

2003 Enosburg Community Visit

Introduction

Over the course of the late winter and spring of 2003, the Vermont Council on Rural Development produced a “Community Visit” with the town of Enosburg Vermont. Visits are designed to help the community review issues, then evaluate challenges and prioritize them, and engage in action toward their resolution.

Rich in tradition and character, hub of Vermont’s northern dairy lands and historic market center, Enosburg is a vibrant community with tremendous opportunities for the future. Enosburg is big sky country. Its gentle hills, winding river, open fields, patchwork forests, and tidy village center make it a post-card image that features much of what we idealize about Vermont.

We know that this landscape is neither an accident nor the result of a landscape design exercise. It is, rather, the result of innumerable decisions of private citizens working for a living in agriculture, forestry, milling and value-added agricultural operations over the last two centuries.

Behind each of the focus forums, town meetings, and task force planning sessions in the Enosburg Community Visit process were profound questions about the economy of the region, and how the town can take advantage of its superb assets and build on its historic role toward prosperity for the future. It is no accident that the challenges eventually deemed to be of the highest priority are all concerned with future economic and community development: Downtown Revitalization, Town/Village Merger, Public Safety and Crime, Education, and Economic Development. Each is a fundamental challenge. Progress on one of these challenges builds momentum for the community as a whole. Together, as central points for community engagement and action, these priorities can serve as grounds for a united effort, even a movement, to help Enosburg achieve goals for the future.

Priority Challenges

Identified By Residents at Community Meeting – April 23, 2003

- **Village Revitalization Issue:**
Many Enosburg residents want to work with the strengths of the downtown today and address needs for parking, attracting tourism, marketing the downtown as the regional hub, retaining and optimizing the presence of the cheese industry, dealing with traffic issues, especially truck traffic, finding further retail anchors, equalizing retail hours, and building momentum by strengthening the business association with new energy and leadership.

- **Town/Village Division Issue:**

Enosburg Town and Village work in relative isolation from each other. Duplication and lack of coordination may result. Few can cite a positive reason for the division. A Town/Village Merger could have the potential to streamline communications, reduce some costs, and, perhaps more importantly, build an atmosphere that Enosburg is a community moving forward all together. A feasibility study could be instituted and funded, and a committee could be assembled to provide leadership depending on its results

Electric Services: With rates as high as anywhere in Vermont, Enosburg needs to build a long-term plan for restructuring its electric services. Village ownership of the Electric Department is seen as a liability, one that interferes with any potential Town/Village merger.

- **Public Safety/Drug and Alcohol Issue:**

There are widespread concerns about drug and alcohol issues, vandalism, and resident insecurities with youth 'hanging out' downtown. There are widespread fears that children are abusing drugs and alcohol at younger ages and that this issue is a factor behind truancy, drop-out rates, and crime in the community. These issues are magnified by the perceived lack of police presence. There is a feeling of powerlessness around this issue that could be answered by expanded police coverage and potentially the development of the restorative justice and proactive work of a "Community Justice Center" in Enosburg. There are also concerns about traffic safety issues that could be dealt with concurrently.

- **Education Issue:**

Literacy: Residents are concerned about the lack of early educational opportunities, low reading scores in school, the high percentage of special needs children, high truancy and dropout rates in the High School, and challenging home environments. A community-wide literacy campaign could directly address the early reading deficits and mobilize educational resources in the community to build momentum toward improved academic performance at all levels.

Educational Engagement: Many Enosburg youth feel dis-empowered and are not actively engaged in driving their educations forward. Teachers are stressed by multiple demands and challenging youth. Many kids fall through the cracks, partly because they do not develop a vision of what they want to accomplish after they leave school. Others feel "bullied" or subject to negative peer pressure.

Community/School Partnership: Many residents and school personnel feel the need for a closer partnership. Many young people are stressed or angry and need volunteer mentors through the school's program; others lack adult supporters and positive role models. Community/School Communications could be improved, and volunteers in the school could provide enrichments.

- **Economic Development Issue:**

Development of the Industrial Park: While much has been accomplished to establish the industrial park and attract and retain business in the community, many residents believe that a concerted effort must be maintained to create new jobs and help Enosburg move forward.

Cellular Services: The lack of cellular phone services in Enosburg may impede future development and currently leads to communications gaps for particular businesses and services. As one part of an economic development strategy, Enosburg residents could negotiate with a provider of cell service and facilitate tower placement within an existing structure, or on a site acceptable to the community.

Website: Residents believe that Enosburg needs to build a strong website to provide a central point for its own communications, to allow on-line government and information exchange, and to attract new business to the community.

Tourist Economy: While Enosburg in many ways represents something of the “ideal Vermont” that tourists come to the state to experience, the community has not thoroughly developed this part of its economy. There are few overnight accommodations. Signs for local attractions and activities like the rail trail or canoe access points on the river could make the community a more welcoming destination point for tourists. There is also a significant, undeveloped agro-tourism potential with the town’s farms and dairy foods industry.

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Resource Team

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