yes
3: Is there an incubator or other form of cooperative and supportive space for start-up businesses in your jurisdiction?	no		no
4: Are there CPA, business advisory and financial services firms in your jurisdiction?	yes		yes
5: Are there law firms in your jurisdiction specializing in commercial law, intellectual property rights, and patents?	yes		yes
6: Are there branches of major commercial banks in your jurisdiction?	yes		yes
7: To what extent are the business services (e.g. venture capital, business planning, specialized recruiting, etc.) in your jurisdiction capable of working with emerging technical and scientific firms?	Moderately capable		Moderately capable

B. Critical Mass Firms ◀

Ashland does not have an up-to-date development strategy, overall economic development plan (OEDP), or an economic development plan within its master plan. An updated plan would help the town target relevant industries as well as leverage applicable state and federal grants, benefit from state and regional business recruiting efforts, and

increase collaboration with local and regional economic development stakeholders. As part of the MetroWest Regional Collaborative (MWRC), state and regional resources are available to help the town target appropriate industries and implement an industrial attraction policy.

Ashland has not identified any specific industry types or sectors as part of its economic development strategy. The town would benefit from targeting industry sectors that align with the state’s development strategy. Such planning can direct and shape the town’s growth so that it reflects the character and goals of Ashland. This activity would involve taking a business inventory, looking for industry clusters already within the town, and using regional, county, and state development specialists could reveal opportunities for manageable growth. New commercial and light industrial expansion would create jobs, increase tax revenue, and diversify Ashland’s economy. It is recommended that Ashland consider industries that take into consideration the town’s highway (Section 1.A) and freight rail (Section 1.F) constraints while leveraging the ample infrastructure (Section 3.A) that is available for expansion and new development.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
8: Does your jurisdiction have an up-to-date development strategy, overall economic development plan (OEDP), or an economic development plan within your community master plan?	no		yes
9: Is your jurisdiction part of a county or regional OEDP or Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)?	no		yes
10: Does your state have a development strategy or economic development plan?	yes		yes
11: If yes, are there firms within specific industry types or sectors that are targeted in your jurisdiction's, your county's or your state's development strategy?	yes		yes
12: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your municipality's development strategy? (Your Municipality)	No Targets		
13: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your municipality's development strategy? Other, please specify (Your Municipality)			
14: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your region/county's development strategy? (Regional/County)	Alternative Energy; Information Technology;		

Question	Ashland		CGM
	Financial Services; Other Life Sciences, including Biotech; Healthcare		
15: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your region/county's development strategy? Other, please specify (Regional/County)			
16: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your state's development strategy? (State)	Alternative Energy; Travel and Tourism; Information Technology; Financial Services; Other Life Sciences, including Biotech; Healthcare		
17: If yes, what specific industry types or sectors are targeted by your state's development strategy? (State)			
18: Which of the following jurisdictions have development specialists to assist in interpreting the needs of these clusters? (Choose all that apply)	State		State
19: How aggressive is your industrial attraction policy?	Don't have one		Moderate

C. Cross Marketing

Ashland matches the CGM in all cross marketing activities. The town engages local and regional business, planning, and development organizations to participate in marketing the town, the business association and chamber host participate in marketing the town, and existing firms are vested in the community and have an awareness of local

market needs, business climate, and local and regional business resources. This local knowledge can be an extremely valuable resource for advising new and prospective firms on site locations and the marketplace, share methods with town officials to recruit and grow firms, and help Ashland enhance marketing efforts. Furthermore, the town engages the MWRC and state agencies to participate in marketing, which have a broader base of potential investors and resources than Ashland. These agencies also have a strong commitment to communities in central Massachusetts, and Ashland should consider leveraging its relationship more to create an economic development strategy and market to target industries.

The town does not actively enlist resident firms to participate in such efforts, which matches the CGM. However, Ashland should consider working more closely with resident firms to market the town. Resident firms possess local knowledge that potential firms cannot get elsewhere and can be much more persuasive than government agencies in convincing companies to locate in Ashland.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
20: Do you actively enlist the services of firms already resident in your jurisdiction to assist in attracting new firms?	no		no
21: Do you engage local and regional business organizations to participate in marketing your jurisdiction?	yes		yes
22: Do you engage regional planning and development organizations to participate in marketing your jurisdiction?	yes		yes
23: Do you engage state agencies and organizations to participate in marketing your jurisdiction?	yes		yes

D. Marketing Follow-up

Mirroring the CGM, Ashland does not conduct any marketing follow-up with firms or inquire about their satisfaction levels. Marketing follow-up, just like cross-marketing (Section 2.C), can yield valuable first-hand information. Through formal de-briefings, such as meetings and focus groups, your town can learn the reasons firms decided to locate in or outside Ashland. Town administrators can not only use this new knowledge to shape marketing and branding campaigns, but for the improvement of town operations, customer relations, and recruitment strategies. Thoughtfully considering and acting on input from these firms can help make the town more business-friendly, foster businesses growth, and become more attractive to prospective firms. This puts Ashland in control of the cognitive maps associated with doing business there.

Additionally, Ashland may want to establish a formal procedure to intervene when negative news surfaces about firm dissatisfaction. This will be increasingly important as the town’s commercial and industrial base grows. Addressing this news early may alleviate the source of dissatisfaction, minimize damaging public relations, and open lines of communications—all factors that both enhance the business-friendliness of a municipality and build relationships with firms.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
24: Is there a formal de-briefing process with firms that chose to locate in your jurisdiction about what made the difference?	no		no
25: Is there a formal de-briefing process with firms that chose <u>not</u> to locate in your jurisdiction about what made the difference?	no		no
26: Do you have a formal procedure for contacting existing local firms about their satisfaction with your jurisdiction?	no		no
27: Do you have a formal procedure for intervening when early news surfaces about firm dissatisfaction with your jurisdiction?	no		no

E. Proximity to Universities and Research O

Ashland has considerably more proximate higher education institutions than the CGM. Proximity to universities and research are important to knowledge-based industries when selecting new locations. The town has four public or private four-year colleges/universities within ten miles including Wellesley College, Framingham State University, Clark University, and Regus College. Ashland is home to the Mass Bay Community College Automotive Technology Center. Although the town itself lacks a vocational/technical school within its borders, the town has a district-wide agreement with Joseph P. Keefe Regional Technical High School, which is less than 3 miles away in neighboring Framingham.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
28: How many major public or private four-year college or universities are located within your jurisdiction?	0		0
29: How many major public or private four-year college or universities are located within 10 miles of your jurisdiction?	4		2
30: How many community colleges are located within your jurisdiction?	1		0
31: How many vocational/technical schools are located within your jurisdiction?	1		1

Section 3. Cost of Land (Implicit/Explicit)

The cost of land to a firm includes two *Very Important* factors: Infrastructure and Rent. Updating civil, utility, and telecommunications infrastructure represents significant expenses for a firm to incur. Therefore, if a municipality does not already have adequate capacity in place, a potential firm could decide to locate in another municipality with adequate capacity. Rents are *Very Important* as they contribute heavily to operating expenses. Location experts consider the quality of available space and amount of available land for development *Important* factors.

A. Infrastructure ●

Ashland has excellent infrastructure. All of the core infrastructure needs of location specialists—water supply, public sewer, wastewater treatment, natural gas, electric power, and all forms of data/communications—currently have sufficient capacity for growth and deliver reliable service. Even with Title 5 regulations (similar to regulations that exist in many competitive communities), this strength allows all types of firms and industries to situate in Ashland with neither the hindrance of limited infrastructure capacities nor the necessity to invest in costly, new infrastructure.

In terms of electricity utility rates, Ashland’s rates through NSTAR are higher than the CGM for residential and industrial end users. Commercial and industrial rates per kilowatt hour (14.4 cents) are less than the residential rate (18.0 cents). Higher utility rates put Ashland at a disadvantage that makes opening and operating business costly for industries that rely on high volume electricity use. However, these rates are in alignment with the average rates for the state of Massachusetts, which were 18.19 cents for residential, 13.94 cents for commercial, and 12.14 cents for industrial as of April 2014. Commercial and industrial rates vary based on usage and negotiation on behalf of the firm or locations specialist.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
1: Are there significant limitations to any of your existing infrastructure systems? - Water Supply	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service		Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
2: Public Sewer	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service		Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
3: Wastewater Treatment	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service		Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
4: Natural Gas	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable		Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
	service		service
5: Electric Power	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service		Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
6: Data/Telecommunications - Land Lines	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service		Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
7: Data/Telecommunications - Cellular	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service		Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
8: Data/Telecommunications - Fiber optic / Cable / DSL	Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service		Sufficient capacity for growth & reliable service
9: What is the average cost in cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for residential, commercial, and industrial end users in your municipality? Residential	18.0		16.23
10: What is the average cost in cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for residential, commercial, and industrial end users in your municipality? Commercial	14.4		15.20
11: What is the average cost in cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for residential, commercial, and industrial end users in your municipality? Industrial	14.4		13.03

B. Rents ●

With the exception of manufacturing space, all business rents in Ashland are marginally higher than in the CGM. Retail space is \$1 to \$1.50 more per square foot in the central business district and highway business district, respectively. Office space in the central business district runs from \$1 more per square foot for Class B office space to \$2.25 more per square foot for Class C office space. In the highway business district, Class B and C office space is \$4 more per square foot. On a positive note, the town’s limited manufacturing space is \$1 less per square foot.

The town has no Class A office space, which puts it at a disadvantage compared to the CGM. To location specialists, this signals that more tenant improvements and building retrofits are needed to accommodate modern amenities and technologies. Ashland matches the CGM with 40 percent of its office space categorized as Class C. With no Class A office space, the remaining 60 percent is Class B. The lower percentage of high-quality office space should result in lower rents. However, limited availability of overall office, retail, and manufacturing space in the town no doubt drives up prices. To attract a stronger business tax base, Ashland is encouraged to increase the supply of retail and industrial facilities and Class A office space through development incentives, particularly along the Pine Street “highway” district.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
12: What is the current average square foot cost for existing retail space in your central business district (Triple Net/Lease)?	13		12
13: What is the current average square foot cost for existing retail space in your highway business district (Triple Net/Lease)?	13		between 11 and 12
14: What is the current average square foot cost for existing manufacturing space (Triple Net/Lease)?	5		6
15: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your central business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS A	n/a		between 12 and 12.50
16: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your central business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS B	13		12
17: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your central business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS C	11		between 8.50 and 9
18: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your	n/a		n/a

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
highway business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS A			
19: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your highway business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS B	13		9.00
20: What is the current average square foot cost for existing general office space in your highway business district (Triple Net/Lease)?: CLASS C	11		7
21: Of all the available office space in your jurisdiction, what percentage is: CLASS A	0		15
22: Of all the available office space in your jurisdiction, what percentage is: CLASS B	60		40
23: Of all the available office space in your jurisdiction, what percentage is: CLASS C	40		40

C. Quality of Available Space

Compared to the CGM, Ashland has a significantly smaller proportion of contaminated or brownfield sites (1-10 percent instead of 21–35 percent). The town currently has limited experience redeveloping contaminated or brownfield sites. The 35-acre Nyanza site, particularly the Hill section, limits what can be built on this site yet has potential once additional funding is available to complete remediation (under review in 2014).

Ashland’s percentage of vacant or underutilized shopping centers matches the CGM. Its small percentage of unused open land or greenfield sites is small, making it difficult to attract large developments or employers. The town might consider rezoning existing parcels in areas where increased density would fit with the town’s character and needs. The town might also consider attracting satellite offices or industries with a high percentage of telecommuters or mobile workforces to encourage office and commercial development on smaller parcels.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
24: Approximately what percentage of available sites in your jurisdiction would be considered contaminated or brownfield sites?	1-10%		21-35%
25: What experience does your jurisdiction have with the redevelopment of contaminated or brownfield sites?	Limited		Limited

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
26: Approximately what percentage of available sites in your jurisdiction would be considered vacant or severely underutilized shopping centers?	11-20%		11-20%
27: Approximately what percentage of available sites in your jurisdiction would be considered unused open land or greenfield sites?	1-10%		21-35%

D. Land (space) ◀

Ashland aligns with the CGM in the amount of vacant developable land is zoned for commercial/industrial uses. It also aligns with the amounts of vacant usable industrial, warehouse, and office space. This limited amount of space, given the current zoning and land use, is a major constraint. In order to develop a strategy that promotes a strong commercial and industrial tax base, the town might consider ways to increase the supply of space for expansion and growth. This might include designating density improvement zones and encouraging mixed use developments to deliver retail, office, and light industrial space within walking distance to transportation hubs, commercial corridors, or denser residential areas.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
28: Approximately how much vacant developable land in your jurisdiction is currently zoned for commercial/industrial uses?	1-150 acres		1-150 acres
29: Approximately how much vacant useable industrial or warehouse space exists in commercial/industrial buildings in your jurisdiction?	1-250,000 sq. feet		1-250,000 sq. feet
30: Approximately how much vacant useable office space exists in commercial/industrial buildings in your jurisdiction?	1-250,000 sq. feet		1-250,000 sq. feet
31: What proportion of the parcels available for industrial development or large scale commercial development is of 5 acres or more?	11-20%		11-20%

Section 4. Labor

The effect of labor factors on location decisions runs somewhat contrary to popular belief. An available labor force that is adequately trained (Workforce Composition) is a *Very Important* factor, while the cost of labor is *Important* and the presence of strong unions is *Less Important*. Conventional wisdom often holds that municipalities with higher labor costs and stronger unions negatively impact a firm’s location decision. However, if the workforce is adequately skilled, these factors are not as strong “deal-breakers” as the general belief holds.

Employers are willing to pay for the necessary skills. Workforce training resources is *Less Important* relative to other location factors. However, having a technically trained workforce whose skills align with industries a municipality wants to attract is a valuable selling point.

A. Labor Costs

All of Ashland’s labor costs, including average hourly wages for both semi-skilled and mid-level clerical workers, average public high school teachers’ salaries, and lack of a living wage statute, are on par with the CGM.

Question	Ashland		CGM
1: What is the prevailing average hourly wage rate for semi-skilled, blue-collar manufacturing workers?	\$12.26– \$17.25		\$12.26– \$17.25
2: What is the prevailing average hourly wage rate for mid-level clerical workers?	\$12.26– \$17.25		\$12.26– \$17.25
3: What is the prevailing average annual salary for public high school teachers?	\$60,001– \$70,000		\$60,001– \$70,000
4: Is there a local minimum or living wage statute?	no		no

B. Workforce Composition

Ashland’s higher percentage of professionals offers an advantage over the CGM and signifies a highly educated workforce. Ashland may want to consider this advantage, as well as available labor (Section 4.D) when choosing industries to target. Certain industries require highly educated professionals, such as the scientific and technical sectors, which also happen to be state targets (Section 2B). Ashland is home to more workers who are English language learners: this seeming disadvantage could be leveraged to attract business that need multi-lingual workers.

Question	Ashland		CGM
5: What percentage of your workforce is Unskilled?	1-25%		1-25%
6: What percentage of your workforce is Semi-skilled	1-25%		1-25%
7: What percentage of your workforce is Technically skilled	26-49%		26-49%

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
8: What percentage of your workforce is Managerial	1-25%		1-25%
9: What percentage of your workforce is Professional	26-49%		1-25%
10: What percentage of your workforce are current English language learners?	11-20%		0-10%

C. Unions ○

Union activity in Ashland is on par with the CGM. The town has not had a major strike or work stoppage in the last three years nor has it had a major union organizing drive. Labor unions are somewhat of a presence, primarily among municipal, educational, and telecommunications sector workers.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
11: Have any employers in your jurisdiction had a major strike or work stoppage within the last three years?	no		no
12: Has there been a major union organizing drive among public or private workers in the last 3 years?	no		no
13: Do labor unions have a significant presence in the labor market of your jurisdiction?	Somewhat		Somewhat

D. Labor (Available) ●

According to the 2012 ACS estimates, 96.3 percent of Ashland residents age 25 or older have a high school diploma, and 54.8 percent have a bachelor's degree. With high proportions of professionals and managers in the workforce (Section 4A) and residents age 25 and older with at least a bachelor's degree, the town is especially attractive to knowledge-based firms like those in the scientific and technical sectors.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
14: What percentage of residents age 25 or older has earned at least a high school diploma?	85% or greater		85% or greater
15: What percentage of residents age 25 or older has earned at least a bachelor's degree?	51% or greater		21-35%

E. Workforce Training ○

The town of Ashland matches the CGM in most workforce training factors. The town does not interact with the top workforce training resources to address the skill development needs of firms. The town does have a workforce-related adult education program that is available to residents through Heath Tech and the Mass Bay Community College Automotive Technology Center. To the town's disadvantage, it does not support public-private partnerships to provide specific workforce training. This low level of workforce training involvement is no doubt connected to the small number of industries currently sited in Ashland.

Question	Ashland		CGM
16: Which of the following workforce training resources do you interact with to respond to skill development needs of firms?			
- Regional employment board or state employment services department	no		
- Area High schools	no		
- Voc-tech schools or community colleges	no		
- Human service or nonprofit career training centers	no		
17: Do you support public-private partnerships to provide specific workforce training?	no		yes
18: Is there an adult education program readily available to residents of your jurisdiction?	yes		yes

Section 5. Municipal Process

The municipal process section covers several themes of marketing and permitting. When it comes to marketing themselves, jurisdictions that are aggressive and collaborate with local firms may be at an advantage in attracting new investment. Those firms can speak to interested companies and investors about first-hand experiences and market conditions, and advise municipal leaders about industries with which they are intimately familiar. Additionally, a municipality needs to establish a transparent and efficient permitting process to minimize business startup time and costs. Among the factors examined in this theme, timeliness of approvals is *Very Important* to location experts, and the remaining themes are *Important* with the exception of the Permitting Ombudsman, which is *Less Important*.

A. Industrial Sensitivity ◐

Like most of the CGM respondents, Ashland does not yet have an industry sensitivity strategy. As a result, it does not have a marketing program based on location specialist needs, core strengths, identified opportunities, or industry concentrations. Without an industry attraction policy and plan, such a marketing program has most likely not been a

priority. The town also does not have a quick response team to counteract negative publicity, does not engage local businesses to speak on its behalf, and does not have a strategy for using local culture to attract niche shopping.

Ashland should consider creating an industry sensitivity strategy. Creating such a strategy would help the town take advantage of strengths, like having sufficient infrastructure to accommodate new firms and a highly skilled workforce. Deliberate cultivation of this strategy will direct an accurate depiction of Ashland’s cognitive map (or perceived image/reputation) as a good place to live and do business.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
1: Does your jurisdiction have a marketing program based on the needs identified by industrial or office location specialists?	no		no
2: Does your jurisdiction have a marketing program based on existing core strengths, identified opportunities, or industry concentrations?	no		no
3: Do you have a quick response team available when negative data, stories, or incidents about your jurisdiction make the news?	no		no
4: Do you actively engage local business spokespersons to speak on behalf of your jurisdiction?	no		no
5: Do you have a strategy for engaging your jurisdiction's racial or ethnic populations in unique businesses, festivals, etc., as a way to attract regional niche shopping?	no		no

B. Sites Available

Ashland has few available sites. Unlike the CGM, it has no sites that are owned by the jurisdiction that it is currently marketing for development. Current Community Preservation Act Program sites along Cherry and Front Streets are for housing development, but no commercial or industrial development. The town also does not have a readily accessible, up-to-date, and complete list of sites that are available for development.

The town maintains active relationships with commercial real estate industry players, has land use regulations that protect industrial lands from incompatible uses, and (unlike the CGM) has a strategy for reclaiming/ land banking tax delinquent properties. It does not have a similar strategy for reclaiming vacant or underutilized shopping centers.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
6: Does your jurisdiction own sites that it is currently marketing for development?	no		yes

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
7: Is there a readily accessible, up-to-date, complete list of sites that are available for development in your jurisdiction?	no		no
8: Do you maintain an active relationship with commercial real estate brokers, developers, or agents with sites in your jurisdiction?	yes		yes
9: Do your land use regulations protect land currently zoned industrial from encroachment by residential or other incompatible uses?	yes		yes
10: Do you have an active strategy for reclaiming or land banking tax delinquent and tax title properties?	yes		no
11: Do you have an active strategy for reclaiming vacant or underutilized shopping plazas?	no		no

C. Timeliness of Approvals ●

Ashland's permitting process is on par with the CGM in some areas, but takes longer in others. Site plan review, zoning variances, and the appeals process take an average of 4 to 8 weeks longer than the CGM. Special permits typically take 9-12 weeks, whereas building permits take less than four weeks, aligning with the median CGM respondent.

Since timeliness of approvals is one of very important considerations for location specialists, Ashland is advised to examine ways in which it can improve this process. Minimizing startup costs and time are essential for businesses and developers, and thus, regardless of the outcome of the permit application, they would prefer to hear a quick no than a slow yes. Longer review and permitting periods can tip the decision in favor of more timely municipalities. Streamlining the approvals process would make Ashland more business-friendly and enhance its attractiveness to prospective firms.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
12: What is the average time from application to completion of the review process for the following?: Site plan review	9-12 weeks		5-8 weeks
13: What is the average time from application to completion of the review process for the following?: Zoning variance	9-12 weeks		5-8 weeks
14: What is the average time from application	9-12 weeks		9-12 weeks

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
to completion of the review process for the following?: Special permit			
15: What is the average time from application to completion of the review process for the following?: Building permit	0-4 weeks		0-4 weeks
16: What is the average time from application to completion of the review process for the following?: Appeals process	13-16 weeks		5-8 weeks

D. Predictable Permits

Like timely approvals, predictable permits make a municipality attractive to prospective firms. Ashland is strong in providing predictable permits for potential developers. The town provides a checklist of permitting requirements. In addition, it provides flow charts of the permitting process and individual booklets for different permits, assisting developers in initializing the permitting process and giving Ashland an advantage over the CGM. Promoting these advantages through the town’s website and through other marketing channels will position Ashland as a great place to do business.

Ashland does not allow for a single presentation of a development proposal to all review boards and commissions. Crafting a process for developers to deliver a single permitting presentation to all review boards would make Ashland more competitive in relation to similar communities to attract prospective firms.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
22: Do you provide a checklist of permitting requirements to prospective developers?	yes		yes
23: Do you provide a flowchart of the permitting process to prospective developers?	yes		no
24: Do you provide a development handbook to prospective developers?	yes		no
25: Do you allow for a single presentation of a development proposal to all review boards and commissions with relevant permit authority?	no		no

E. Fast Track Permits

Ashland outperforms the CGM for fast track permitting considerations. The town does not pre-permit developments in certain districts nor has publicly or cooperatively-owned industrial parks that have their own expedited permitting. However, the town does market a fast track permitting option and participates in the state’s Chapter 43D program to guarantee a permitting decision within 180 days. The town also has the Pond Street Mixed Use Overlay District to direct commercial development along Highway 126. It is recommended that once an updated economic

development plan and industrial attraction strategy have been agreed upon, the town should consider pre-permit and additional overlay districts in other areas that can support commercial and industrial development.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
26: Do you pre-permit development in certain districts?	no		no
27: Are there any publicly or cooperatively owned industrial parks in your jurisdiction that have their own expedited permitting authority?	no		no
28: Do you have an "overlay" district that allows expedited permitting of certain uses?	yes		no
29: Do you market "fast track" permitting to potential developers or firms?	yes		no

F. Citizen Participation in the Review Process

Ashland has disadvantage in terms of citizen participation in the review process. Like competing jurisdictions, elected officials do little expedite development by facilitating dialogue with community groups. In addition, abutters and organized neighborhood groups “very much” contribute to slowing the permitting process. The town lacks a specific time frame and procedure for abutter and neighborhood in the initial stage of the permitting process. The town does offer interested parties multiple opportunities for review and comment during the various development review processes. In spite of these disadvantages, opposition has not stopped a development proposal, and officials have not been required to rescue a development proposal that was endangered by citizen opposition in the past five years.

Ashland can address this issue by developing a comprehensive economic development strategy, then working together with existing businesses and community leadership to communicate that strategy and plan to residents. Communicating the importance of business to a viable community will shape the cognitive maps that residents have of economic development efforts, minimize resistance, and potentially empower them to facilitate the process.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
30: To what extent do abutters slow the permitting process in your jurisdiction?	Very much		Somewhat
31: To what extent do organized neighborhood groups slow the permitting process?	Very much		Somewhat
32: To what extent do elected officials in your jurisdiction expedite development by facilitating dialogue with community groups?	Very little		Very little

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
33: Do you establish a specific time frame and procedure for abutter or neighborhood response in the initial stage of the process?	no		yes
34: Do interested parties get multiple opportunities for review and comment during the various development review processes?	yes		yes
35: Has a development proposal in your jurisdiction been stopped by abutter or neighborhood opposition in the past 5 years?	no		yes
36: Have officials from your jurisdiction intervened to rescue a development proposal that was endangered by abutter or neighborhood opposition in the last 5 years?	no		no

G. Permitting Ombudsman O

Ashland is similar to the CGM, but also has advantages when it comes to serving as a problem-solving liaison for potential firms. Like the CGM, members of the redevelopment authority are empowered to ensure the efficiency of the local permitting process, and Ashland’s review committee convenes to review major developments. Like the CGM, the town does not have an established training program for development staff or officials to identify critical adjustments or accommodate the changing needs of firms. In addition, the town manager does not play a significant role in ensuring the efficiency of the permitting process. Ashland’s disadvantage lies in that the town does not get involved in the process or provide technical assistance for businesses that require state or federal permitting or licenses.

The local licensing process is 4 weeks or less (like the CGM). Ashland’s use of local licenses puts it ahead of the CGM since the licensing process slows time to market to potential competitors. Local licenses for all businesses with special licenses for auto dealerships, bars/taverns, and restaurants are required in the town.

Ashland could create an advantage by providing technical assistance to businesses in the state and local licensing/permitting process. It could also establish a training program for development staff, boards, commissions, authorities, districts, and elected officials that identify critical adjustments in policy and regulation to accommodate the changing needs of existing and potential firms. The town is already on track to improving its permitting ombudsmanship by finding ways to get the chief executive more involved in the process. These changes would signal to incoming businesses that town leadership and staff are at their service and want to make doing business in Ashland a pleasant and efficient experience.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
37: Does the chief executive officer of your jurisdiction play a significant role in ensuring the efficiency of your local permitting process?	no		no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
38: Are there other local officials empowered to ensure the efficiency of your local permitting process?	yes		yes
39: Is there a "development cabinet" or "development team" that is convened to review major developments?	yes		yes
40: Do you have an established training program for development staff that regularly identifies critical adjustments in policy or regulation to accommodate changing needs of firms?	no		no
41: Do you have an established training program for boards, commissions, authorities, districts, and elected officials that regularly identifies critical adjustments in policy or regulation to accommodate changing needs of firms?	no		no
42: If yes, approximately how long (in weeks) is your local licensing process for businesses?	0-4 weeks		0-4 weeks
43: Is your jurisdiction involved in the process for businesses that require state or federal permitting or licensing?	no		yes
44: Do you provide technical assistance for businesses in the state or federal permit or license application process?	no		yes
45: Does your jurisdiction require any local licenses for specific businesses or industries?			
- General license for all businesses	yes		no
- Auto dealership	yes		no
- Barber shop	no		no
- Bar/Tavern	yes		no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
- Beauty salon	no		no
- Child care services	no		no
- Construction contractor	no		no
- Home health care	no		no
- Massage therapist	no		no
- Real estate agent/broker	no		no
- Restaurant	yes		no
- Skilled Trades (electrician, plumber, etc)	no		no
- Other, please specify	no		no
46: other:			

Section 6. Quality of Life (Community)

The quality of life within the community is an *Important* location factor because companies want to be able to offer employees a safe community with affordable housing, good schools, and a rich selection of cultural and recreational opportunities.

A. Cultural and Recreational Amenities ◀

Like many communities in the CGM, Ashland is home to a few cultural and recreational amenities. The town has access to public beaches and boating activities, as Ashland is home to two reservoirs, two state parks, Warren Woods, Ashland Town Forest and wetland trails. These features are part of the advantages that make Ashland an attractive and desirable place to live and work. Marketing these natural amenities should be a part of the town's overall economic development strategy.

The town does not have a professional sports team, major museum, professional repertory theater, civic center, arena, concert hall, symphony orchestra, opera, or ballet company, which matches the CGM. Unlike the CGM, the town does not have a golf course. The town's proximity to other jurisdictions make these amenities available to those living and working in Ashland.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
1: Is there a professional sports team resident within your jurisdiction?	no		no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
2: Is there a major art, science or historical museum?	no		no
3: Is there a professional repertory theater company?	no		no
4: Is there a civic center, arena or major concert hall?	no		no
5: Is there a golf course within your jurisdiction?	no		yes
6: Is there a symphony orchestra, opera, or ballet company?	no		no
7: Are there public beaches or boating activities within 5 miles of your jurisdiction?	yes		yes

B. Crime

In regards to crime, Ashland is considerably safer than the CGM in most areas. In 2013, the auto theft rate was over 61 percent lower whereas the robbery and homicide rates were so low as to be incomparable (both were at 0 in Ashland). With so few crimes committed in Ashland, residents, businesses, and developers will have few safety concerns about situating in your jurisdiction. The town should consider its residential burglary rate, however, which was 61 percent higher than the CGM (476 burglaries per 100,000 compared to 295 burglaries per 100,000 for the CGM).

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
8: What was the residential burglary rate per 100,000 last year in your jurisdiction?	476		295
9: What was the auto theft rate per 100,000 last year?	36		93
10: What was the robbery rate per 100,000 last year?	0		36
11: What was the homicide rate per 100,000 last year?	0		3

C. Housing

Housing in Ashland is a disadvantage when compared to the CGM. The ranges for median sale price of a single family home and rent for a two bedroom apartment are relatively high. The town reported that the median sale price between \$351,000 and \$450,000, and median rents for a two-bedroom apartment exceeded \$1,250 per month. These home prices do not include the recent development of condos in the town (estimated between 2,000 and 3,000 units in the community workshop). The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey estimated median home

prices at \$353,900 and median rent at \$1,198 in 2012 (ACS, 2008-2012). Home ownership, however, exceeds the CGM (76 percent or greater). Rental vacancies and available homes for purchase are less than 3 percent of the housing stock. Added together, these factors indicate that it might be difficult for potential firms to find places for their workers to live in your town.

Few major officers of firms located in the jurisdiction reside in Ashland. This could be due to the low number of large firms in the town.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
12: What was the median sale price of a single family home in your jurisdiction last year?	\$351,000-\$450,000		\$251,000-\$350,000
13: What was the median rent for a two bedroom apartment in your jurisdiction last year?	\$1251 or greater		\$801-\$1000
14: What is the home ownership rate?	76% or greater		66-75%
15: What is the vacancy rate for rental housing?	Less than 3%		3-5%
16: What percent of homes are for sale?	Less than 3%		Less than 3%
17: Approximately what proportion of the major officers of firms located in your jurisdiction live in the community?	Few		Some

D. Local Schools

Schools in Ashland matched or outperformed the CGM in all factors. In fact, U.S. News and World Report ranked Ashland High School #19 out of all 352 high schools in Massachusetts. Like the CGM, the town spent \$12,001–\$14,000 per pupil, had a dropout rate of 25 percent or less, graduated 95 percent or more of its high school students within five years, and had no underperforming schools. Though the community reported that 26 to 49 percent of K-12 students were eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch last year, the school district reported only 12.4 percent. The state mandates an assessment or proficiency test as a prerequisite for high school graduation, which are not used by the district as a measure of performance for teacher assessments/evaluations. Like the CGM, between 66 and 80 percent of Ashland students tested proficient in English and Mathematics. Further, 75 percent or more of high school graduates from last year’s class went on to a four-year college. It’s no wonder, with average SAT scores of 1622 and ACT scores of 23.8.

Though Ashland does not have any charter or boarding schools, the town is home to a Montessori school and a number of parochial schools.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
18: What is the average K-12 per pupil expenditure in your jurisdiction last year?	\$12,001-\$14,000		\$12,001-\$14,000
19: Does your state mandate an assessment or proficiency test as a prerequisite for high school graduation?	yes		yes
20: If yes, what percent of students in your jurisdiction tested at least "proficient" in English?	66-80%		66-80%
21: If yes, what percent of students in your jurisdiction tested at least "proficient" in Mathematics?	66-80%		66-80%
22: If yes, are the tests used as a measure of performance within your local school district for teacher assessments or teacher evaluations?	no		no
23: What percentage of your jurisdiction's K-12 students are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch last year?	1-25%		1-25%
24: What was the average combined (reading, math, and writing) SAT score last year?	1622		
25: What was the average composite score (English, math, reading, and science) for the ACT last year?	23.8		
26: What percentage of high school freshmen normally graduate within 5 years?	95% or more		95% or more
27: What is the high school dropout rate last year?	1-25%		1-25%
28: Are there any schools in your jurisdiction that are currently deemed "underperforming?"	no		no
29: What percentage of high school graduates from last year's class went on to a four-year college?	75% or greater		50-74%

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
30: Are there any charter schools in your jurisdiction?	no		no
31: What types of private schools are there in your jurisdiction?			
- Parochial	yes		
- Non-sectarian	yes		
- Boarding	no		

Section 7. Quality of Life (Site)

This section reviews the amenities and services available within one mile of existing development sites. Having a variety of amenities, restaurants, stores, and services near employment centers enhances the location, adds convenience, and allows employees more social opportunities.

A. Amenities

Most of the development sites in Ashland are within 1 mile of site amenities. These include fast food restaurants, day care facilities, and retail shops. Few fine dining establishments are located within 1 mile of development sites. The presence of these amenities, particularly day care options, will attract the attention of location specialists, whose firms will need such services to support a productive workforce. The lack of more fine dining options puts Ashland at a slight disadvantage compared to the CGM.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
1: What proportion of existing development sites within your jurisdiction have the following within 1 mile?: Fast food restaurant	Most		Most
2: What proportion of existing development sites within your jurisdiction have the following within 1 mile?: Fine dining	Few		Some
3: What proportion of existing development sites within your jurisdiction have the following within 1 mile?: Day care	Most		Most
4: What proportion of existing development sites within your jurisdiction have the following within 1 mile?: Retail shops	Most		Most

Section 8. Business Incentives

Business incentives (e.g. tax and financial) are *Important* factors when companies are evaluating jurisdictions for location. However, contrary to conventional wisdom, these incentives are not the first factors on which an investor makes a location decision. Factors such as infrastructure, workforce composition, and timeliness of permitting have the highest levels of importance, representing “deal-breakers.” A municipality must be at least adequate in these areas before a business will advance negotiations. Therefore, investors value a broader portfolio of business incentives as possible “deal-closers”, but might not be initially attracted by them.

A. State

With more special state tax incentive eligibility through the state of Massachusetts for Ashland’s businesses than those in the CGM, your municipality is at an advantage. However, Ashland’s businesses take very little advantage of them. The town may want to consider promoting these incentives in marketing materials and offering technical support to help firms obtain them, especially to smaller businesses that may not have resources or relevant experience. These actions will convey to businesses that Ashland is invested in their success.

Question	Ashland		CGM
1: Are businesses in your jurisdiction eligible for any of the following special state tax incentives? Check all that apply.			
- Investment tax credits	yes		no
- Job training tax credits	yes		no
- Research and development (R&D) tax credits	yes		no
- Low (subsidized) interest loans	yes		no
- Loan guarantees	yes		no
- Equity financing	no		no
- Workforce training grants	yes		no
- Other, please specify	no		no
2: Are businesses in your jurisdiction eligible for any of the following special state tax incentives? Other, please specify			
3: To what extent does your jurisdiction actively take advantage of any special state business incentives?	Very little		Somewhat

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
4: Does your state allow for priority funding for distressed economic areas?	yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	yes

B. Local

Like the CGM, Ashland has no local business incentives. It does not offer property tax abatements or provide incentives for businesses to locate in the town. The town also does not actively try to attract governmental facilities in town and does not have a designated Enterprise Zone. The town does not assist in securing financing for businesses with commercial lenders and state industrial finance mechanisms, nor does it use TIFs or other programs for retail development. Much to its disadvantage, Ashland does not actively pursue federal and/or state programs designed to assist in attracting and retaining businesses. As a further disadvantage, the town does not use TIFs or other programs to provide tax breaks for businesses, particularly given the high commercial tax rate when compared to other jurisdictions (see Section 9.A).

To build a stronger commercial and industrial base, the town should consider actively pursuing state and federal programs and providing assistance in securing financing for businesses. A brownfield revolving loan fund through state, regional, or federal sources might also be available to encourage an incoming business to do any needed remediation on the Nyanza site or other areas affected by past contamination. The lack of incentives represents a considerable hindrance to location specialist. By leveraging outside funding sources, Ashland can take a first step toward creating incentives that will help it outperform the CGM without tapping the town's coffers.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
5: Does your jurisdiction offer existing or new businesses property tax abatement? Existing businesses	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
6: If yes, what proportion of existing businesses is offered abatements?		<input type="checkbox"/>	
7: Does your jurisdiction offer existing or new businesses property tax abatement? New businesses	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
8: If yes, what proportion of existing businesses is offered abatements?		<input type="checkbox"/>	
9: Who negotiates the tax abatement?	Legislative	<input type="checkbox"/>	Legislative
10: Does your jurisdiction offer any of the following incentives for businesses to locate in your jurisdiction? (Check all that apply)			
- Revolving loan fund	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Loan guarantees	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
- Revenue bonds	no		no
- Equity participation	no		no
- Business district group loans	no		no
- None	yes		no
- Investment tax credits	no		no
- Job training tax credits	no		no
- Research and development (R&D) tax credits	no		no
- Low (subsidized) interest loans	no		no
- Workforce training grants	no		no
- Other, please specify	no		no
11: other:			
12: Does your jurisdiction actively pursue federal and/or state programs designed to assist in attracting and retaining businesses?	no		yes
13: Does your jurisdiction use Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or other programs to provide tax breaks to businesses?	no		yes
14: Does your jurisdiction grant TIFs or similar programs for retail development?	no		no
15: Does your jurisdiction assist in securing financing for businesses with commercial lenders or state industrial finance mechanisms?	no		between yes and no
16: Do you actively try to attract local, state, and federal facilities, including post offices, to your jurisdiction?	no		no

Question	Ashland		CGM
17: Is any part of your jurisdiction in a designated Enterprise Zone?	no		no
18: Do you participate in a regional brownfield revolving loan fund or offer your own?	No brownfields funds utilized		Regional

Section 9. Tax Rates

A tax rate is another cost factor that has traditionally been considered a business “deal-breaker.” Municipalities often thought that if tax rates were too high, then it would have difficulty attracting businesses. However, like business incentives, the tax rate is not one of the *Very Important* location factors. If the *Very Important* factors are satisfied, a business will likely ask for a more favorable tax rate during later stage negotiations. However, negotiations are unlikely to get to that point if the *More Important* location factors have not been satisfied.

A. Local

Ashland’s local tax climate might be a challenge when compared to other jurisdictions. The local meals tax helps pay for local services. The town does not impose impact fees on new commercial and industrial development and has none (0%) of its commercial and industrial property tax revenue abated. The challenge lies in the single property tax rate: it is 13 percent higher than the CGM for commercial/industrial property and 117 percent higher for residential property.

Ashland’s tax base is 91 percent derived from residential property, 7 percent from commercial, and 2 percent from industrial. In addition to looking at more diverse sources of revenue, the town might consider TIFs, tax abatement tools, and other incentives (see Section 8.B) to attract firms to increase the proportion of revenue from commercial and industrial properties.

Question	Ashland		CGM
1: What types of taxes are collected by your jurisdiction to pay for local services?			
- Property tax	yes		yes
- Local sales tax	no		no
- Local income tax	no		no
- Hotel room tax	no		no
- Meals tax	yes		no
2: Of the potential commercial and industrial property tax revenue your jurisdiction could collect, what percent is currently abated?	0%		0%

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
3: Does your jurisdiction tax property in industrial or commercial uses at a different rate than residential properties?	no		yes
4: If yes, what is the tax rate on industrial/commercial property? \$ /\$1,000	17.39		between 15.22 and 15.47
5: If yes, what is the tax rate on residential property? \$ /\$1,000	17.39		between 7.80 and 8.21
6: If no, what is the tax rate on all property?	17.39		17.39
7: What % of your tax revenue is derived from: Industrial %	2		
8: What % of your tax revenue is derived from: Commercial %	7		
9: What % of your tax revenue is derived from: Residential %	91		
10: Does your jurisdiction impose impact fees on new commercial or industrial development?	no		no

B. Tax Delinquency

Ashland mirrors the CGM for most tax delinquency considerations. Only 0–3 percent of residential, commercial, and industrial properties is more than one year tax delinquent. Less than 50 percent of properties are tax defaulted or subject to the power of sale. The town does not auction the “right to foreclose” on delinquent properties, seek tax abatement on such properties, or provide special attention to tax delinquent properties, which serve as an impediment to development.

The tax title auction decision process takes much longer than the CGM: 5–10 years instead of 1–5 years. In addition, the town does not have an organized process for conducting tax title properties. It is recommended that the town consider creating an organized and defined process and accelerating the auction of tax title properties to signal to incoming businesses that the town is committed to keeping the town strong and thriving in case tax delinquent property proportions rise. The town might also consider seeking short-term tax abatement on such properties to spur rapid redevelopment.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
11: What proportion of residential property in your jurisdiction is more than one year delinquent in taxes?	0%-3%		0%-3%

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
12: What proportion of commercial property in your jurisdiction is more than one year delinquent in taxes?	0%-3%		0%-3%
13: What proportion of industrial property in your jurisdiction is more than one year delinquent in taxes?	0%-3%		0%-3%
14: How many properties are tax defaulted or subject to the power of sale?	0-50		0-50
15: When do you choose to auction tax title properties?	5-10 years		1-5 years
16: Do you have an organized and defined process for conducting such auctions and ensuring that they are successful?	no		yes
17: Do you auction the "right to foreclose" on tax delinquent properties?	no		no
18: Do you seek tax abatement on tax title properties to allow the liens to clear for new owners?	no		no
19: If a tax delinquent or tax title property serves as an impediment to development, does the property receive special attention?	no		no

Section 10. Access to Information

While a municipality's website may rank as *Less Important* in terms of decision making, it can be the initial source of information that entices a location expert to probe deeper and contact a municipality's economic development department for further information. At that point, an appropriate municipal staff member has an opportunity to step in and develop a personal relationship with the developer or company representative. If the necessary data are not easily accessible and understandable, the researcher may reject the municipality as a candidate, opting instead to consider others with easily accessible data.

A. Website O

Ashland's website includes more information in some areas than the CGM. Unlike the comparison group, the town's website lists all local development policies and procedures, has a development permit checklist or flow chart, allows for downloading of date-certified applications and forms, and allows for electronic submittal of the permit application. Like the CGM, the site also includes a current list of available hearings as well as makes it easy for prospective firms to find contact information for current review board, staff members, and key officials. The site has a designated webmaster who makes weekly updates.

Ashland could enhance the value of its website by offering links to state permitting and finance agencies, economic development agencies, regional planning agencies, workforce training agencies, chambers of commerce, nonprofits, and outdoor recreation opportunities. Other areas that would add value include a list of available land and building sites as well as pending applications. As the town develops an economic development strategy, an economic development tool aimed at businesses and developers should be added to the site. Since the site serves as a first

impression for location specialists, it is important to imprint a strong initial picture so that firms choose Ashland over competing jurisdictions.

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
1: Does your jurisdiction's website list all local development policies and procedures?	yes		no
2: Does your website have contact information for key officials?	yes		yes
3: Does your website have general information about your jurisdiction?	yes		yes
4: How frequently is your website updated?	Weekly		Weekly
5: Does your website include an explicitly designed economic development tool aimed at businesses and developers?	no		no
6: Is there a development permit checklist or flow chart on the website?	yes		no
7: Are permit applications available for downloading on the website?	yes		yes
8: Are applications and other forms date certified to ensure that they are the most recent versions (i.e. the same versions that you would get in person)?	yes		no
9: Is it possible to file a permit application electronically?	yes		no
10: Is there a list of available land and building sites on the website?	no		no
11: If yes, check the types of information available about each site. (Check all that apply)			
- : Owner	no		no
- Square footage of vacant land	no		no
- Square footage and quality of existing buildings and structures	no		no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
- Abutters	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Zoning	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Assessed value	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Tax rate	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Current tax status (e.g. paid up, delinquent)	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Contamination	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Aerial photos	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- GIS links	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
12: Other, please specify		<input type="checkbox"/>	
13: Is there a posting of current hearings available on the website?	yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	yes
14: Is there a posting of pending applications available on the website?	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
15: Is there a listing of current members of development review boards and staff contact information?	yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	yes
16: Are there links to other local development resources? (Check all that apply)			
- State finance agencies	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- State permitting agencies	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Regional planning agencies	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Regional development organizations	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Workforce training organizations	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no

<i>Question</i>	<i>Ashland</i>		<i>CGM</i>
- Local public or quasi-public financing resources	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Demographic information	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Economic development agencies	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
17: Other, please specify		<input type="checkbox"/>	
18: Are there links to other locally-based private or non-profit organizations?			
- Colleges and universities	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Chambers of Commerce	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Community development corporations	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Arts and cultural organizations	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Sports and recreation venues	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
- Convention and tourist organization	no	<input type="checkbox"/>	no
19: Other, please specify		<input type="checkbox"/>	between Municipal utility and
20: Is there a designated webmaster or staff person responsible for maintaining the website?	yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	yes

SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS

Ashland, Massachusetts is a desirable community of more than 16,500 people. According to 2012 ACS estimates and 2012 Massachusetts Office of Labor and Workforce Development (MA DOL), 4,739 of the 9,880 residents in the workforce actually work in Ashland. The MA DOL reported in September 2013 that the majority of the local job opportunities were in the Retail Trade industry (822 jobs), followed by Manufacturing (721 jobs) and Administrative and Waste Services (588 jobs). Ninety-one percent (91%) of the town's tax revenue comes from residential properties. These statistics demonstrate that the town of Ashland has room to expand local jobs and diversify its tax revenues by attracting more commercial and industrial employers.

Ashland's many advantages over the CGM include good public transit, moderate traffic congestion, sufficient infrastructure capacity for expansion, predictable permitting and an established fast-track permitting process. The town also has higher proportions of professionally-skilled workers and a workforce with at least bachelor's degrees. A high percentage of parks contributes to the physical attractiveness of the town. Crime is low, home ownership rates are high, and the public school system is overall strong and produces a higher proportion of school students who go on to attend a four-year college than the CGM.

Ashland does however have some weaknesses that inhibit economic growth. Chief among them are a relatively slow permitting and appeals process, no Class A office space, very low supply of industrial and commercial space, and does not take advantage of state or regional business incentives. Perhaps even more importantly, **the town lacks economic development, industrial attraction, and marketing strategies to guide its growth.**

As the development process for most permits and appeals averages four to eight weeks longer than the CGM, Ashland may want to **investigate and streamline the permitting process.** Identifying bottlenecks and implementing fast track permitting would be extremely beneficial to helping developers make decisions more quickly and improve Ashland's image as a great place to do business.

The cost and amount of available space is a significant barrier to economic growth in Ashland. Relatively high rents are no doubt tied to the low availability of space for commercial or industrial development. Ashland should consider **identifying properties for redevelopment, then aggressively promoting them and the current Pond Street Mixed Use Overlay District** to encourage development in appropriate areas across town.

Allowing for more commercial and industrial development should fit with **an updated economic development plan.** An updated plan would help Ashland to leverage applicable state and federal grants, benefit from state and regional business recruiting efforts, and increase collaboration with local and regional economic development stakeholders. The plan could define the economic development and industrial attraction strategy and the steps needed to reach strategic goals. The plan should also include a **strategy and plan for marketing and cross-marketing** activities that outlines how the town can **take advantage of state incentives** and **build a set of local incentives** that will attract desired industry sectors. Collaborating with stakeholders, including residents and businesses, to craft it will help communicate the need for more commercial and industrial development, mitigate opposition, and allow the entire community to help shape the future of Ashland.

The town of Ashland can also address some of its other weaknesses by creating a process for more swiftly addressing tax delinquent properties and establish a specific time frame and procedure for abutter or neighborhood response throughout the development process. The town should also improve enforcement of codes and regulations in order to boost its physical attractiveness and consider creating a hotline or application (e.g. Citizens Connect) for citizen participation in reporting code violations.

All of these issues are ones which the town of Ashland has the authority to address. Ashland can overcome economic development barriers while preserving the character, history, and livability of this mature suburban community. The town has the resources and the will to confront weaknesses and threats head on and to leverage strengths to create economic stability and growth opportunities.

Recommendations	Priority
Streamline the permitting process	High
Craft a comprehensive economic development plan with a strong industrial/commercial attraction policy and marketing strategy	High
Identify and market appropriate properties to increase available sites for commercial and industrial development	High
Develop and formalize procedures and time frame for abutter and neighborhood response in the development process	Medium
Design a tax and incentive strategy for introducing local incentives, leveraging state incentives, and addressing tax delinquent properties	Medium
Implement a hotline or application for resident reporting of code violations	Low