

2001 Wilmington Community Visit

Introduction

The first thing a visitor to Wilmington notices is the beauty of the land, the mountains, hills, and the Deerfield River Valley, and then, from the White House Inn to the downtown four corners, the charm and character of the historic buildings in the village.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development Community Visit Team came to Wilmington in the spring of 2001 to help the community evaluate the challenges before it, prioritize them, and set action plans toward some of the town's most important long-term goals. The team came to examine challenges and problems, many of which are catalogued and prioritized in this report. Beyond these challenges, it found a great many community strengths that balanced the "issues" before the town.

The visiting team was deeply impressed by the dedication that the men, women and teens of Wilmington brought to the Community Visit Process. We have found that the key to success of any Community Visit has been local leadership and organization. In both these areas, Wilmington excelled. David Larsen's diplomatic skill and commitment made him the ideal chairperson for the Wilmington Community Visit. The support and participation of Selectboard leaders was terrific, and the organizational work by Sonia Alexander, the Town Manager, with assistance from Mary Towne, was absolutely top notch.

We were also keenly impressed by the knowledge and commitment of community members; first the local steering committee, then the focus group members, and community meeting attendees. The Community Visit provides an opportunity for an overview of challenges; it serves as a starting point toward their resolution, but nothing real happens without community leadership. The Wilmington Visiting Resource Team was especially encouraged by the vitality and leadership potential of each of the Task Forces formed to address community priorities.

One moment typified the hospitality of Wilmington toward the Visiting Team: on entering the elementary school for the community dinner, each Community Visitor was greeted with warmth and poise by a member of the fifth grade class. Their positive spirit reflects the community's enduring values and bodes well for the future!

Wilmington - Priority Challenges

Established in Wilmington Community Meeting, April 30, 2001

- **Education Issue** – Explore options for acquiring capital funding to deal with facility deterioration and space deficiencies at the high school. Address funding needs to provide adequate programs and courses beyond minimum standards for Wilmington children.
- **Act 60 Issue** – Determine whether there are possible actions to convince the Legislature to re-evaluate Wilmington’s “gold town” designation, reduce its contribution to the “sharing pool”, or separate capital expenditures from the sharing pool.
- **Community Center Issue** – Continue efforts to establish the teen, day care, senior and other community-based activities center. Build in possibilities for regularly scheduled out-posted social and employment services on site.
- **Economic Development Issue/Growth/Non Growth Issue** – Reach consensus as a community to determine where the town wants to go. Expand on tourist-based economy to create a year-round appeal and bring in other businesses. Establish same hours for all businesses and extend beyond 5:00 PM. Plan for controlled positive growth. Act 60 and high taxes discourage growth. There is a low number of full time residents and a lack of good paying jobs to retain young people in the community. A subgroup under Economic Development will look at: Downtown Beautification and Parking.

VCRD Resource Teams

Community Visit Day Focus Group Team

This team met with community members in nine focus sessions on March 26th, 2001

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Resource Day Visitors

This team met with Task Force Members to build action steps and review potential resources on May 31, 2001

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