

2004 Bristol Community Visit

Introduction

The Vermont Council on Rural Development is pleased to release this summary report from the Community Visit process to the residents and friends of the Bristol community.

What a dynamic community!

Bristol has enviable talents, diversity, and an energy per capita that is equal to that of any community in the state of Vermont today. Distinct. Geographically and geologically unique. Gateway to mountains and plains. Regional downtown hub. Center of a working landscape with a unique heritage and future. Surely, Bristol's assets make it one of the most beautiful and attractive communities in the state of Vermont.

To VCRD, the Bristol Community Visit was a great success. People from all walks of life and diverse points of view agreed that the community should look to its future and together craft a vision—then work on four fundamental priorities: youth, economic development, trails and conservation, and water/sewer infrastructure. Valuing Bristol's heritage and looking to the future, and having come to a working consensus on key priorities, Bristol residents are in a position to put their skills and experience on the table together, listen to one another, and set next steps to support the progress of the community.

We wish the new task forces all success and will do what we can to lend support to their efforts!

The Community Visit had three major parts:

- On the **Community Visit Day** on October 12th, Visiting Team members heard testimony from Bristol residents in nine focus group areas that had earlier been identified by the local steering committee. Notes and issues raised in these sessions are detailed in Part V. Based on the testimony received, the Vermont Council on Rural Development identified an initial list of the Major Challenges before the community (Part II).
- The second stage of the Community Visit occurred at the Bristol **Community Meeting** on November 16th, when VCRD presented the Major Challenges list and facilitated the review and prioritization of these issues by town residents. The resulting list of **Prioritized Challenges** (in Part I) were then the focus for the formation of five Task Forces established to build plans that would address them.
- In the third phase of the Visit, the **Community Resource Day** on December 9th the Task Forces met with a second Visiting Team to get organized, build Action Steps, and consider state, federal, non-profit, and private resources that may be

available to support their work. The resulting **Task Force Action Steps** are listed in Part IV.

Priority Challenges

Identified by Bristol Community Meeting – November 16, 2004

- **Building a Bristol Vision:** The Bristol community does not have a consensually defined vision of its future. Many residents see a need to find a balance between what businesses need to be viable and sustainable and what residents need to maintain the wonderful quality of life in the town. There is a critical need to address the divisiveness between long-term residents and relative newcomers and between town and village dwellers. There's a huge interest in working to find common ground, show mutual respect, unite the community and encourage cooperation and good relations. Part of the vision may include potential resource sharing with the five-town area.
- **Building Walking/Hiking/Biking Trails/ Expanding Bristol Conservation:** Better walking and biking lanes should be built on existing streets and a bike path should be built to connect "Tin City" to Bartlett Falls. A path could be built to connect the town property from the north end to the south end of town. A multipurpose trail would be a real attraction for residents and visitors alike. Right-of-ways and liability challenges should be overcome with a partnership of landowners and municipal leadership. A Bristol Land Trust should be created that would allow people a direct and easy way to make both time and money contributions for land conservation, protection of agricultural lands, and trail development.
- **Developing Water and Sewer Infrastructure:**
 - A. Sewage Treatment.** Septic systems have worked for small businesses and residences in Bristol; their success has prevented creative solutions around the issue of wastewater treatment needed for future village and business development. The sewer system on Merchants Road does not serve the rest of the community; this limits economic development opportunities in the village, especially for businesses that incubate here but grow out of their small shops. New technologies and potential systems should be explored.
 - B. Water System.** The town water facility has abundant water but the system lacks significant capacity to deliver it.
 - C. Stormwater System.** A stormwater system should be designed and built to prevent run off from damaging private property, especially near Mountain Street, and from flowing unimpeded into the New Haven River.

- Enhancing Economic Development:** Jobs that provide a livable wage are crucial to the retention and attraction of youth, and to the future prosperity of Bristol. A business space or industrial park for non-retail business incubation and growth should be established. Incentives should be developed to attract businesses that fit with the vision of the community. The current process for starting a business can confuse entrepreneurs who must present their ideas to two different boards; the town’s permitting system should be streamlined. Bristol should build a pro-active leadership group to encourage entrepreneurs and help to retain growing businesses. This group should also work to ensure that Bristol businesses have access to competitively affordable broadband access. This committee should also explore Bristol’s opportunity to develop a strong vertically and horizontally integrated **forest products economy**, one that adds value to the material, works with local landowners and produces products that meet market demands.
- Supporting the Success of Youth/Developing Recreation Facilities:**

A. Activities. Bristol could build three significant volunteer-led efforts in support of the success of its young people: A Mentoring/Apprenticeship program would promote job skills and provide positive role models to Bristol youth. Mentoring efforts could also include recreational activities like hiking and camping, and involve Middlebury College, which has expressed interest in developing a big brother/big sister-type mentoring program. A Community Service program could involve students in positive and productive work that benefits the community and builds skills and experience that will be useful when they seek employment. A Speakers Program in the High School could invite adults to share their stories of vocations, hobbies or life experiences and build another bridge between generations in the community. These projects could expand opportunities for adults and young people to engage in positive ways.

B. Facilities. Bristol should develop a plan to prioritize and address recreation facilities needs including: studio and classroom space for the recreation program, gym and banquet space, indoor plumbing at the youth center, picnic shelter near the playground, the development of the pavilion project, and other recreation facilities needs. This discussion could include building a new multipurpose municipal services building.

VCRD Resource Team Members

<p>Mel Adams, Planning Director VT Dept of Transportation</p>	<p>Harry Frank Vermont Children’s Forum</p>
<p>Joss Besse, Director Vermont Downtown Program-VT Dept of Housing & Community Affairs</p>	<p>George Gay, Executive Director Northern Forest Alliance</p>
<p>Kiersten Bourgeois, Economic Development Director Vermont Department of Economic Development</p>	<p>Andy Gilbertson, Outreach Assistant Office of U.S. Rep. Bernie Sanders</p>

Brian Byrnes, President & CEO VT Community Foundation	John Hall, Commissioner Housing and Community Affairs
Lynne Cleveland, Field Representative U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy	Sue Hayes, Area Director USDA-Rural Development
Hal Cohen, Executive Director Central Vermont Community Action Council	Seth Herman UVM Center for Rural Studies
Paul Costello, Executive Director Vermont Council on Rural Development	Steve Jeffrey, Director VT League of Cities and Towns
Kathleen Diehl, Partnership Coordinator Green Mountain Nat'l Forest	Ellen Kahler Peer-to-Peer Network, VT Business Roundtable
Jan Eastman, President Snelling Center for Government	Brian Keefe, Community Liaison U.S. Senator James Jeffords
Wayne Fawbush, Executive Director Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund	Candy Koenemann, Executive Assistant Vermont Council on Rural Development
Tim Kononan, Vice President & Senior Retail Officer Factory Point National Bank	Charlie Smith, Secretary VT Agency of Human Services
Adam Lougee, Executive Director Addison County RPC	Jamie Stewart, Executive Director Addison Co. Economic Development Corp.
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