

RUTLAND CITY

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM FINAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN



June, 2006
Vermont Council on Rural Development

Rutland City Creative Communities Program

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Introduction

The City of Rutland has a proud tradition of cultural creativity and economic innovation. The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) and its team of visitors from the Creative Communities Program were deeply impressed by the energy, vision, and sense of opportunity that residents brought to the table in the process, and used as foundations for the exciting projects that have resulted.

VCRD recognized Rutland's enthusiasm for the creative economy long before the Creative Communities Program itself began. By the end of its June, 2005, creative economy forum, Rutland was ready to *move* on the many great ideas being stimulated by a creative economy perspective. Leadership from Crossroads Arts and the Rutland Regional Planning Commission helped keep that enthusiasm high and these groups submitted an exceptionally strong application to the Creative Communities Program when the time arrived.

The Creative Communities Program quickly drew a strong local steering committee that reflected diverse aspects of Rutland life. Participants represented the Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Partnership, farmers, parks and recreation, local businessmen, the hospital, Regional Planning Commission, area colleges, arts organizations and the Board of Aldermen. This mix allowed the creative economy work to build a dynamic community dialogue that moved beyond the "usual suspects".

The public meetings held over the spring drew the highest turnout of any Creative Communities programs. More important than the strong attendance, however, was the quality and quantity of ideas that the group discussions introduced. One message came through clearly: Rutland City has a strong, unique role in Vermont's state identity. Participants used "authentic", "honest", and "hard working" to describe their community. Analogies were drawn to cities like Chicago and Milan. Speakers agreed that "cute" should never describe Rutland.

Rutland area residents expressed a strong commitment to their city throughout the Creative Communities process. This level of civic engagement is a tremendous asset that came up again and again in the visiting Resource Team's reflections on their experience. One important aspect of this engagement is the fact that people are ready to take up controversial proposals and find common ground to move forward. The **Center Street Mall** project is an example of putting a bold idea on the table and then discussing pros, cons and alternative means of reaching the larger objective (in this case boosting, downtown vitality).

The priorities that Rutland has set through the Creative Communities visit, like the Center Street Mall, all require new partnerships. Forming these new partnerships and networks between individuals is an important way to build on the initial enthusiasm for participating in the Creative Communities Program. **Sustainable Rutland**, for example, ties together threads of sustainability that run through other projects and brings together those who want to parlay the creative economy perspective into an environmental assessment of the city. The idea to **Build an Arts Education Center** begins with strengthening the cooperative work of area arts and culture organizations, then using that strong core to bring arts education to a larger audience in Rutland.

Rutland as a Recreation Center seeks to interest *everyone* in healthy recreational activities including through extensive bike and pedestrian trails.

Rutland is a city of true leaders. The Creative Communities Program benefited from the leadership of everyone on the local steering committee, particularly the Chairperson, Tara Kelly. We are sincerely grateful to the leadership this group showed in rallying an entire city to think about creative economic development.

Rutland distinguished itself by having a truly festive community dinner in our first public forum. Tammy Lattuca, Greg Cox, and India Burnett Farmer were instrumental organizers of the feast. Boardman Hill Farm, Over the Hill Farm, Heleba Potato Farm, Whipple Hollow Hydroponic Farm, Thomas Dairy, Vermont Herb and Salad Company, Mendon Mountain Orchards, Green's Sugarhouse, and the Coffee Exchange all provided food, while Foley Distributing provided eating utensils. The Green Brothers jazz band also deserves thanks for their musical entertainment. The entire effort showed ways that creative endeavors can bring people together.

Finally, the Creative Communities Program would like to thank those who donated space to our effort: the Rutland High School, Paramount Theater, and Godnick Senior Center.

Accomplishments in the Creative Communities Program result from local leadership and community effort. However, VCRD is eager to support implementation. We suggest that you carefully review the Recommendations section of this report for concrete resources and ideas, and that you call upon members of the Resource Team (listed at the end of this report) and VCRD staff for help.

Overview of the Creative Communities Program

By 2003, the idea of the creative economy had become pervasive in Vermont, but few policy makers and local leaders had understanding of how to advance the opportunity of the creative economy systematically in state policy or in practice in towns throughout the state. The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) convened the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI) to craft a strategic plan that would coordinate the work of statewide leadership, the congressional delegation and state legislature, and provide community leaders with a guide to practical action. The final product, *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy*, was formally issued at the beginning of the 2005 Vermont Legislative session.

The VCCI report is available online at <http://www.vtrural.org>. It outlines the current strength of Vermont's creative economy and offers recommendations for increasing the contribution that a creative economy can make to the state's overall economic health.

One of the policy recommendations in the VCCI report was to establish a Vermont Creative Communities Program that would jumpstart local creative economy development projects by offering targeted assistance for community-led planning. VCRD received a grant from Jane's Trust to implement this program starting in 2005.

Today, the Creative Communities Program builds on both VCCI's findings and the successful Community Visit program that VCRD has managed for many years. Community Visits offer a way for communities to identify key issue areas and construct work plans for addressing selected public concerns.

The Creative Economy

Organizations around the world, including several in New England, have studied and set their own definitions of the "creative economy." Some definitions focus on the revenue generated by particular creative sectors that fit standard industrial codes, others focus on the individual qualities of creative workers, and still others attempt to pinpoint specific policies that spark creativity in *every* worker.

The Creative Communities Program considers all existing creative economy perspectives and uses a working definition with three key components that are common to most creative economy discussions:

•The Importance of Place:

Our discussion of "place" includes the natural, physical and community environments that form the foundation for creative economy work. Is this a place where people will *want* to work, live, and participate as active citizens? Is there a healthy mix of culture and commerce? Is there a strong community identity that distinguishes this place from any other?

•Creative Partnerships:

The 2004 *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy* report began to outline the breadth of businesses, individuals, and organizations that contribute to a strong economy. These contributors include groups that have not traditionally been thought of as business partners, such as arts, heritage, place-based, and other (usually) not-for-profit organizations. They are core partners in economic development discussions. Who needs to be at the table to help build a strong local economy?

•Individuals' Creative Skills:

Businesses in every field generate a competitive advantage from new ideas and unique skills – how do we increase business' ability to capitalize on creative contributions? What type of environment attracts and retains today's top creative thinkers? What inspires creative thinking in *everyone* in a community?

The Creative Communities Process

The Creative Communities Program consists of three public meetings that generate the brainstorming, prioritized projects, and action steps detailed in this report. The goal is to bring a diverse group of community members to the table who are in agreement in their commitment to a strong future for their community and can begin to work together to identify key steps for ensuring that future. The timeline for Rutland's process was as follows:

March 30th, 2006 – First Public Forum

In the month leading up to the first forum, a local steering committee chooses 6 issue areas related to the creative economy to serve as the starting point for public discussion.

VCRD invites a resource team to a day of facilitated public discussion in focus groups formed around the 6 issue areas (pg. 9). Using notes from scribes and resource team members, VCRD develops list of themes that emerged during the day as concrete project possibilities. This list (pg. 23) forms the basis for the prioritization session in the second public meeting.

May 3rd, 2006 – Project List Review and Prioritization

The first full community meeting places all issues of concern on the table. The second community meeting reviews and revises the ideas on the initial list and then allows individuals to champion issues seen as top priorities. Through discussion and voting, Rutland participants narrow the long list of projects that emerged from the first meeting to 4 priority areas (pg. 29), then sign up to participate in work teams on projects in these areas.

May 24th, 2006 – Project Team Working Day

In the final meeting run by VCRD, work teams for each project set specific strategies, identify available (and potential) resources, and outline a work plan for the next year around the projects selected in the second meeting. A new Resource Team invited by VCRD facilitates the group discussions, offers ideas and resource suggestions and answers questions from their experience. VCRD then writes up work plans based on residents' decisions (pg. 31). Finally, VCRD Resource Team members submit their ideas, suggestions, and resource recommendations for the use of the new committee (pg. 42).

Background to Rutland's Participation in the Creative Communities Program

Rutland was one of five pilot communities in the Creative Communities Program. The other four initial participants were: Hardwick, St. Albans, Rockingham / Bellows Falls and Windsor. A press conference in the Vermont State House kicked off the program in December, 2005. Work began with Rutland in January, 2006. However, as its application to the Creative Communities Program described, Rutland developed a strong framework for creative economic planning before the January start date.

Rutland had already invested in local creative economy planning for several months before applying to the Creative Communities Program. A high profile forum presented in conjunction with the Vermont Council on Rural Development on June 9, 2005, drew 165 people. Attendees represented a diverse mix of businesses and interested individuals. Local businesses also donated to the event, including space and food from Three Tomatoes. This forum piqued interest in what the creative economy could mean for Rutland.

Following that initial meeting, over 200 people became involved in discussions about moving the creative economy concept forward in Rutland. An e-mail list serve provided this group with regular updates. The committee that planned June 9th's forum evolved into a main group of about 40 to consider long-term objectives along with short-term action items.

Looking at Rutland through a creative economy lens draws attention to many longstanding assets. For example, Rutland City possesses a nearly intact downtown with a true "Main Street" flanked by historic 19th and early 20th century architecture that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a state Designated Downtown. Rutland has done an admirable job of maintaining the integrity of its core demonstrating a very clear "sense of place". Rutland complements its downtown's historic character with a growing roster of events and local businesses. As the County seat it sees natural migration from surrounding rural communities as it is the focal point for arts, culture, dining and shopping. Also within close reach are two major resorts, Killington and Okemo from which Rutland can be viewed as a natural destination for recreation oriented visitors to the area.

Growing, innovative businesses in the community are as diverse as Hubbardton Forge, in the process of building a new plant; Casella Waste Management Services, which has recently acquired out-of-state subsidiaries; and Boardman Hill Farm, rapidly expanding its roadside stand's facilities and season of operation. Owners of these three businesses demonstrated their commitment to the community by taking part in the June, 2005, Creative Economy Forum.

Rutland has a tradition of businesses that are heavily involved in helping their communities grow. Buildings and institutions that benefited from help by Vermont Marble Company, Howe Scale, Rutland Railroad, and other key segments of the community's economic life continue to serve the community today. Businesses like the Rutland Herald and other communications outlets ensure that community events receive attention and have played a significant role in raising awareness around the creative economy.

Alongside its existing assets, Rutland has identified many opportunities for improvement. Larger employers are worried about upcoming turnover due to retirement and their ability to attract new employees and retain current workers. The downtown has been experiencing a degree of revitalization, but still suffers an image problem. Rutland completed a major economic developing planning process 15 years ago that rallied public participation and enthusiasm. A creative economy discussion could offer the first step towards re-creating that earlier momentum.

Rutland's Creative Communities Program application identified 5 general goals for the process:

- Create an open dialogue inclusive of a wide diversity of interests and economic contributors
- Identify and capitalize on Rutland's existing strengths and assets
- Encourage new ideas and innovations
- Act on opportunities that have widespread support but which have not yet been fully implemented
- Inject new energy and enthusiasm into efforts to move the economy forward

The overarching community goals for the end product were to create a community where:

- Young people build their lives and are actively involved in the future of their community
- Businesses downtown are thriving and meeting local needs while also attracting tourist dollars
- Non-profit and business collaborations provide ongoing, well attended, coordinated creative offerings for entertainment and education
- A "buzz" is created in Rutland attracting new businesses, tourists, and other investments

I. Public Forum on the Creative Economy

March 30th, 2006

A local steering committee formed to plan the first public forum. The central principle behind inviting steering committee members was to bring together a diverse range of perspectives on what the creative economy could mean for Rutland. The individuals on this committee were:

E Jay Bishop
Greg Cox
Tom Donahue
India Burnett Farmer
Mark Foley, Jr.
Paul Gallo
Maryann Goulette
Tom Huebner
Tara Kelly
Patricia Kreitzer
Whitney Lamy
Chris Louras
Charles Romeo

The steering committee selected six topics to serve as the starting point for public discussions around the creative economy. These topics represented broad ideas that could open the door for participants to bring a range of specific concerns and project suggestions to the table.

The Rutland High School hosted the initial forum on a beautiful March afternoon. Approximately 170 participants attended to share their ideas. Local farmers provided a feast that highlighted the range of local foods available well outside of the peak summer season. The Green Brothers Band provided jazz music for the dinner hour. Below are the notes from the 6 discussion groups held that evening.

Downtown Vitality:

Resource Team: Joss Besse (Director, VT Downtowns Program), Betsy Gentile (Marketing & Special Events Consultant, Brattleboro), Andy Broderick (President, Housing Vermont), Mike Curtis (Chair, Creative Communities Steering Committee – St. Albans), Patrick Shattuck (Federal Housing Program Manager, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board)

How does Downtown Vitality fit into the creative economy & what contributes to / takes away from Downtown Vitality today?

- Rutland is an authentic, working city and the downtown should reflect that character. Rutland is not (and should not be) “cute” or pretend to be a rural village.
- The downtown is not full of malls / chain stores – there’s a sense of discovery and surprise to hang on to.

- Rutland doesn't have a great night life.
- Rutland's history should be clear in the downtown – it is a historic downtown, more might be done (for example, a rail history museum).
- How do we define downtown? There's the designated downtown, but also the unofficial sense that a downtown is an area that is accessible (including ADA accessible), that doesn't require a car to get around in, that contains basic necessities (food, clothing, etc.) and is lively. Right now Rutland has separate pockets of activity.
- A thriving downtown signals a thriving community.
- The Paramount brings people downtown.
- Brattleboro and Montpelier seem to have more people downtown. What makes a people magnet? Reliable activities like kiosks, street performers, anchor attractions, and restaurants “spilling onto the street.”
- The Wal-Mart parking lot is a problem – it separates the store from downtown and puts up a barrier that discourages the shopping plaza customers from exploring other areas.
- There's a lack of people living downtown.
- Sprawl pushes away from a strong, concentrated downtown.
- Traditional retail has changed and Rutland hasn't kept pace with the arenas where local businesses can be competitive. Small service-oriented businesses are absent.
- Rutland's identity isn't well developed; the city needs more positive attention.
- People need to be more involved – city government can't do everything and some people feel that it moves too slowly.
- Other cities have an interstate highway connection.
- Downtown businesses experience a lot of pressure, including high insurance costs, that make it hard to pay the types of wages they would like to (including wages that let employees live downtown).
- There are unfriendly aspects of the city – poor pedestrian ways, inconvenient parking garage and lack of public restrooms.

Project Ideas

- Expand walking paths downtown and make them easier / safer to walk along.
- Build connections with schools and colleges, provide activities for young people and places to hang out (including cafes that stay open later)
- Develop WiFi access in all downtown.
- Use upper floors for businesses and/ or living space (particularly for youth)
- Open space will be available with the removal of the parking garage. Use this and other open, green spaces to makes downtown inviting.
- Incorporate basic improvements - Public Restrooms, bike racks, signage

- Create a tourist attraction – a train museum portraying the history of downtown, possibly with a larger Welcome Center built around it.
- Start an indoor/outdoor market built around the train station or empty parking lot by the Rutland Herald. Make this a place where Killington visitors will want to shop. Food should be a focus of the market.
- Build bike routes in the city center and also connecting with surrounding area.
- Connect downtown’s different pockets of activity – maybe with passageways or even sky walks.
- Do a better job showcasing downtown to prospective businesses.
- Build a better hospitality sector – bring in hotels and do a better job promoting what is there, including the hostel for hikers.
- Attract people from the Long Trail and Appalachian Trail – hikers need food, laundry, housing, etc. and number in the 1,000’s.
- Build a better food environment with a Trader Joe’s type store (or improving existing Sunshine and Co-op foodstores) and connections with local agriculture.
- Do something with the theater next to Center Street alley, perhaps an art/ theater school space.
- Create a community garden.
- Improve the airport.
- Bring venture capital investment for businesses.
- Encourage more people to buy from local merchants.
- Rutland needs more music / dancing downtown. Create a venue for low-cost music.

Rutland City Image

Resource Team: Paul Costello (Executive Director, Vermont Council on Rural Development), Robert McBride (Rockingham Arts and Museum Project), Michael Crane (Crane Associates)

How does City Image fit into the creative economy? What are the main components of Rutland’s character that ought to define the city’s image?

- The physical environment of Rutland leads to a bad image – people see vacant stores, the sprawl outside of downtown, and unattractive “gateways”. Conventional wisdom is that “Rutland people are the best, Rutland as a place is a dump.”
- You don’t hear about the really good things.
- The name “Rutland” sounds awful.
- There are other names within the city with negative connotations, e.g. the Gut.
- People are unaware of the proud history of the city.

- Rutland is perceived as the town “below” Killington and has an inferiority complex compared to other Vermont cities.
- Visitors who visit downtown and the historic parts of the city have a much better perception of the place. The city looks like a “fairy land” getting off the train in winter. But people don’t always find those beautiful parts.
- Downtown revitalization is building more and more positive points and bringing people to the good things that already exist. Good restaurants, retail, architecture.
- There are great natural assets – Pine Hill Park is rated in the top 50 in the country. Master gardeners keep up the parks and gardens. There is excellent recreation.
- People’s image is that Rutland is not diverse or open to diversity.
- The fairgrounds are interesting, but underutilized.
- There’s a perception of Rutland as a football town (MSJ)
- There are questions about how the city sees youth and how they see the city. Perceptions are different depending on who you ask.
- There is a lot happening with art (Chaffee, Art in the Park, Paramount) but the city is not thought of as an art town.
- Perceptions change from neighborhood to neighborhood. Some people say only pockets of the city are positive. At the same time, community involvement seems higher in the tougher neighborhoods.
- Generosity is a defining part of Rutland: a generous business community, big-hearted people. Authentic.
- There’s a perception of Rutland as a drug town.
- There are problems with kids in Depot Park.
- The Food Coop and Sunshine Natural Food Store are assets.
- Rutland can be viewed as a great place for families with school age children.
- There are two societies: those who have lived here their whole life and those who have just moved in – and it’s hard to assimilate if you are a newcomer.
- Rutland has an image as a conservative city, not hip.
- This is a community on the verge of great things.

Project Ideas

- Close off lower Center Street to traffic to be open for people, artists, musicians – starting with weekends and moving towards full time.
- Build a downtown hotel and convention center (one facility) with parking.
- The Rutland Herald has in essence departed from Rutland – so take over that building and anchor it to the parking garage.

- Advertise Rutland's image (with all of its assets) in a unified way both in the community and outside the community. Information about community activities often is circulated only in small groups.
- Take advantage of the fact that Rutland Herald is an independent paper and does care about the community. A single page could run in the Rutland Herald on all of the great things happening in Rutland each day.
- Build bike paths and pedestrian routes – turn Rutland into healthy active hub – connected to Pine Hill Park. Take advantage of creeks for recreation.
- Remove barriers for businesses to come downtown. The cost of rent prohibits small businesses – do an escalating scale for rent (start low, raise over time). Water and sewer is increasing 25% and will discourage businesses from coming into town.
- Develop a buy-local campaign and expand business hours later to let people who work outside the city make local purchases after work.
- Find out what skills and talents the people in this city have – do an independent census of the citizens – and then can utilize people's talents to solve specific problems.
- Develop downtown housing.
- Build more evening activities. People on the street at night are a sign of successful urban planning and increase business, safety, community.
- Develop a website so that local students and graduates can keep in contact - with links to all of the city jobs, programs to encourage graduates who have left the city to come back.
- Pull together resources by merging Rutland Town with Rutland City – market the positive image of the City to Rutland Town
- Continue forums like tonight through the community. Develop small community conversations. An example of community organizing is Rutland United Neighborhoods. That organization has gone beyond its original goal of decreasing crime to doing community development, although funding is still tied to the original mission.
- Political leadership is needed to unify and support ongoing communication. A central entity is needed to collaborate and coordinate all of the fragmented things that are going on in the city – to convey a single positive image of the city.
- Bring back the free standing kiosks to communicate community events.
- More events should happen each year, like the Ethnic Festival, summer movies and concerts, First Night.
- Set a clear vision for Rutland's future.
- Host a familiarity tour of Rutland by journalists.
- Tax Rebate Participators Club – stamp your card for every city event you attend and then get a tax rebate.
- Everyone is requested to look at the Rutland Chamber of Commerce website (www.rutlandvermont.com) and offer feedback to Tom from the Chamber of Commerce

Entrepreneurial Climate

Resource Team: Gerianne Smart (Smart Communications, Inc.), Alex Aldrich (Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council), Zon Eastes (Managing Director, Brattleboro Music Center), Janice St. Onge (Director, Vermont Business Center (UVM)), Mary Niebling (Director, Community Economic Development – Central Vermont Community Action Council)

What types of entrepreneurial activities do we see in the city today? What are some of the challenges to entrepreneurs?

- The Howe Center is a place where small businesses can easily get started. It is a malleable space, provides opportunity for small business. A challenge is that stricter environmental laws might not have allowed the Center to be built if it were attempted today.
- There are examples of individual entrepreneurs who started in Rutland and chose to stay even with an opportunity to go somewhere else. Hubbardton Forge is one example.
- Rutland has a good quality of life (vital downtown, the arts, good schools, place to settle) that makes entrepreneurs want to stay. This message isn't always communicated well, especially to young people.
- Rutland has a beautifully restored downtown with plenty of vacant downtown spaces but it is underutilized. Downtown has been monopolized by a few owners and it is expensive.
- Businesses cannot afford to pay employees a livable wage and therefore people cannot afford to live in Rutland.
- There's a problem with local people not supporting local businesses. It's hard for local businesspeople to keep pace with the low prices of the chain stores, but there are other areas where businesses can work with the community to find ways to increase local shopping.
- There's tension about the types of jobs we should be creating. It's a positive to have good employment for everyone, but at the same time Rutland doesn't seem to be reaching its potential with white collar jobs like in Research & Development. R & D could be particularly strong given that Rutland is accessible to UVM, Dartmouth, and Middlebury.
- Killington has more people as customers than downtown Rutland.
- Rutland's priorities are a problem - \$3M to renovate Paramount vs. \$18M parking garage.
- This climate is not as acceptable to service businesses and/or telecommuters as to retail businesses.
- Medical care is a mixed bag – people take jobs with benefits rather than jobs they want or the option of starting their own businesses. That constraint holds back entrepreneurship.

- What is Rutland doing with the younger workforce? Pressures include producing a workforce that is easily trained, maintaining a strong work ethic, and also providing the jobs that will be attractive so that young people *want* to join the Rutland workforce.
- Weak connections to the business world outside of Rutland are a problem. The train to NYC could be an asset, but there is no convenient bus service. For people coming to Rutland there's no place to stay.
- Rutland hasn't found a way to compete in a global marketplace.

Project Ideas

- Form a committee to find specific industries that are conducive to this area and find ways to encourage them to locate here. This would include a developing a specific vision of what businesses to bring to Rutland.
- Create an umbrella organization to support small service businesses' needs such as healthcare, payroll, insurance.
- Create incubator space for businesses.
- Look at the success of buy local campaigns around food (Rutland Area Food and Farm Link) and think about how to expand those loyalty campaigns to include more local products.
- Improve the image of neighborhoods where housing is available, but were people do not currently choose to live.
- Get better commitment from political leadership to develop infrastructure that small businesses need.
- Seek legislative solutions to high electric and taxes (local and state) and zoning changes (mixed use).
- Create an economic enterprise zone within the city.
- Build a better hospitality industry– the hotels are on the Mountain or outside of downtown
- Improve our rail access for business.
- Talk to Mark Foley to make use of the “upper space” of downtown businesses more accessible and affordable.
- Respect diversity (artists, alternative lifestyles) and people will become more of the community.
- Promote community events like the Ethnic Festival.
- Have more activities that don't require disposable income. Paramount events should be less expensive. There should be events, arts and performance that bring people together but don't cost money. Music is particularly needed.
- Mandatory community team croquet with community topics for discussion with great prizes and food.

- Small business development corporations are only for those at a certain level of business development. Rutland needs a step down from SBDC such as a mentoring program.
- Build a street life. Build outside and inside physical spaces for people to sit, eat, watch, meet each other. The Farmers Market is great example of this.
- Rotary Park is set up but waiting to “happen.” The parks close at dusk. Kids get run off for loitering. Create spaces for us all to feel safe and welcome.
- Increase the bike and pedestrian-friendly nature of the city. Police have a negative attitude toward bikes and pedestrians. Rutland requires a car.
- Improve public transportation. Bring in trolleys.
- The Department of Recreation should have ongoing activities rather than just special events. Activities should include a focus on adults and not just kids.
- Include more young people in arts organizations, particularly on their Boards.

Using Currently Unused Spaces:

Resource Team: Joss Besse (Director, VT Downtowns Program), Betsy Gentile (Marketing & Special Events Consultant, Brattleboro), Andy Broderick (President, Housing Vermont), Mike Curtis (Chair, Creative Communities Steering Committee – St. Albans), Patrick Shattuck (Federal Housing Program Manager, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board)

***How does finding uses for currently unused spaces fit into the creative economy?
Are there examples of creative space uses today?***

- There is a critical mass of interesting places and businesses downtown, along with some unused spaces that could add to the downtown as an active core.
- Some examples of places / uses: Center Street artisans, Tuttle Building, Eastman Building, Howe Center (example of great rehabilitation), many smaller spaces including upper floor spaces.
- Problem of filling spaces and then letting that space be *self sufficient*. Need to combine creative ideas with good business sense.
- Parking is a problem – both lack of parking and the parking garage that closes at 11:00. People now use the Wal-Mart parking lot as primary parking for downtown.
- It’s difficult for people new to the building process to understand how to rehab old buildings / make space available within city codes.
- Artists could find space that is easy to make fit with codes (eg studio space doesn’t require elevators) and also serve as a draw to more people downtown.
- There are concerns not only with available space, but also with attractive spaces. Do they let in sunlight? Is there green space nearby? Is Rutland maintaining its classic architecture?
- Condo and second home owners contribute to unused space.

- Some landowners in downtown aren't friendly to local business, don't work on reasonable rates or look for ways to use upper floors.
- Upper floors have a high vacancy rate. Could demonstrating a creative environment create more interest in these spaces?

Project Ideas

- Build a Community Kitchen space for local food businesses to pack and ship. Could also find space for a year-round Farmers' Market (like in Manchester).
- Map out contiguous unused space.
- Form an organization to educate investors about how to renovate upper floor space (permits and funding). Include a website on how to get development done in Rutland.
- Start a referral service through the Chamber of Commerce to connect potential buyers and sellers.
- Close Center Street to create a pedestrian mall.
- Create shared space for artists. Encourage upper floor uses for arts – music lessons, studio space.
- Find simple spaces to put places to go after 9:00 pm, for example when a Paramount show lets out or when college students are looking for a place to meet and work.
- Open more housing options on upper floors.
- Install sky walks between buildings.
- Make hot spot wireless connections to draw people downtown.
- Develop more support services for small business so that they can be an ongoing presence in the spaces they occupy.

Leisure Time and Recreation Opportunities:

Resource Team: Paul Costello (Executive Director, Vermont Council on Rural Development), Robert McBride (Rockingham Arts and Museum Project), Michael Crane (Crane Associates)

How do options for activities in free time shape Rutland as a place to live? Can they draw visitors to the city? Does Rutland offer diverse activities? How does recreation connect with natural assets in the region?

- There is a high rate of inactive and obese people in Rutland. At the same time, there are not enough alternatives to going to bars and drinking for evening entertainment.
- Rutland needs to make the connection between a healthy outside-of-work environment, with leisure time & recreation activities, and being an attractive place for a strong, creative workforce.

- Creativity includes an element of “play.” If you don’t have that, you don’t have creativity.
- Leisure activities could specifically target people who would come back to Rutland – both residents (today’s young people or people who have moved away and might return) and tourists who would return.
- The diversity / quantity of activities needs to be improved (not just quality).
- There is a need for a smaller unconventional music scene (as opposed to large venues at Paramount or local artists playing for older people and very young children at Depot park).
- When people move somewhere they think “what’s available for my family in that place?”
- Rutland lacks an intellectual atmosphere – activities that stimulate new thinking.
- There’s a lack of things coming in from outside of Rutland (events, artists, authors, musicians). “Rutland is a black hole on the touring circuit” not having enough money or space to attract artists.
- Closing the skate park lost a major asset (note – plans are underway to reopen a skate park).
- There is a need to look at the demographics being targeted now by activities and see what groups are underserved.
- Activities can involve and welcome underprivileged youth (12-16) so that we “stop turning our backs.”
- Gear towards more service learning and volunteer work- get more people involved
- Recreation projects can help Rutland work with other cities/towns in the county.
- Assets that we do have in Rutland that need to be more connected and work better together.
 - Boys and girls club
 - Rutland Herald
 - Coffee exchange (closes too early)
 - Recreation center
 - Studio bliss
 - CCV
 - Pine hill park
 - Non profit TV stations
 - Library
 - Walking/biking trail (we need more)
 - The scenery
 - Art in the park
 - Farmers market (expand, make bigger and more days a week)
 - Theatre programs
 - Churches
 - Killington music fest
 - Ethnic fest
 - Paramount

- Chaffee art center
- Film studio
- Gymnasium
- Parent child center
- Pregnancy center
- School systems
- Technical center
- CSJ
- Other area parks (depot, meadow...)

Project Ideas

- Improved walking systems – better sidewalks, more crosswalks, more walking paths around and outside of town. Connect recreation assets.
- Non-alcoholic pool and recreation hall, maybe connected with an arcade.
- Indoor Olympic-sized pool.
- Centralized creative community space (with a small café, art classes, music classes, author readings, study spaces, computers). Include study space.
- More art studio spaces.
- Annual film festival.
- More recreation partnerships (especially with ski areas)
- Community music school
- Less formal performance spaces
- Close Center Street or Merchants Row to create a pedestrian area to be the heart of the city.
- Adopt an annual event, Rutland cultural specific like the Keene Pumpkin fest.
- More centralized information
- United Way for the arts
- Annual sports events for causes – running, walkathons, etc.
- Host more events such as a literary festival
- Build a culture of volunteerism, beginning in school and moving up through all age brackets.
- Visitors look on the web to find out what’s happening – provide a better web presence for recreation and entertainment options. The Chamber of Commerce website might be a good place to start.

Rutland as an Arts Destination:

Resource Team: Gerianne Smart (Smart Communications, Inc.), Alex Aldrich (Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council), Zon Eastes (Managing Director, Brattleboro Music Center), Janice St. Onge (Director, Vermont Business Center (UVM)), Mary Niebling (Director, Community Economic Development – Central Vermont Community Action Council)

***How could being an arts destination contribute to the overall local economy?
What is the economic impact of arts in the city today?***

- Arts need to be seen as a business rather than a hobby.
- Arts draw tourists.
- An active arts scene marks a city as a “place to be.”
- Art projects can bring the community together – for example the Trains project in Rutland.
- If arts beautify a city that can build city pride.
- Arts education programs give people new perspectives, hands-on learning, engage the community. This learning can spark innovation.
- A challenge is making the public aware of the art market and arts education opportunities.
- Art is a way for tourists to take home a piece of Vermont.
- The larger area around Rutland (and including the City) is not well coordinated.
- Where are the arts educators? CCV and Castleton both have an art program, the Carving Studio offers classes.
- An arts scene can draw in young families.
- The Rutland Herald may soon have an art page.
- Rutland wants doctors; doctors want art.
- Studies in other places show a direct economic impact from thriving arts community.
- The arts community locally is "fractious" and don't collaborate for support.

Project Ideas

- Make the Chaffee more of a community arts center.
- Create a center that makes art more visible – including classes, talks and demonstrations.
- Coordinate the arts community so that they can work together towards common projects.
- Create an arts school.
- Make an arts directory and arts teachers directory
- Art programs should target youth.

- Do an arts-specific needs / interests assessment that targets a broad cross section of the community.
- Create more artists' space – including studios open to the public.
- Revitalize the Richards building.
- Host more public area arts displays.
- Put a unified calendar in RutVegas for activities for all ages with a phone number and contact person.
- It would be nice to have an Internet page with links.
- Line up local businesses to sponsor more children's shows – this also advertises to the parents.
- Start an art walk or night market.

Additional Comments (received following the forum)

- Rutland should recognize that as workers decide where to locate, they need to feel welcomed, comfortable, and safe in the larger community. Rutland has not developed that open atmosphere towards gay and lesbian community members. This failure will indicate a city that does not have the type of open environment sought by many people as they choose their home.
- Secure tax stabilization for the upper floors downtown. The Board of Aldermen has the ability to grant stabilization. They will need to update the criteria that they use to move forward on this project.
- Work out a long term lease with Heritage Realty on the former parking deck lands and build a swimming pool with a cap for year-round use.
- Roof top gardens are catching on all over the country. Rutland has great roofs downtown and access to them from the parking deck on West Street would enhance the downtown experience.
- The Grimm property and Smalley lot across from the property should be used to enhance the Farmers' Market and maybe periodic flea markets. Eventually they could be logical places for downtown expansion, but not before more existing upper floors fill.
- For walkways, look at the incredible Galleria Victor Emmanuel in Milan. The entire street is capped with glass over the street. Access to the upper floors is via one elevator strategically placed. Walkways on the interior access the roof to the parking deck. A structure like that would put Rutland on the map.
- Years ago the Chaffee, Crossroads Arts Council, Historic Preservation and UVM students worked together to develop walking and driving tours of the Rutland area. It's time to update these tours and expand them into new communities.
- Research and attract an entrepreneur to open a green fuel station in Rutland County. This connects with the trends followed by 20- and 30-somethings and marks Rutland as an attractive match for young peoples' preferred lifestyles.

- Rutland should be a model of sustainable self-sufficiency. This effort should particularly target energy options, with a think tank that evaluates possible clean energy solutions and a learning center to teach about both alternative energy sources and conservation methods. Rutland should recognize the far-reaching impacts that a fossil fuel-dependent lifestyle has on community structure and identify specific steps to reorganize its community life to move away from that dependence. Planning around these next steps should include goals of teaching visitors to the city and attracting young families who prioritize an ecologically sensitive lifestyle.

II. Initial List of Project Possibilities May 3rd, 2006

The March 30th public forum produced stacks of notes from enthusiastic group discussions. The next step was sifting through the information to form a list of the major projects suggested that evening.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development looked through the forum notes, and input from the Resource Team on what they had heard, to pull together the first draft of a projects list. VCRD identified common themes that appeared throughout the discussions and blocked out a list of ambitious concepts that could provide a starting point for project teams to research and refine. VCRD did not filter projects based on feasibility or how closely they related to the creative economy. Instead, this process simply organized the notes, combined small ideas into larger ones, and connected general observations to concrete project possibilities. Later revisions in a public meeting produced the list below:

Promote Arts through an Education Center: Rutland has many arts programs and the city should support expanding the reach of arts *education* to engage more community members. Rutland should create an arts and music education center that provides exceptional education for learners of all ages and space for existing programs that need room to grow. This center should work collaboratively with arts programs at area colleges to strengthen college-city relations. The center should also include an activities area that offers interactive, hands-on displays for children. The Montshire Museum offers examples of this type of activity.

Advance Rutland as a Recreation Center: Rutland should rally to take advantage of its proximity to the Appalachian and Long Trails and ski areas by building on its outdoor assets. It should also add indoor opportunities to become a true recreation center that draws day visitors as well as those spending extended time in the region.

An important part of recreation should be bike and pedestrian trails. Bike trails should offer both a way to explore the city without a car and recreation throughout the areas surrounding the city. These trails should be friendly to runners as well as bikers. The trails could be enhanced by a designated tour route with a brochure that shows points of interest.

Pedestrian paths within Rutland City could offer a low key way to both get exercise and connect pockets of downtown activity. These paths should improve how pedestrians move through the downtown with signs highlighting popular locations and attractive pathways that clearly lead the way from one place to another. The particularly challenging Wal-Mart parking area should have exceptional connections, potentially including a sky walk to the main section of downtown.

Create a Gateway to Rutland at the Train Station: The train station is a historic entrance to the city; Rutland needs to build on this history and build a thriving modern gateway. A welcome center at the train station should include a museum that celebrates the heritage of the railroad, a year-round market for local foods, and space for vendors of other local products (for example handcrafts). The gateway should provide clear directions for finding hotels and exploring the city on foot.

Community Gathering Places: Residents need “third places” in town that are neither the workplace nor home. Residents are looking for welcoming places where students can do homework or gather to chat after class, they want wireless Internet connections, places to play pick up games, host non-professional art displays, and plant a community garden. Rutland should build a venue that serves residents’ priorities for community space.

Launch a Buy Local Campaign: Rutland needs to celebrate and market what is available in its own backyard! Rutland should launch a citywide Buy Local campaign. It should educate customers on buying local and work with businesses on ways to make it easier for area residents to stay local with their purchases

Establish a Business Incubator: Rutland should assist its smallest businesses by creating a business incubator with space for creative entrepreneurs and technical assistance to help with start up phases. The incubator should include a targeted recruitment plan linked to goals for Rutland’s city image and backed with expertise in particular fields, such as for young entrepreneurs, IT business, arts related businesses, or environmental businesses. The incubator should promote downtown vitality by locating in the downtown and exploring second and third floor spaces as preferred locations. The incubator organizers could serve as point people for small businesses considering settling in Rutland.

Open Upper Floors for Affordable Housing & Retail Space: Many upper floors sit vacant in Rutland while at the same time the city experiences an affordable housing shortage. Some of these empty floors should be converted into affordable living space. Other floors should be made available for business and studio space. Rutland should plan for and attract developers (including Housing Vermont and the private sector) and support their successful redevelopment of key downtown projects.

Build a Small Business Cooperative for Insurance Purchasing: Health insurance presents a major cost for small business owners. Small businesses should join together to exert more bargaining power in getting a good price for insurance. This cooperative purchasing activity might then be applied to other areas, lowering the costs of doing business in Rutland.

Attract a Conference Center to Rutland: Rutland offers an ideal location to hold conferences. The city could increase its capacity for hosting conferences and conventions through attracting a center dedicated to this purpose. This project would also bring additional hotel space to accommodate visitors to the area, stimulate downtown, and build Rutland’s reputation as a business and tourism destination.

Bring More Music and Performing Arts Downtown: Residents feel as if there are not enough low cost performances in Rutland. At the same time, they want a more vibrant street life. Both issues can be addressed through an outdoor performance venue, sponsored for the purpose of public concerts, possibly along a section of Center Street that would be made into a pedestrian zone on performance nights. This would be coordinated as a complement to existing events brought in by venues like the Paramount.

Market Weekend Travel Packages to Rutland: Rutland is conveniently located near major population centers such as NYC and Boston. A more aggressive marketing campaign for Rutland as a weekend retreat, including a targeted “brand” for the city and connections to public transportation to increase the convenience, can draw a new pool of enthusiastic visitors.

Sustainable Rutland – A Model City: Rutland should be a model of sustainable self-sufficiency. This effort should particularly target energy options, with a think tank that evaluates possible clean energy solutions and a learning center to teach about both alternative energy sources and conservation methods. Rutland should recognize the far-reaching impacts that a fossil fuel-dependent lifestyle has on community structure and identify specific steps to reorganize its community life to move away from that dependence. Planning around these next steps should include goals of teaching visitors to the city and attracting young families who prioritize an ecologically sensitive lifestyle.

Highlight the Green Landscape of the City: Green space within the city can define the visual image of Rutland. The city should invest in additional green spaces in creative places, for example rooftop gardens and abandoned lots of any size, while doing more to point visitors to existing assets like Pine Hill Park. Small gardens and plantings should be added to side streets to make them appear more friendly. Rutland should provide a community garden space. Finally, in a cooperative project with the town, Rutland should plant trees along corridors into the city.

Coordinate & Promote Rutland Activities through the Web: Rutland should coordinate activities through a dynamic website that posts events and opportunities for business, arts, non-profit and other sectors. This site should contain a common ‘master’ calendar for residents and tourists alike. It should also be used to connect Rutland residents who have moved away back to their hometown.

Space for Retailing and Preparing Local Foods: Rutland’s working landscape and creative small enterprises can both be supported through a food products center. This center should include retail space for year-round local foods sales and a cooperative kitchen space as an incubator where small entrepreneurs in food products can prepare their goods and start new businesses.

Build a Central Open Air Mall on Center Street: Rutland needs a center point for its cultural and community life and commerce. An open air mall in the heart of the downtown could deliberately attract crafts vendors, local food sellers, music and street life. Not all events would need to be daily – for example this location could host the farmers’ market or community music performances. This mall would build pedestrian traffic and stimulate a strong feeling that Rutland is an open, welcome and creative city. Planning for this mall should consider both the Center Street location and the possibility of turning the former parking garage site into a park, with a connection to the pedestrian area.

A Community Festival to Celebrate Rutland: Rutland should encourage local residents to display their creative ability through a community festival. An annual event can be a

time for local performers (including music, dance, and other arts), visual artists, chefs, and other talented individuals to show off their abilities. This community time should also be used to educate people about how to become more involved in Rutland and could be a signature project that markets the Rutland brand to the rest of Vermont and the region.

Office of Community Development: An Office of Community Development could be built to lead Rutland's community and creative economy projects to success and further town/city cooperation. The office would unite community efforts, provide staff support to resident committees, foster a greater spirit of volunteerism, help newcomers become involved in the community, catalogue available community and commercial space, and provide a clearinghouse for resident engagement and leadership of city projects. This office could also work on general leadership development for residents who want to play a greater role in their city.

Beautifying City Gateways: Rutland should use projects around improving city gateways as a platform for unifying economic development plans between the city and town. A major project to consider is burying power lines. The joint efforts of community organizations, businesses, and local governments to improve these gateways might lead to developing a permanent coordinating body such as an Office of Community Development.

Improve Basic Infrastructure: Rutland's creative economy relies on a strong underlying urban infrastructure. Some residents feel as if the city lacks crucial ingredients – particularly a link to the Interstate highway and a strong airport. This project would address those infrastructural issues as a foundation for creative economic development.

Background Information on Project List

The steering committee developed a background sheet on the project list for participants to use to find out a sample of some things happening in the identified areas.

Promote Arts through an Education Center

- a. Chaffee Center for the Arts does educational programs on site
- b. Crossroads Arts Council brings education programs out to schools and into the community
- c. Carving Studio does education programs on site
- d. Paramount offers space to local schools for performances
- e. Community College of Vermont and Stafford Technical Center offer a variety of arts courses for the public
- f. Rutland Herald is debuting a new Arts and Entertainment section each Thursday
- g. Rutland Area Arts Alliance (a partnership between non-profit arts organizations) is seeking additional ways to market this region's art offerings around the state (combined website with links, rack cards etc)

Advance Rutland as a Recreation Center

- a. A Regional Recreation Center effort is underway. It would include indoor and outdoor recreation spaces: a pool, fitness space, multi-purpose rooms, sports fields etc. Conceptual design has been done, the land agreement is nearly finalized, a capital campaign is about to begin. Contact EJay Bishop of the Rutland Rec Dept for additional information
- b. Rutland Area Physical Activity Coalition has been working on a number of efforts, including an extensive website full of information about recreational opportunities in the region. Check out www.rapac.info for more details
- c. RAPAC and the Rutland Rec Dept have been working on Pine Hill Park as a premier mountain biking and hiking area within Rutland City's borders. Trail maps available at www.rapac.info.
- d. An extensive study and plan was done a number of years ago on a bike path, but has not yet been implemented. Information is available, if desired.

Create a Gateway to Rutland at the Train Station

Community Gathering Places

Launch a Buy Local Campaign

- a. An effort focused on buying more local agricultural products is underway through the Rutland Area Farm and Food Link (RAFFL). Call India or Tara at 775-0871 for more information

Establish a Business Incubator

Open Upper Floors for Affordable Housing

- a. The Tuttle Building redevelopment is a good example. The Rutland County Community Land Trust could be consulted for additional information about how they did that project.

Build a Small Business Cooperative for Insurance Purchasing

- a. The Chamber of Commerce has a system for group purchasing for its members (more info available from Tom Donahue)
- b. An initiative called REACH (Rutland Employers Alliance for Cooperative Healthcare) attempted something similar in the mid 1990's. Background information is still available as a starting point, if needed (from Mike Lannon of Rutland Plywood)

Attract a Conference Center to Rutland

Bring More Music and Performing Arts Downtown

Market Weekend Travel Packages to Rutland

Sustainable Rutland – A Model City

Highlight the Green Landscape of the City

Coordinate & Promote Rutland Activities through the Web

- a. A number of websites have been developed for this purpose including:
 - i. www.rutlandvermont.com (Chamber of Commerce website – includes comprehensive list of activities),
 - ii. www.rutlandweb.com (independent website that highlights community organizations and events),
 - iii. www.rutvegavibe.com (sponsored by Rutbusters – aimed toward people in their 20's and 30's)

Space for Retailing and Preparing Local Foods

Build a Central Open Air Mall on Center Street

- a. An extensive study and plan was done a number of years ago, but has not yet been implemented. Information is available, if desired.

A Community Festival to Celebrate Rutland

- a. Rutland Downtown Partnership organizes a number of festivals throughout the year, including the Ethnic Festival. For information about how to get involved in those efforts call MaryAnn Goulette at 773-9380.

Office of Community Development

Beautifying City Gateways

Basic Infrastructure

III. Priority Topics **Selected May 3rd, 2006**

On the stage of the Paramount Theater, sheets listing ideas provided the set for voting on priority creative communities projects on May 3rd. This Community Meeting is the center point of the democratic decisionmaking that takes place through the Creative Communities Program, where residents select four priority areas that will become the focus of year-long project teams. This is a forum where ideas flow freely, arguments are offered, perspectives shared, and people have the opportunity to champion their beliefs and then vote their priorities.

After discussing and revising project proposals on May 3rd, voters used a weighted system, starting with 8 votes to distribute among the topics, which cut the list to 8 possibilities. After a second discussion session, voters received 4 more votes to distribute and reach the final 4 topics. This system allows voters to select multiple topics and also indicate their degree of enthusiasm for each topic by potentially giving multiple votes. Level of interest is key to this process, as the end goal is to find projects that Rutland residents will line up behind to make happen.

The four priority issues selected by Rutland are:

Advance Rutland as a Recreation Center: Rutland should rally to take advantage of its proximity to the Appalachian and Long Trails and ski areas by building on its outdoor assets. It should also add indoor opportunities to become a true recreation center that draws day visitors as well as those spending extended time in the region.

An important part of recreation should be bike and pedestrian trails. Bike trails should offer both a way to explore the city without a car and recreation throughout the areas surrounding the city. These trails should be friendly to runners as well as bikers. The trails could be enhanced by a designated tour route with a brochure that shows points of interest.

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Rutland should create an arts and music education center that provides exceptional education for learners of all ages and space for existing programs that need room to grow. This center should work collaboratively with arts programs at area colleges to strengthen college-city relations. The center should also include an activities area that offers interactive, hands-on displays for children. The Montshire Museum offers examples of this type of activity.

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IV. Action Plans May 24th, 2006

Community members have organized into Project Teams to implement the ideas generated during the earlier strategic planning sessions. Each Project Team has a chairperson to run sessions for the next year while Tara Kelly is serving as chair of the overall process. At the first team meetings on May 24th, committee members worked closely with a facilitator and small resource teams to develop step-by-step action plans, and to devise a list of human and financial resources to help achieve their goals. This final phase of the program marks the time when residents begin the exciting work of turning ideas into action.

Rutland as a Recreation Center:

» **Advance Rutland as a Recreation Center:** Rutland should rally to take advantage of its proximity to the Appalachian and Long Trails and ski areas by building on its outdoor assets. It should also add indoor opportunities to become a true recreation center that draws day visitors as well as those spending extended time in the region.

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Committee Chair: EJay Bishop (ejaybishop@adelphia.net)

Project Team Sign-Ins:

Ellen	Atkinson
Ejay	Bishop
James	Breton
Nicole	Breton
John	Cassarino
Brenda	Colburn
Paul	Conner
Sharon	Davis
Susan	Feenick
Clara	Florin
Richard	Frank
Paul	Gallo
Ann	Goettelmann

Meg Laferriere	Horrocks
Sherman	Hunter
Cindy	Kilic-Murray
Patti	Lancaster
Stephen	Long
Bill	Lucas
Mike	Raymond
Lynn	Reardon
Laurel	Rice
Becky	Rizzi
Susan	Schreibman
Andrew	Shinn
Michael	Smith
Kent	Smith
Jim	Tasse
Sara	Weldon
Sarah	Willis

Action Steps:

1.) Gathering Background Information

- i. Review existing plans & identify where updates are needed (for example the bike path plan) → Talk to Rutland Regional Planning Commission, Recreation Department
- ii. Committee should be familiar with plans for Rutland County Recreation District
- iii. Talk with other towns about their plans, particularly for trail systems.

2.) First Steps in Marketing and Construction/ Physical Projects

A. Framework for Marketing & Advertising

- i. Inventory existing assets - parks, trails (incl. Long Trail, Appalachian Trail), skateboard park, rec centers, etc. – as well as advertising tools in place – e.g. walkrutland.com, bikerutland.com, recent article on Pine Hill Park, brochures & signs for trail routes
- ii. Begin discussions with potential marketing partners – Killington Ski Resort, major employers that want to promote a high quality of life, organizations concerned with maintaining good health, local tourism groups, groups concerned with marketing Rutland overall (eg REDC)

B. Framework for Projects

- i. Develop a policy position on adding bike/ ped lanes for all new road construction.
- ii. Survey / assess what uses community has for trail systems (running, biking, mountain biking, rollerblading, strollers, etc.) to design multi-use trails that meet different needs.
- iii. Work with the Rutland County Recreation District on outreach / community input around their recreation center plans.

- iv. Identify communities that have succeeded in projects similar to those proposed for Rutland (see below for projects).
- v. Identify if this committee should have a role in the skateboard park project (whether there is any value added)

3.) Launch Recreation Promotion Campaign that runs concurrently with other projects.

Promotion includes marketing Rutland to outside visitors along with ensuring that residents make use of the recreation options available to them.

4.) Safety Concerns

- i. Identify best walking routes through the city – looking for traffic, places that might need new pedestrian paths, and any safety concerns.
- ii. Create safe walking lanes between neighborhoods (clear marking, lights, signs, etc.) or through construction of new walking routes if necessary.
- iii. Review impact of future recreational development on traffic patterns

5.) Infrastructure Projects – these may be further prioritized based on initial feasibility assessments and the presence of an enthusiastic leader invested in making the project happen.

- i. Expanded trail systems around the Recreation Center site
- ii. Trail connections – connecting recreation centers (eg proposed county center with Pine Hill park), connecting with other towns’ systems (West Rutland, Proctor), identifying / resolving problem areas for bike & pedestrian trails meeting traffic.
- iii. Rails to Trails project along old trolley line
- iv. Flat walking path along Otter Creek – tied to a river clean up – potentially a good place to have paved areas for rollerblading & strollers.
- v. Reclaim Pine Hill Park Ponds for swimming

6.) Long – Term

- i. Study how bike/ walking paths through “blighted” areas tie in to revitalization efforts. Make these revitalization connections happen
- ii. An extensive trail system reaching to Castleton
- iii. Recreation as part of ongoing collaborative work between area Chambers of Commerce.

Resources

Rutland area organizations currently working on recreation (RRPC, Rec. Department, etc.) and promoting Rutland (REDC, Redevelopment Authority)

Rails to Trails grants

VT Land Trust

VTrans Enhancement grants, Safe to School grants, crosswalk/ intersection funds

Steve Howard

National Park Service

State Land & Water Conservation programs

Gail Frieden (working in Addison County)
VELCO / CVPS (for trails along powerlines)
VT Health Dept – health & wellness programming, AHEC
Health insurance companies
NIH
USDA / NRCS
Organizations for Appalachian Trail, Long Trail
VAST / VASTA

Marketing Partners:

Chamber of Commerce
Businesses interested in quality of life (RRMC, major employers – Casella, Hubbardton Forge, Omya, GE, CVPS)
Killington Ski Resort
Heritage Trails
VT Dept. of Tourism & Marketing
Magazines that promote trails
International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA)

Volunteers for Work:

Service groups in town – particularly for clean up, one-day volunteering
Colleges – potential interns, help from professors, alumni

Foundations:

Different angles: health, land preservation, nature trails, heritage trails, alternative transportation, park enhancements, community safety (trails in city), economic revitalization
Orton Foundation
VT Community Foundation

Open Air Mall on Center Street

» **Build a Central Open Air Mall on Center Street:** Rutland needs a center point for its cultural and community life and commerce. An open air mall in the heart of the downtown could deliberately attract crafts vendors, local food sellers, music and street life. Not all events would need to be daily – for example this location could host the farmers’ market or community music performances. This mall would build pedestrian traffic and stimulate a strong feeling that Rutland is an open, welcome and creative city. Planning for this mall should consider both the Center Street location and the possibility of turning the former parking garage site into a park, with a connection to the pedestrian area.

Committee Chair: Mark Foley, Jr. (mfoleyjr@foleydistributing.com)

Project Team Members:

Paul	Barbagallo
Peter	Becker
India	Burnett Farmer
Tom	Donahue
Susan	Feenick
Mary Ann	Goulette
Jerry	Hansen
Bonnie	Hawley
Henry	Heck
Greg	Henry
Steve	Howard
Luigi	Illiano
Phil	Lamy
Marc	Latzky
Carol	MacLeod
Larry	Masse
Chip	Ogg
Laurel	Rice
Chris	Siliski
Joe	Sonderman
John	Valente

Action Steps:

- 1.) Evaluate alternative sites and activities to fulfill the goal of a central, open cultural / community space
- 2.) Look at where this concept of closing streets and building a downtown mall has worked, where it hasn’t, and why.
- 3.) Gather existing plans for downtown development in one place for committee review.
- 4.) Survey Center Street businesses for their vision for the street.

Bring businesses and property owners together to work out issues and move forward one step at a time to support the prosperity of businesses on the street.
The Committee will then keep in touch with these businesses.

- 5.) Support and evaluate the 5 (or more) events taking place on Center Street this summer.
- 6.) Close Center Street on Friday nights; the committee will work to build activity and amenities that draw street traffic.
- 7.) Do committee field trips to investigate successful open air mall sites. Visit Ron Redmond at Church Street Marketplace.
- 8.) Identify who ought to be added to this committee to ensure connection to resources and decision-makers.
- 9.) Evaluate the mix of businesses that succeed in open air malls and systematically target them – maybe through a special downtown district.
- 10.) Develop a list of amenities and “people magnets” that would encourage increased street traffic.
- 11.) Plan for canopies or awnings and a lighting scheme that create a unified and special identity for the street.
- 12.) The parking garage needs to stay open after 11 pm to encourage shows and nightlife downtown.
- 13.) This Project Team should explore dramatic elements that could help brand the mall like a caboose, fountain, or other center point.
- 14.) Name the ‘mall’ and market it—not when it’s all done years from now, but today with Friday evenings and events: What should it be called and what will be the brand identity? Then use the name to build expectations and understanding of the vision by community and visitors.
- 15.) Evaluate the success of Friday nights and events that close off street and add incrementally to time that any street exists as a mall, evaluating events as they occur and eliminating obstacles, building pedestrian traffic, and supporting merchant prosperity.

Resources:

1. Community Development Planning Grant from Agency of Commerce
 2. USDA Rural Business Opportunities Grant or Rural Business Enterprise Grants
 3. Burlington’s Church Street Marketplace as a model
 4. Municipality – including an existing pedestrian mall feasibility study for Center Street
- See also the Resource Team Recommendations section.

Promote Arts through an Education Center

» **Promote Rutland as an Arts Education Center:** Rutland has many arts programs and the city should support expanding the reach of arts *education* to engage more community members. Rutland should create an arts and music education center that provides exceptional education for learners of all ages and space for existing programs that need room to grow. This center should work collaboratively with arts programs at area colleges to strengthen college-city relations. The center should also include an activities area that offers interactive, hands-on displays for children. The Montshire Museum offers examples of this type of activity.

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Pamela	O'Connor
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Becky	Rizzi
Sara	Weldon
Sarah	Willis

Goal: The short-term goal was modified from an education center that is a physical building to evaluating needs for advancing the Rutland area as an arts destination, including for education. These projects should build unity among arts & culture groups and set a strong community foundation as a necessary precursor to building an education center.

Action Steps:

1.) Identify who is already doing what in arts education, what has been done in the past, where the gaps are, and who is teaching in various disciplines.

Review the survey by Ann Singiser (Rutland Cultural Alliance)

2.) Examine feasibility of coordination and consolidation of services to reduce duplication and offer central source of information.

Potentially form an arts version of a Chamber of Commerce and / or create a Cultural Affairs ombudsman.

Talk to other areas that are coordinating arts activities – for example the Brattleboro arts groups.

3.) Marketing assessment for the arts – identify the “product” that you’re trying to market, who the target markets are, why.

Invite marketing professionals in the area who are familiar with branding to work on this project

Look at examples like “Rutbusters” and at logo potentials.

4.) Longer term plans

a) Determine whether a new edifice is needed

b) Expansion/ definition of service area

Sustainable Rutland

» **Sustainable Rutland – A Model City:** Rutland should be a model of sustainable self-sufficiency. This effort should particularly target energy options, with a think tank that evaluates possible clean energy solutions and a learning center to teach about both alternative energy sources and conservation methods. Rutland should recognize the far-reaching impacts that a fossil fuel-dependent lifestyle has on community structure and identify specific steps to reorganize its community life to move away from that dependence. Planning around these next steps should include goals of teaching visitors to the city and attracting young families who prioritize an ecologically sensitive lifestyle.

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Becky	Rizzi
Lane	Smith
Maggie	Smith
Michael	Smith

Carol	Tashie
Jim	Tasse
Paul	Vidovich
Sylvia	Wallett
Paul	Whelton

Action Steps:

1. Stakeholders – Education and Decisionmaking

- How does the Project Team think about “sustainability”? (see notes at end of Action Steps). Develop a common vision.
- Answer how sustainability fits into the creative economy. Note that 3 of the 4 priority projects include a pedestrian / bicycle component.
- Assess sustainability initiatives already underway in Rutland. Be able to answer questions like where local electricity comes from (some is from renewable sources, manure) or what is being done to promote local foods (Rutland Area Food and Farm Link).

2. Public Outreach and Feedback

Understand where there can be a broad based coalition to move projects forward
Create places for students to get involved.

3. Support Bike and Pedestrian Paths

- Petition the city to adopt a policy of routine accommodation for alternative transportation (eg bikes) when they do road projects.
- Endorse the downtown pedestrian mall concept.
- Adopt a new sidewalk plan.

4. Form a Partnership with Efficiency Vermont

5. Set Clear Indicators of Sustainability Success and Follow Up with Measurement.

6. Other Project Ideas for Future Consideration

- Form partnerships with other communities – for example Manchester’s light bulb changing initiative.
- Form a Rutland alternative fuels cooperative.
- Establish an incubator for alternative energy ideas.
- Target thermal efficiency for homes.
- Track state laws that mandate education / outreach – for example around energy options.
- Start a Rutland MPG Auto Show for better mileage vehicles (contact Ron Pulcer, rspulcer_2k@yahoo.com).

Resources:

www.MoveOn.org has a model for building action steps and setting priorities

www.global-community.org

www.ci.burlington.vt.us/legacy

www.iscvt.org

www.vermontbiofuels.org

www.vtearthinstitute.org

www.iclei.org

www.encycvt.org

Efficiency Vermont (in Action Steps)

Other Creative Communities Project Teams (in Action Steps)

See also, Resource Team recommendations (pg. 42)

Comments on the Meaning of a Sustainable Rutland:

- A community that has stable, year-round work; an equal balance coming in and going out.
- Vermont – a green and beautiful place. Put back more than we take.
- Regional perspective: make the whole area sustainable, providing for local people, selling good clean resources.
- Not relying on oil as much; different forms of transportation.
- More businesses in downtown; downtown as a place to live.
- Model within Center Street: bakery growing its own food, building running on alternative fuels, educational center.
- Support local businesses and farms.
- Wean selves from greed; change our mindset away from consumer culture.
- Buy local, reduce our dependence on oil.
- Living in a vibrant place that invests in its community and where people thrive with minimum resource consumption.
- Rutland as a place where people live with a lighter footprint. A place where children can earn a living wage.
- Appreciate Rutland's assets, develop them and use them responsibly.
- Good jobs for people to stay here – full time with benefits and not dependent on fossil fuels.
- Sustainability as a process, not a destination – stay in balance with nature, it's a constant balancing, dynamic.
- Balance between economic development and the environment, attracting young people with good jobs.
- Address drug programs – social issues that underlie drug addiction.
- Model city for a lifestyle that has a lower impact on the natural world.
- Civic engagement and a balance of economic, environmental, and social goals so that one does not detract from another. An emphasis on “local.”
- Pride in local ownership, food production and distribution.
- Balance between haves and have-nots – social justice.

Resource Team Recommendations

Resource Team members represent a wide array of professionals from across the state, and agree to serve as partners and advisors to the Rutland Project Teams. Their recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community's unique assets and needs. It is hoped that community members will turn frequently to these pages for concrete ideas, resources, and support. Resource Team members are eager to support the Project Teams as they begin their work. Following are recommendations compiled from the Resource Teams' comments.

General Recommendations

Rutland clearly has a strong group of citizens who care strongly about the city's future. The Creative Communities process should not be a one-shot deal for bringing people together around the table – ongoing public discussion on areas of general interest should continue to take place. Civic engagement is a tremendous asset.

A recurring theme was the need for grassroots leadership in addition to existing city government structures. That is an interesting counterpoint to the high levels of thoughtful participation in the public meetings. What can harness the underlying energy that was obvious in the public meetings and channel that energy into more effective grassroots leadership?

As Project Teams consider where to hold events, they should remember the earlier (March) conversations about the Fairgrounds being underutilized. This asset should receive more attention.

Funding sources will be key to making projects move forward. Rutland should do a short inventory of local funding sources to get a sense of what options exist. Also, a good sense of the scope of costs and long-term plans for sustainability will be needed for each project.

Rutland as a Recreation Center

Two major recreation centers in Vermont might be interesting to speak with and each have been contacted before about the Rutland Creative Communities visit. **Jim Davis** at **Indoor Recreation of Orleans County (IROC)** would be happy to answer questions – (802) 334-8511 x104. The **Collins-Perley Sports Complex** in St. Albans is another example. **David Kimell** (802) 527-1202 is available to answer any questions about St. Albans.

Vermont has some great examples of towns with successful recreation plans, particularly walking and biking trails. While considering some of the examples listed below, Rutland should also think about how it will take advantage of connections to the Long Trail.

Springfield has a frequently used riverside trail. A visit to Springfield and to talk with the group that put that trail together could be useful.

Chittenden County's Regional Planning Commission created a master plan for paths that could serve as a model. The Rutland Regional Planning Commission probably has information on paths for Rutland. For questions about trail planning in Chittenden County, **Chapin Spencer** at Local Motion, (802) 652-2453, will either know the answer or know who to ask.

VT Youth Conservation Corp may be able to help build, clear, and clean up trails and access points. Call (802) 434-3969.

College students often can assist with trail building – either the physical building or mapping out the trail systems. Check with **Castleton, Green Mountain College**, or **St. Joseph's** to see what partnerships might be possible. At **Dartmouth College**, geography majors design, create and print trail maps.

Working with landowners and gaining rights to use their land can be the most difficult part of a trail project. The **Vermont Center for Geographic Information** (<http://www.vegi.org>) might be able to assist with mapping parcels. This could also be a graduate student project.

The **Vermont Recreation Trails Grants Program** of the **Agency of Natural Resources** may have funding. Matching grants are offered for maintenance of existing trails and the construction of new trails on state, municipal and private lands where there is a recreational need. They can also help prepare and print trail maps and more. Contact Sherry Smecker, grants administrator at 241-3690; she can also advise you on additional resources.

Funding for outdoor recreation and trails is available through the State of Vermont **Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation**. For details, explore their site at <http://www.vtfpr.org/recgrant/trgrant.cfm> and <http://www.vtfpr.org/reclwcf/index.cfm>.

The **VT Agency of Transportation** (VTrans) administers a Bicycle/Pedestrian program that provides advice and connections to grant resources. Amy Bell is the coordinator: 828-0457.

The **Bikes Belong Coalition** (BBC) assists local organizations in developing bicycle facility projects with grants of up to \$10,000. Bikes Belong Coalition, 1368 Beacon St. Suite 102, Brookline, MA 02446-2800, (617)734-2800 tim@bikesbelong.org.

The **Vermont Bike and Pedestrian Coalition** could be a resource (<http://www.vtbikeped.org>). In fall, 2006, Becca Roof, currently Executive Director of the Coalition, will begin a consulting business on bike and pedestrian trails. Her contact information will be: Becca Roof, Going Green, 802-279-4037, becka_roof@pobox.com.

The **National Park Service** Rivers & Trails Program helps plan and implement local trail, greenway and river protection projects. Contact Jennifer Waite, VT Projects Director, NPS Rivers and Trails, PO Box 178, Woodstock, VT 05091, 802-457-3368, Jennifer_waite@nps.gov.

The **National Recreation and Park Association** has recreation funding ideas. Betsy Orselet of the Vermont Recreation and Parks Association can provide information: orselet@adelphia.net or visit the website www.calcaminedesign.com/vrpa

If part of a trail system includes conservation projects near rivers, then you can also check with the **Natural Resources Conservation Service** which works with farmers and landowners to do stream bank erosion work. Contact Bill Forbes at NRCS (802) 775-8034 for information. You could also check with your local **Watershed Association**.

Congressman Sanders at one point had recreation funding. While that particular funding pool is now gone, the **Congressional Delegation** may acquire more.

Public/ private partnerships often produce the largest pot of money for recreation. Killington may provide partners. It does take skill to manage projects that match goals of both private and public entities. Building small scale institutional capacity can help – for example a local Mountain Bike Club for maintaining bike trails. Stowe followed this strategy.

Michael Crane (on the visiting Resource Team) has spent considerable time researching recreation options. His phone number is: (802) 657-3720.

Open Air Mall on Center Street

The Project Team has developed a strong step by step workplan; its emphasis on measured progress with constant evaluation is pragmatic and can lead to real success. It also allows this team to continue to evaluate whether the specific “mall” format is the best way to meet shared goals.

There should be an honest assessment of what the problems have been surrounding other downtown pedestrian malls. Many mall attempts have not succeeded, and the team should learn from successes and failures in other places. Have conversations with other Vermont locations to find out about the challenges of an open air mall. The **River Garden** in Brattleboro is a good example – talk to them about what obstacles ultimately limited the scope of their project. At the same time, visit **Church Street Marketplace** to see what is possible with a successful project. A conversation with **Joss Besse** at the **Downtowns Program** ((802) 828-5212) can identify who to interview.

While exploring what has happened in *other* towns, Rutland should also identify where sticking points have been in its own city. The pedestrian mall is not a new concept for Rutland. The Project Team needs to document the process of exploring the idea, including collecting and recording stakeholder input.

The Project Team might think of an open air market instead of a mall. A market sounds more vibrant and does not necessarily mean a permanent structural change. Markets are also familiar to consumers – Farmers’ Markets, for example, are common.

An excellent tool for learning about what can go right in an open air venue is the **Project for Public Spaces** (<http://www.pps.org>). PPS is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating and sustaining public places that build communities. They offer training, conferences, funding, technical assistance, and publications.

Another organization is the **National Main Street Program** that works on downtown development, with some aspects related to the open mall concept. (<http://www.mainstreet.org/>).

The **Partners for Livable Communities** offer another perspective on downtown districts, particularly cyber districts. One strategy for increasing pedestrian traffic in the downtown could be wireless hotspot zones.

The **Central Vermont Community Action Council** is working on its own public market project as a way to provide a venue for their micro business participants and their products. **Mary Niebling** would be interested in speaking more with Rutland about their project (802) 479-1053.

The first step in planning how Rutland will proceed should be bringing downtown merchants into the discussion. A comprehensive understanding of both the vision that an open air mall is attempting to achieve *and* where this overlaps with merchants' specific goals is essential.

Bringing together plans for a pedestrian mall, if Rutland moves forward with that format, will require strong professional assistance to study market feasibility. **Robert Gibbs** should be considered. Again, **Joss Besse** at the **Downtowns Program** ((802) 828-5212 will have recommendations.

Promote Rutland as an Arts Destination

The March 30th forum touched on some disconnects between local arts organizations. Before Rutland can become a center for arts education, these organizations will need to find an effective mechanism for working together. Strong partnerships should be used to get the general public more involved in the arts and culture and understand the benefit of investments in this sector.

The team moving forward on the arts center project will need to host many opportunities for people to get involved in creating a shared vision. An important question for arts groups should be what they might accomplish through economies of scale, shared space, collective assets and collaborative energies. Some meetings might require an outside facilitator – contact the **Vermont Council on Rural Development** for facilitation help.

More mundane issues beyond the big vision will be how to organize the players behind an education center effort, how they will make decisions, and how to sustain the infrastructure. The group will also need to find a common language. Thinking carefully (and collaboratively) about this structure should moderate the inevitable turf issues.

The **Vermont Arts Council** offers a grant for Local Arts Partnerships. Planning grants of up to \$2,500 and implementation grants of up to \$10,000 / year are available to arts organizations starting working partnerships with other community organizations. Contact the VT Arts Council's Director of Community Programs (802) 828-3778

The **AD Henderson Foundation** makes grants specifically for arts education. Talk to the **Brattleboro Music Center** about funding / operations for educational centers (<http://www.bmcvt.org/>).

Think about art projects that can happen in town in the short term that highlight creative partnerships and get the public engaged as the big planning behind a potential center continues.

Sustainable Rutland

The biggest challenge for this group will likely be defining “sustainability” and identifying practical components of a sustainable city to tackle as initial goals.

Look for some win-win situations that combine sustainability with direct economic returns for businesses. For example, initiatives to reduce waste will lower garbage hauling bills, energy efficiency saves money after the initial capital investment, and using local food can mean higher quality meals – a plus for restaurants.

There are Vermont groups working on these everyone-benefits initiatives:

Casella Waste Management and **Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District** (CVSWMD) have innovative waste management projects. CVSWMD has a zero-waste initiative – see <http://www.cvswmd.org/>.

One of the nation’s leading energy efficiency groups is **Efficiency Vermont** (<http://www.veic.org/>).

The **Vermont Fresh Network** works on farmer-chef partnerships for local food (www.vermontfresh.net or call Meghan Sheradin (802) 434-2000). Groups are also working on local foods in schools, particularly **VT FEED (Food Education Every Day)** – <http://www.vtfeed.org>).

Mutually helpful situations are also possible in partnership with the other Creative Communities topics. Trails built by the Recreation team provide routes for alternative transportation, while the emphasis on supporting downtown merchants, rehabilitating downtown buildings, and encouraging use of green / pedestrian space, contribute to a sustainable local economy.

The **Vermont Peak Oil Network (VPON)** is full of information on building sustainable communities: <http://www.vtpeakoil.net/index.html>. Find out how the Rutland area is being represented in the network.

The question of how to define sustainability and how to use it as part of a strategic plan for Rutland could make a good project for a graduate student. The **Snelling Center for Government** is affiliated with **UVM** and places graduate students in policy-related internships (Phone: (802) 859-3090). **Middlebury** has had several student groups complete sustainable systems projects. Visit their Department of Environmental Affairs: <http://www.middlebury.edu/administration/enviro/>

Dartmouth recently hired **Jim Merkel**, a well known sustainability expert and author of “Radical Simplicity”, as their first college sustainability coordinator. It could be helpful to find out how Jim took first steps at Dartmouth (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sustain/>)

The Addison County Relocalization Network (ACoRN) is designing its own local initiative using as a template the Energy Independence Plan from Willits, CA.

<http://www.willitseconomiclocalization.org/Papers/EnergyIndependencePlan.pdf>

Another example of a community life initiative including sustainability is Burlington's Legacy Project: <http://www.cedo.ci.burlington.vt.us/legacy/>. **Beth Humstone**, part of the Resource Team, helped establish that project and could answer questions.

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