

Our 4-Town Future Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held with residents and the VCRD Visiting Team at forums in South Royalton, Tunbridge, Strafford, and Sharon

These notes capture the many interesting and diverse thoughts and ideas shared during community discussions in each of the 4 towns of Royalton, Sharon, Strafford, and Thetford. These notes represent a starting point of brainstormed ideas that will be compiled and shared with the residents of the 4-Town region for prioritization. Priority action items will be selected at a 4-Town region priority setting session on April 25, 2019.

Economic & Cultural Vitality

Visiting Team: Amy Cunningham, Vermont Arts Council; Kim Gilbert, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission; Joan Goldstein, VT Department of Economic Development; Bob Haynes, Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation; Jenna Koloski, VT Council on Rural Development; Jenna Lapachinski, Preservation Trust of VT; Nancy Larowe, Vital Communities; Jon Muise, USDA Rural Development

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Vibrant local schools.
- Local farms.
- Wonderful array of restaurants and food and CSA's lead to cultural vitality.
- Beautiful natural environment that attracts people to the area.
- Cultural events with the Lebanon Opera House, Dartmouth, Woodstock, etc. nearby.
- Community owned food coops.
- Libraries in all 4 towns.
- Two-Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC)
- Local beer – 2 micro brewers – biggest concentration in US.
- Local community radio station.
- Vermont Law School for diversity and educational opportunities for the community.
- Best broadband internet (not in all 4 towns) – EC Fiber by end of next year all 4 towns.
- 3 of the 4 towns have ice skating rinks.
- White River.
- Proximity to the interstate.
- Rich architectural heritage – great buildings.
- Historical attractions:
 - Joseph Smith birthplace
 - Justin Smith Morrill Homestead
- Town meetings.
- Great public buildings – Royalton Academy, 7 stars center, Tunbridge Town Hall for music events, parties, weddings. Venues for events.
- Organized sporting events get people out doing something healthy.
- Amazing people, some of them musicians.
- Tunbridge World Fair.
- Town Band.
- Town Rec Programs.
- Great trails – logging, biking, skiing.
- Churches open to everyone.
- Manufacturing like GW Plastics that encourage workplace learning for students.
- Diversity of farms – sizes, types, structures.
- Strong emergency services. Rescue squad is shared in 2.5 of the towns. All fire departments are mutual aid and will go to the other towns.
- Stagecoach bus out of Randolph supported by each of the 4 towns. They go to the senior centers, take people to doctor's appointments.
- Sharon has a community nurse with office hours and is available to visit people that have needs.
- Tunbridge and Strafford has neighbors helping neighbors.
- Food shelves in all 4 towns.
- Meals on wheels for seniors and on the holidays.
- The skills of people in the area – can find people that know how to do things.
- Lions clubs.
- Visual artists – strong painters, poets, writers, journalists, photographers.
- 7 Stars is an arts center in Sharon.
- People's art on walls in South Royalton.
- The place is an asset – you can wander here and feel free between the river and the hills.
- Fall foliage.
- The railroad goes through but it should be used more.
- Bale building is a nice community building.
- The health center in So Royalton and Sharon.

What are the Challenges?

- Hard to get places, Stagecoach only runs once a day.
- Small scale farms aren't economically vibrant enterprises.
- Aging infrastructure: roads, bridges, and sewer.
- Not enough childcare options.
- Declining enrollment in the schools.
- Parking is a challenge in South Royalton.
- Lack of plan development for zoning.
- Trail access and connectivity.
- No common repository for where the trails are, no map of what's available in the whole region (Strafford has maps).

- True broadband connectivity to every household.
- Cell phone service is spotty.
- Long commutes to employment is considered normal.
- Lack of an Interstate exit for So Royalton and Tunbridge means visitors don't stop to spend money (or it's an asset depending on how you look at it).
- Drawback for business development is the low underpasses – trucks can't bring products in.
- Auditory challenge of living near a loud train but can't hop on the train – Amtrak goes right through but doesn't stop.
- No robust waste management service in the region, no clear consistent or economically viable way to manage waste when the new law kicks in.
- Recycling centers have different rules so hard to know what they take.
- Population is aging.
- Real estate sales driven by retirement purchases.
- Have 7 Stars in Sharon, but no community center to gather and meet up with your neighbors.
- Great local businesses but their hours are limited or unreliable.
- Climate change will be more and more a challenge over time, impact of hurricane Irene on the region.
- Higher than average poverty rate in Sharon and Royalton.
- Growth in the working poor population.
- All libraries are 1 room libraries and are under staffed (except one of them).
- Lack of affordable housing and affordable rents.
- Finding balance of offering quality education and affordability.
- Not much middle range housing available.
- Not affordable farm houses.
- Hard to get around – need all-wheel good car or can't live here. (It was noted that the Sharon road crew is doing a great job with the roads this winter).
- Winter is tough. Can't enjoy all the assets we listed above for months out of the year as people stay home.
- Declining volunteerism and impacts on our emergency services.
- Lack of racial and ethnic diversity.
- Opioid drug and alcohol abuse as well as domestic abuse.
- Cost and time to find out what you don't know. No one-stop source to get help for good ideas. Going through Act 250 is an education. Cost and time to get through the regulations is a drawback to a lot of things. Barriers to accomplishing priorities.
- Town office could be more accessible and more of a resource, not inviting to walk there in Royalton.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Tax air intake manifold vehicles and proceeds support electric car purchases.
- Sharon Health Initiative nurse/community coordinator is warehouse for needs. Sometimes hard to find the right person in a state agency to help.
- Economic Development staff person to help people navigate through barriers.
- With housing being such an issue, look at house sharing programs or programs like that that are working.
- Hard to get into existing farmland. Preserve rural landscape but make smaller tracts of land available for farming and learning. Remove the barriers for new farmers to get access to existing farmland – can only do it currently if willing to take 50 acres or more, but has to be a way to work around that for viability of small diversified farms. Making land available in smaller chunks would help farmers looking for land to farm.
- Connect people that have land they want farmed with people that want to farm through a forum or network.
- As a farmer, don't know what land is available that we can use – what land in land trusts are available.
- Use railroad.
- Local transportation options, connect people that live nearby that need to go to the store, etc.
- Ask Stagecoach to explore ways to expand their service options in the 4 communities.
- Recreation opportunities are huge, towns working hard to keep open land and individuals allow others to ski or walk on their land. Have a group that maps it and show where the parking is to access it.
- Fund to seed new businesses as loans or equity.
- VLS is piloting a new course on entrepreneurship and legal advice – people can get free legal advice with social environmental focus. Get the word out.
- Royalton has revolving loan fund.
- White River investment club out of BALE have pooled money and taking applications for loans.
- If have farmers in transition from conventional to organic farming, they need bridge money to build their soils before they can convert.
- Royalton help Tunbridge with neighbors helping neighbors.
- To address opioid issue – provide teenagers with out of school activities after school hours.
- Clearinghouse for land swapping, volunteerism. Need to consolidate all the forms of communication – we have too many currently.
- Share emergency services and resources for people when they have power outages, for example.
- Small solar projects that serve 4 to 5 houses. Most transportation will be electrified and need to control it locally.
- Do more to clear trees along power lines preventatively to prevent power outages.
- Make Tunbridge Fairgrounds a year-round asset – utilize the venue as a space for events and activities.
- See strength in being together but the region is “a community” rather than “4 communities” Each community has its own assets and we need to share things between us better. If we had a central library could have a hell of a library. Think about ourselves as a single community – shared service opportunities where more can be done together.
- Many more communities – Barnard, etc. but we are all little groups right down to our families.

- Regarding disaster preparedness, there's a move toward community resilience projects like in Sharon. Towns could come together and coordinate resilience planning.
- Currently, emergency service people from towns come together every other month.
- More planning on watershed scale which is what connects us all together. As a watershed, ecologically-speaking need to think in those terms.
- Bicycling is strong in the area – people come here and bike. When roads are repaved, there is an opportunity to get shoulders put in. In planning ahead, need to make more bike friendly. Can get grants for bike paths, etc. improve bikeability and walkability of the region.
- Evaluate if towns are getting adequate funding from the state in relation to what they are paying in.
- Support local businesses, municipalities sharing crushing operation for gravel and sand. Need more and more these days, communities struggle with accessing it, trucking it.
- Have a place where musicians, artists, writers meet with children to connect and learn. Parents can't afford private lessons or can't drive the kids around because of work, etc.
- More evening events available. A lot of socializing is done in homes, but hard to break into local social circle.
- Make winter shorter.
- A hub or central communication source to share all the things that are happening. Need to consolidate the many lists that already exist.
- Could have an app with a calendar of all the local events. It could also list needs, like someone needing help washing windows, etc. Youth helping elders, building community, good for youth and elders.
- Bethels revitalization initiative brings a lot of people out – Arnold block co-working space, kitchen, venue, all-purpose space. Could be good for this region.
- Toolshare.
- Not great web presence for local businesses or town offices. Hard to find information online about anything local. Improving web presence of town offices would be great.
- Chamber of commerce for the 4 towns.
- In revitalized block would love to see an artist's coop where local craft people and artists could sell their work.
- Whistle stop for Amtrak – wave and the engineer would stop. We have VLS and no stop for their students. Would benefit them and others. It costs \$600 each time they stop.
- Paying attention on climate change – in next 20 years it will impact and cost us more and more. When you get flooding, it's because the water is running off the land. It won't if you have taken care of the land and it's absorbing it. From climate perspective, get a cooling action which cools the planet. Anytime we do projects, we ought to be thinking about whether we can also make it cooler at the same time. Anything to do with land, transportation, bringing more farmers to the land, etc.
- Underlying value – will do collective vision and value exercise at next session.
- Whole systems thinking for ecological function, ecosystem services, water quality, influx of people because we have water, forward thinking of regional planners.
- Regional business association to unify the region and eventually serve as incubator for new businesses in various industries.
- Small local farmer incubator or resource hub.

Reflections of the Community Visiting Team

- Infrastructure challenges, wonderful assets, not sure how to access or share them. Bethel "Better Block" project is great, but the revitalization initiative also created the Bethel University that offers free classes. A lot of opportunities to share wonderful resources. Have fabulous downtowns, village centers, historic resources. Incorporate the ideas from today into the village centers to keep them vibrant for the next 50 to 100 years.
- 12 regional development corps around the state help provide info and resources. In terms of references, 2 Rivers Ottauquechee is another source of info, challenges with permitting can be solved. Norwich has a fantastic website. Good project to work on. Communication is part of it. Need broadband for life. Funding available from VEDA, USDA, NBRC, small investment loans, revolving loan funds. Grant planning assistance. The glass is way more than half full here. Great opportunity to coalesce.
- Local food, beer, artists, quintessential Vermont. Great resources here with VLS, broadband coming, rich cultural and people assets. Collective but independent. Have opportunity for consistency and market self as destination region will help with economic development. Share resources whether it's a person, platform of communication, will come up with great ideas. USDA RD needs specific actionable items to fund.
- Need to do some planning. Although have tremendous assets, there are gaps. In ED we talk about gaps. We could refer people, farm viability program through VHCB good in technical assistance, transitioning to organic with small pots of funding. On big issues, like underpass is long term planning. How to do it as a 4-town coalition or as a region. Worthy of thinking of a master plan for the infrastructure improvements of roads, bridges, watershed and stormwater management, built in would be resiliency and shared services. Proper planning will lead to the funding.
- VAC has been around for 55 years. State arts agency and nonprofit. We invest in orgs and artists. Vermont Creative Network about lifting up the creative sector in the state. It's a significant economic driver in the state. WRJ April 18th is region wide convening for what can be done to lift creative vitality in this region in the state. New grant round for community building.
- Cover 30 town area. Similar challenges we hear in other towns. Work directly with towns as they update their town plans.
- Strong sense of place here, love of community.

Affordable Housing and Senior Living

Visiting Team: Paul Costello, *VT Council on Rural Development*; Josh Hanford, *VT Department of Housing and Community Development*; Monica Hutt, *VT Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living*; Mike Kiess, *Vital Communities*; Seth Leonard, *VT Housing Finance Agency*; Tom Roberts, *Vital Communities*; Gus Seelig, *VT Housing and Conservation Board*; Beth Stern, *Central VT Council on Aging*

What are the Assets in this Area?

- There is a senior subsidized property in Royalton that will also allow for younger residents.
- Homes are very large. Difficult to move to the area and downsize.
- The rental market is very tight: the Law School and Upper Valley create pressures on demands.
- Wages were relatively flat in the area while housing prices increased (comment from a former lister).
- One law student that came in May from Maryland had a very difficult time finding rental housing. The stock was also low quality, or had absentee landlords.
- Tunbridge discussed pulling together resources to build more homes.
- Transportation to services, specifically for the aging populations, is a challenge.
- Individuals maintain multiple jobs to ensure they can afford housing. Quality of housing is a detriment to being able to work from home. "I pay 75% of my income to maintain housing where I can work".
- It takes a long time for homes to turn on the market.
- In the mid-\$250k-\$300k there is a good inventory".
- The recent Tunbridge conversation was about supporting a network of volunteers to support each other. Neighbors Helping Neighbors in Tunbridge and Strafford provides services if needs are identified such as firewood.
- The Sharon Health Initiative assists in accessing medical care or federal/state services.
- Strafford, Chelsea, and Royalton all have Senior Centers.
- There is a need for more Stagecoach transportation access, need more drivers for this service.
- Bethel is a nearby town where services can be accessed.
- There is not a focused group around housing in any of the towns or from a regional perspective.
- Homeshare Now was referenced by visiting team member, but only one attendee had heard about the service.
- Norwich's affordable housing is a potential example to strive toward.
- Mini-Houses or Tiny Homes have been utilized in Strafford. This assisted with younger individuals being able to buy homes

What are the Challenges?

- Strafford had a conversation about bringing in senior housing, but it fizzled out. It was challenging or overwhelming to individually support housing initiatives around the creation of housing.
- Confusion around the definition of Affordable Housing. Typically small "a" affordable versus capital "A" affordable.
- Law School students create a strain on demand in Royalton which increases prices. Lower income non-students have NO options and it is difficult to stay.
- Need for affordable housing, especially for seniors.
- Single Family Homes are not as affordable as they used to be.
- If you are modest income, it is hard to get to homeownership – condition of homes and barrier of down payment.
- Strafford has had several groups to attract Senior Housing. Have run into issues around location and land.
- Zoning was referenced as a barrier (specific to the Strafford Senior Housing efforts), with lack of density permitted.
 - Strafford is only town with zoning, other three do not.
- Town Water/Sewer issue. All attendees identified water/waste water (mostly or all septic in the villages) – Strafford, Tunbridge
- Sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure do not exist outside downtown Royalton.
- Homes require too much care or maintenance for aging population.
- Airbnb and short-term rental are putting stress on rental availability.
- Lack of connection to shared or regional services, community networks are dependent on people knowing people and lend to isolation. "Stubborn Yankee Independence".

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- We need a contiguous bus service. There is no identified group organizing that conversation. Lack of funding for Rural Transportation.
- Randolph Concept: RACLT project (VERMODs just outside downtown Randolph) as a potential model.
- Recognition that each community is taking on issue of supporting seniors, and regional coordination could be beneficial.
- Co-housing development and or home share expansion.
- Royalton became eligible for New Market Tax Credits. Royalton has "Hope Property" and the Town Offices land that it is considering for co-housing (or other development). There is not currently housing on these properties – but with one being owned by the town, there was real interest in its potential.
- Interest in supporting the childcare expansion of existing private facility.

- Royalton was discussed as being a convenient center between the towns.
- Is there a “general massing” of people that justifies investments in housing and infrastructure? Concern about the population.
- There are large homes that are vacant in Strafford that could be potential redevelopment properties.
- There is a lack of duplexes... “lots of studio apartments, old farm houses, but nothing in between”.
- South Windsor Street in Royalton - Journey Church/Lumber Yard. Noted these properties are for sale and could be combined, but no current housing exists there.
- We need apartments the size of Exeter Block.
- “Old Grain Mill” in Royalton is privately owned. No current housing on site, but was identified as a potential housing redevelopment site.
- No private sector development is occurring in the area.
- “All the Nice Homes Are Second Homes”
- Buildings in the area build other places because it is hard to get permits.
- Are there private sector investment? Town Steeple (\$100k) example in Strafford; Upper Valley Land Trust – preserved a piece of land with private donations.
- Engage VLS volunteers in addressing housing needs.
- VLS Development: they have talked about developing housing.
- Getting Access to down payment assistance or “rent-to-own.”
- Work at creating a vision.
- Identify reasons why homes are sitting on the market. Find opportunities to reinvest in them, maybe energy efficiency upgrades.
- Single family affordable housing development is expensive....so does it make more sense to reinvest in existing stock?
- Old Farms and Barns that are tax burdens for owners. Perhaps seek to change some of these into housing?
- Sweat Equity and community energy. Energy has popped up in times of crisis.
- More inclusion between students and region...harness and use the student energy.
- Untapped and unorganized human power exists.

Reflections of the Community Visiting Team

- Energy can be harnessed.
- Gave examples of potential smaller scale affordable housing. Expense of housing development at this scale.
- Housing Committee, get conversations in the hopper before money starts being spent.
- You want housing that affordable and accessible, and location matters....the themes were consistent across demographics. Integrated communities matter – cross-generational.
- Dynamic Vision can drive energy if it is organized well. Lock-in, set priorities, drive them forward. Squeaky wheel begs the resources of state and federal funders. Use the youth.

Attracting & Supporting Young Residents & Families

Visiting Team: Emily Blistein, *Let's Grow Kids*; Ted Brady, *VT Agency of Commerce & Community Development*; Ben Doyle, *USDA Rural Development*; Dee Gish, *Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission*; Peter Gregory, *Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission*; Bob Haynes, *Green Mountain Economic Development Corp*; Mike Kiess, *Vital Communities*; Jenna Koloski, *Vermont Council on Rural Development*

What are the Assets in this Area?

- All 4 towns have natural assets for outdoor recreation.
- Good schools.
- There are more affordable homes and land than closer to Montpelier and other larger hubs.
- Excellent libraries with good community events (and books). There is a library in all 4 towns.
- Pre-K programs seem to be getting stronger.
- High speed internet access will be available in 2020 through ECFiber.
- Higher education through institutions like VT Law School.
- Food coop markets and CSAs.
- High school choice (Tunbridge, Sharon, Strafford).
- Two Parent Child Centers in the region.
- Birthing center at Gifford.
- Sharon Academy (model independent school).
- Good infrastructure (interstate to get cultural places nearby).
- Easy access to Hanover and Dartmouth. Close to larger hub communities.
- Arts activities, Northern Stages, 4H, ArtisTree.
- World's Fair.
- Strong women and moms.
- Central VT Women's basketball league. Men's league too.
- Recreational Activities/ skiing/outdoor recreation.
- There's Clogging.
- Lots of social dancing.
- It's a safe place to be.
- Community events that bring people together.
- Small schools invite participation. Towns are welcoming to new families.
- Historical societies.
- Vital downtown communities.
- Royalton radio.

What are the Challenges?

- There aren't enough quality high paying jobs to recruit or keep people here.
- Not a livable wage around – rents are high.
- Lack of affordable daycare (that lasts throughout the day).
- One person can find a job, but not necessarily his or her partner so that makes it hard to move here together.
- People have to commute and that doesn't leave a lot of time for other activities.
- Finding affordable quality housing. There is some housing, but it's run down (lots of lead paint). Young people don't necessarily want a fixer upper.
- The cost of transportation (distance, road conditions). There isn't the proximity of some of the assets.
- Opioids and substance abuse is a real challenge.
- Long commutes limits volunteer time and as a result volunteer rescue services are suffering.
- Poor cell service.
- Stress around Act 46.
- Act 46 "Is not well thought out – the conversation should be broader to think about the community impact."
- Insecurity around Principal turnover in the schools – a couple have left.
- Student population decline. Variation among the four towns. There is a pay differential in the towns and statewide – making it challenging to keep well qualified teachers.
- On the flip side of safety – the limited ability to connect with 911 is really tough. 911 isn't available sometimes. Immediate access to emergency services. Cell service can be a life or death situation.
- Policing is expensive.
- Ambulance is shared between two towns.
- Real strong community of stay-at-home moms, but it can be a struggle for working mothers to connect with one another.
- Patchy internet makes it difficult to work remotely.
- It takes too long for people to feel welcomed. Sometimes people still feel like outsiders.
- There is an assumption that new residents are going to be transient and it prevents folks from forming connections.
- Lack of diversity. Tough to give your kids enough diverse experiences.
- (Asset) there are some bilingual kids and they do feel welcome.
- There isn't any public transportation.
- Directions based on the assumption that you know where things already are.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Resurrect a traditional welcome wagon – cool way for four towns to work together. Share the information about the different activities available to kids and parents.
- There are a number of cultural events at VLS from the black law students association. The students are trying to connect with the community, but the school could do better. How to connect students of color who want to connect communities? Find a way.
- Enhance participation at school board meetings and key intuitional meetings. Increase communication.
- Provide childcare at public meetings to increase participation.
- Sharon is working on a community phone book and community connections guide.
- People need to take leadership – not just volunteerism, but take on something yourself (build trails, organize a ball game)
- Childcare providers are underpaid, so somehow find a way to subsidize cost. Somehow fund more professional development. Support and boost provider's skills.
- Tap into the seniors to help with the childcare.
- Royalton does not have a Neighbor Helping Neighbors program. Organize a volunteer platform that makes it easier to help connect – neighbors helping neighbors.
- Four town listserv.
- Increase the quality of the housing stock – can money be pumped into it?
- Create more rental properties for young families.
- The rent cycles with the law students need to be staggered so they keep other people out.
- (Challenge) The landlords prefer landlords.
- Create a dedicated economic development committee.
- Support a co-working space. Especially for folks who work remotely.
- Tweak the ACCD program to support more folks moving to more rural communities.
- Encourage folks to use the VLS library for a co-working space now.
- Encourage home/office rental.
- Work on diversifying community by being more welcoming to people of color.
- Encourage arts programing from the Hop – increase participation from the community.
- The churches need to work on building more bridges in the community. Meditate on the idea that everyone is created equal.
- Start a coffee shop in Sharon.
- Crowd source community loan fund. White River Investment club does exist and could be used locally. Royalton has a community loan fund. Expand on it.
- Building on the corner in Sharon (dancehall/pub).
- Encourage community owned enterprises.
- Create a schedule of community building potlucks or community festivals that build community among the four towns. Follow the tumble town model.
- Form a cooperative where folks teach skills or learn new things (Bethel Community Learning Exchange) particularly for kids.
- Expand senior meals programs to expand the sense of community.
- Create a summer camp for kids that employ high school kids to give them a job skills program. One Planet (existing

- program) could be expanded with the idea of employing local students.
- The communication needs to be enhanced to publicize current events. Integrate listservs.
 - The town could offer down-payment assistance. You don't have to pay it back if you stay long enough.
 - Raise the profile of the young community members – so that it encourages others to come here.
 - Join Upper Valley Young Professionals. Expand opportunities for events in the region.
 - Offer childcare through vacations. School based/community based.
 - Young people are the best representatives.
 - Create “cool young people who live here” calendar.
 - Create a centralized online information sharing platform.

- Support the Ranger program (bike event).
- Improve web presence of the four communities (are the websites dynamic enough).
- Address the generational gap where younger people use the internet for connection and older residents feel more comfortable with paper.
- Increase opportunities for childcare with seniors. Again, bridge the generational divide.
- Young people marketing brand that focus. Identify shared purpose and vision. Frame the narrative of the four town region. Create a destination region.
- Invest in libraries to enhance in-person communication.
- Build a campaign – an ad campaign for the town.
- Revisit the folks ten months after the initial touch.

Reflections of the Community Visiting Team

- Communication goes two ways – invite students from VLS into the community as well.
- Brand yourself as the childcare community in Vermont or as the best place to raise children.
- Continue to build on existing assets.
- Focus on listservs. Increase investments from agencies and employers. Find local investment in the services and homes. Expand neighbor helping neighbor program. Community investment is key.

Agriculture & Forestry

Visiting Team: Erica Campbell, *Office of US Senator Bernie Sanders*; Paul Costello, *VT Council on Rural Development*; Nancy Everhart, *VT Housing & Conservation Board*; Pete Fellows, *Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission*; Laura Ginsburg, *VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets*; Nancy Larowe, *Vital Communities*; Sam Lincoln, *VT Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation*; Elijah Massey, *USDA Rural Development*; Michael Snyder, *VT Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation*

What are the Assets in this Area?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality soils • Trees • Maple • Lumber • Firewood • Water • Pasture land • Recreation trails (developed and potential) • Wildlife • Moose • Town forests • Hay • Skiing • Hiking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of CSAs fosters competition • Reasonable landowners • People know how to work the land • Diversified agriculture • Sheep • Goats • Cows (dairy and meat) • Pigs • People have a connection to the land. Ownership is often multigenerational. • Sugaring • Coexistence with wildlife • Farmers Markets • On-farm slaughter • Veterinary services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logging • Master's degree in forestry and agriculture at VT Law School • Ice cream • Horse farms • South Royalton market as a place to sell local produce • Breweries (high number per capita) • Tunbridge Fair • Coffee roasters • 5 covered bridges • Organic dairies • Meat processing in Sharon • Saw mills (permanent and portable) • Strafford Creamery |
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What are the Challenges?

- Property taxes are high.
- Hard to compete at scale with larger operations elsewhere.
- Cultural divide around working lands issues
 - Old growth trees
 - Seeing and smelling agriculture
 - Landscape appearance, agricultural aesthetic
- Cost of farm maintenance
- Deteriorating infrastructure
- Cost of buying or financing land.
- Terms of land purchase unfavorable to young people. It is hard to get on land (cost and access).
- Loss of land to development
- Agricultural use outcompeted by residential use
- Fragmentation of farmland
- It is sad when old farms are transformed in to residential use.
- Soil health/sustainability for future generations
- Technological challenges - Lack of cellular service
- Changing weather challenge makes planning unpredictable. There are increasing extreme weather events.

- Declining water quality
- Fisheries, rivers used to be full of fish.
- Agricultural as source of soil erosion.
- River bottom land requirements for hay crop in proximity to river.
- Sugaring equipment regulations prevent small scale profit in production and processing.
- Invasive species in forests are killing trees and increasing with climate change.
- Lack of meat processing infrastructure (smoking, storage), lack capacity and quality of service. Regulations are barriers for this infrastructure.
- No local agricultural network
- No farms in Sharon (aside from gentleman/hobby farms).
- Aging population of foresters and farmers.
- Forestry moving to larger equipment. Smaller equipment is no longer manufactured, making it challenging to get into the business as a start-up operation.
- Business succession challenges.
- Milk prices
 - Need alignment between supply and demand
 - Need a better price
- Hard to make a living in farming. There are barriers to entry.
- Cheap food – Where are farmers supposed to make a living? Cost of production often higher than return to farmer
- After the market and middlemen take their cut, what’s left for the farmer?
- Social stigma around going into farming, socially discouraged.
- Lack of commercial kitchen/processing space.
- In forestry, markets are tough for low-grade wood.
- Heritage breeds being lost as well as the knowledge of/about them.
- Lack of an ability to compost on an industrial scale locally. VT Law School creating waste rather than a resource.
- Workman’s Comp insurance is increasing, making it harder to find jobs
- Seasonality of working lands jobs
- It is hard to hire people and pay a living wage without bumping up over the line.
- Very little woodworking
- Farmers who use “best practices” in management face greater challenges than their peers
- Lack of sawmills. Past board production for local construction - there isn’t a market anymore
- Constrained by land base.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Develop a Center for Community Supported Agriculture (CCSA)
 - Agricultural education
 - Farmer shared equipment
 - Processing kitchen
 - Community meals
 - Office space
 - Farm management guidance
 - Increase farmland access
- Identify and utilize community resources and potential for mentoring around apiculture and dairy.
- Keep local libraries open late as community gathering spaces.
- Working inventory of available pastureland for grazers and forest resources for foresters
 - Current use program matching landowners and users
- Property taxes should be predictable and stable going into the future in order to enable prediction of future expenses. Address this policy issue with the legislature.
- Identify conservation opportunities to address forest fragmentation
- Opportunity for VTC as the site of a future food hub/large scale storage.
- Farmers can trade/loan specialized equipment.
- Opportunity for small landowners to sequester carbon in woodlots. Look into the possibility of reimbursements.
- Conserve a corridor of preserved land. Utilize tax benefits.
- Use the David Hall owned land as a cooperative opportunity for conservation and agriculture.
- Build financial Support for conservation easements and use for surveying and legal advice.
- Give families a break on health insurance through CSA memberships.
- CSA with cohousing opportunities
 - Heartland model for cob building
- Site alternative energy infrastructure on agricultural land to help cover the cost and mitigate development issues.
- NRCS and Audubon work on invasive mitigation and conservation.
- Cooperative law models exist for joint ownership of farmland.
- Cooperative venture to take advantage on economics of scale for a compost facility - Industrial and home.
- Grow less corn, diversify agricultural production.
- Reforestation efforts will pay dividends over time and provide ecological resiliency in face of changing climate
- Changing climate presents the opportunity to increase productivity of landscape through Carbon capture and Carbon markets.
- Tunbridge Fair could provide a marketplace for regional agricultural producers to sell their products during the fair
- Reward farmers who apply “best practices” in farm management. Local recognition and support.
- Regional biomass energy generation. Provide cheap energy and a market for low grade wood.
- Community work days on local farms
- Historical foundation of Farm to School programs exists. All four schools have programs operating. This could be an opportunity to bring school meals back into focus.
- Milk coops existed in the past, what new models are out there for dairy producers?
 - Price controls
- Develop an active education curriculum teaching agricultural and forestry content to children in schools.
- Utilize forests as sources of non-traditional products.
 - Mushrooms
 - Ginseng
 - Silvopasture
- Forests as source of mulch and/or wood chip production.

- Control imports to support local markets. Put seasonal limits on the importation of agricultural products produced in Vermont.
- Establish a local fund to leverage other funds to buy land and increase local access through easements.
- First branch valley as future bread basket of upper valley region. Develop cooperative working opportunities.
- Develop a local agricultural product to use on icy roads in place of salt/sand. Maybe a Sugar/syrup base?
- Hold an event like Kiss the Cow in Barnard.
- Attract and support cheesemakers.
- Take advantage of the Hemp salve market.
- Bees for Honey and Candles.
- Malted grains for local brewing.
- Hop production.
- Local distilling.
- Butchering opportunities, farms have animals. Create opportunities for Value-added products through Curing and Smoking.
- Local poultry processing. Develop mobile poultry processing.
- Revitalize local orchards. Rundown/neglected orchards as sources of gleaned apples and cider. Could be an opportunity for local pressing and bottling
- Morrill Mountain Fruit Farm in Strafford.
- VT Land Trust as resource for getting onto land.
- Passumpsic processing.
- ECI sawmill in Royalton.
- Angels sawmill in Randolph.
- BALE as a clearinghouse of local activity. Could play a possible coordinator role.
- Conduct an inventory of towns – who’s producing what?
- Involve Abenaki population – need to include their voice in the conversation.
- Use water to power mills and for energy generation.
- Build assistance for young farmers such as transfer plans and a local policy to assist with student debt.
- Acknowledge there are areas not suited to farming due to slope.
- Desire for more information around farming and forestry. Develop a website and/or written directory for information.
- The number of farms is increasing. This is getting missed in the conversation due to the small scale of production.
- 3 to 4 purpose cow to encourage self-sufficiency and part time work.
- Operation of the Tunbridge Fair demonstrates skills and coordination, this could serve as a model for the organization of other projects.

Reflections of the Community Visiting Team

- Farms and forests clearly matter to the community
- Opportunity and energy “gelling” to make next steps
- Fair as example, brings people in, demonstrates the power of this community
- Networks exist, opportunity to leverage skills
- Resources evident
- Issue of scale – possibility of adding value to products
- Pay attention to zoning and planning
- Workman’s compensation rate going down in forestry
- State Working Lands Enterprise Board as resource
- Amazing assets in land and forests
- Clear understanding of challenges
- “Co” came up throughout the conversation, major theme, strength in this thread
- Ownership
- Coordination
- Together the communities have incredible assets
- Interest in inventories, sharing information, theme of need for more knowledge
- People connections
- Potential in meat processing
- Resources exist to address challenges identified
 - Commercial kitchen in Royalton
 - Micro meet-up for new farmers
- Figure out transition and viability
- Familiar network through proximity

Infrastructure, Communication & Municipal Partnership

Visiting Team: Ted Brady, *VT Agency of Commerce & Community Development*; Maura Carroll, *VT League of Cities & Towns*; Ben Doyle, *USDA Rural Development*; Dee Gish, *Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission*; Bob Haynes, *Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation*; Paige Heverly, *Vital Communities*; Gary Holloway, *VT Department of Housing & Community Development*; Matthew Langham, *VT Agency of Transportation*; Lisa Ryan, *Preservation Trust of VT*; Clay Purvis, *VT Department of Public Service, Telecommunications & Connectivity Division*; Sarah Waring, *Vermont Community Foundation*

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Fiber optics are doing well, EC Fiber taken off in the last 3 years, been around for 10 years. 23 communities are part of this.
- South Royalton Co-op, Coburn Store.
- Herald of Randolph.
- Local radio station – programming from all 4 towns – community radio.
- Vital communities listservs – each community has one.
- Upper valley has list serve for all 4 communities
- Tunbridge and Chelsea have Front Porch Forum
- Tunbridge has a newsletter with all the town organizations listings and on town website
- Strafford has a newsletter.
- Tunbridge has a women’s e-mail list.

- Municipal Partnerships
- Emergency services are set up to help each other with all 4 towns. Offer manpower to each other. Mutual agreements between towns on emergency services
- Ambulance services Sharon, Royalton and ½ Tunbridge shared – non profit
- Sharon and Royalton, Tunbridge and Strafford share road.
- Royalton has town water and wastewater.
- Sharon – no wastewater, shared well limited in village only.
- Private wells and waste mostly.
- Justin Morrill Homestead
- Town Office
- Event Spaces
- Schools
- Royalton Academy, Sharon Academy
- Community gathering spaces in each town

What are the Challenges?

- Cost prohibitive to bring fiber to all houses
- Communicating in isolation from the towns
- Maintaining the infrastructure is a challenge to fund and is a burden on tax payers
- 2/3 of municipal budget is for roads
- Bridges are expensive to maintain
- Cell service is bad – Strafford nonexistent; Tunbridge is spotty, small cell tower put up – ½ town or less has it in Tunbridge; Royalton has spotty service; Sharon is pretty good but spotty as well
- Replacing culverts is very expensive
- Limitations on substation from GMP – undersized for state goals around renewable energy – 5 megawatt plant – can't add any more solar – need twice the amount to 15mega watt – privately owned solar array
- Cost of handling recycling waste and recycling
- Ongoing struggle to pay for infrastructure for emergency equipment, vehicles, apparatus – difficult to get volunteers to maintain services – schedule of volunteers is different now compared to the way it was – particularly during the day – training required is so much more time requirement – 300 hours – state picks up the cost
- Royalton is paid ambulance and volunteer fire fighters; same in Tunbridge
- 4 paved roads – 20% have adequate bike lanes – RASTA is active – dangerous to bike on the roads
- Response time for 911 can be slow
- Public transportation is sparse
- Transportation to the health centers is not good
- Not everyone has internet access

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Electronic calendar for all 4 communities ; list serve for all 4; subscribe to the upper valley list serve and have a moderator organize it – separate from calendar but link it to the calendar
- Public places where people can go to get high speed internet – Strafford Library
- Not having cell service everywhere can be an asset – not everyone is on phone – brings community together – create those public spaces – hot spots – old time phone booth
- Common Wi-Fi network that is open would allow folks to connect
- EC fiber has worked well in micro initiative – 50 homes could come together and ask them to bring the fiber to their area
- Cell phone booster in the village centers
- Royalton has a town wide network that could be a model
- Select boards could come together and talk and share services for road work, equipment share – early conversations have started.
- Share material locations for gravel, sand, etc.
- Consolidate recycling areas with a regional compactor to make it more efficient – share services.
- 3 different solid waste districts so makes it difficult to collaborate – 2 different counties set up administratively different.
- RPC could create different subsets that would allow the communities to work together – staffing/admin solutions – overarching group to help the 4 towns work together.
- Alternative solutions to waste stream – plastics recycled into construction material
- Sharon garbage goes to White River Junction
- Develop a regional compost facility.
- Advocate with legislature to help bring back community solar – make the process easier; more than 150kw that could be shared by 4 towns.
- All wheel electric van that could be shared.
- Existing energy committees could increase collaborative efforts.
- Bring a Stagecoach stop in Strafford – pretty broad network exists but not necessarily ideal for commuters.
- VTrans expanding a trip planner to provide all the options to get where you need to go.
- Park n ride in Sharon is very busy and one in Bethel being built
- Car pool aps could be a more formal way to decrease miles travelled. Use GoVermont ap – sign up in the 4 towns with large database of users could be useful.
- Pooling resources for emergency services – Bethel has rescue snow mobile equipment that is accessible; share information about resources available.
- Choose 10 shared services, cost benefit analysis, shared buying, triple bottom line – environment, people, infrastructure.
- Hazard mitigation plan – local emergency plan is in place.
- Municipal vehicle loan fund to purchase equipment – provision for 2 towns to purchase and share equipment.
- Thetford has a community nurse which helps people to age in place – Sharon has started one – successful in the Upper Valley but can be tricky the more rural a community. Thetford is a 501 c 3 and the town helps to fund part.
- Sharon health initiative has 50-60 people to offer rides and get people to health services through community health coordinator position.

- Create a place for kids to gather for dances and events that is coordinated to create more activities locally. It would have a community center feel.
- People from community can volunteer to help train kids in the trades such as plumbing connect kids with internships, mentorships in schools.
- Culture, education and arts program – identify community assets and needs – start a group for 4 towns that can help with this.

Reflections of the Community Visiting Team

- Ability for community to come together, informal agreements for 4 towns; create a structure with more formal agreements and capitalize on what you are already doing
- Communities want to work together and look for opportunities to come together – kids events/community space that can host it; cel phone/wifi parties, 10 shared services and analysis
- People are connected in some way, collaboration, come together, strengths and weaknesses and how to overcome
- Micro loan funds to support community initiatives
- 4 towns are proud of the EC fiber, schools, gathering spaces
- Challenges around bike lanes, emergency services, roads, broadband, understand assets and how to best share information; shared calendar so they don't miss out on opportunities; collaborate with select boards, planning commission, etc.
- Collaboration is the word of the day
- Consolidate ideas to work together – look for shared funds to show critical mass
- Community nursing solutions for the area
- Challenge from informal relationships to formal – towns are already working together and has good will which is a big asset to help make it happen.

Recreation, Trails, Environment, & Natural Resources

Visiting Team: Paul Costello, *VT Council on Rural Development*; Zac Freeman, *Rochester/Randolph Sports Trail Alliance*; Liz Gleason, *VT Housing & Conservation Board*; Lauren Griswold, *Vital Communities*; Bob Linck, *Vermont Land Trust*; Jessica Richter, *Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission*; Randy Richardson, *Upper Valley Trails Alliance*; Tim Tierney, *VT Agency of Commerce & Community Development*

What are the Assets in this Area?

- White River for fishing, tubing, and paddling.
- Cross town trail in Strafford.
- Trails in Downer forest – cross country skiing and hiking.
- We have the right amount of water.
- First Branch River.
- Beautiful mountains and forests.
- Kents Ledge for hiking in Royalton.
- Beautiful back roads for cycling.
- Strafford Nordic ski center.
- 65 miles of forest trails for snowmobile club, plus 15-20 miles of secondary trails, some which are used by other user groups.
- Town forest in Tunbridge.
- Adventure Cycling's green mountain route is listed on a national cycling website.
- Horseback riding.
- Snowshoeing.
- Wildlife.
- Old City Falls.
- Class 4 roads that are still on the maps.
- Strafford rope tow.
- High number of vernal pools.
- The Ranger – Tunbridge bike event.
- Sharon school skating rink.
- Tunbridge skating rink.
- Town forest in Strafford with a boardwalk and fenn.
- Ability to create large loop trail through all towns.
- Tunbridge walking group meets three times per week year round.
- Ashley community forest.
- Tennis court and ball fields in Strafford.
- Strawberry hill in Tunbridge.
- Pocket park in Strafford.
- Town forest in Royalton is in process of putting trails in
- Macintosh state pond.
- Paynes beach in Royalton.
- Public access to White River.
- High proportion of protected farms and forestland.
- Bear population strong.
- Rec fields in Tunbridge.
- White River water trail map will be published this year for paddling and access sites.
- Hiking in Podunk wildlife management area in Strafford.
- Pompanoosic winds peacefully through several towns.
- Taylor valley.
- Our landscape is resilient in the face of climate change because of hills, temperate climate.
- All 4 towns have conservation commissions.
- Volunteer management of trails and partnership of landowners to use their trails.
- Green Up Day.
- Manning Farm trail connects to the Ashley parcel.
- We have events that are assets:
 - The Ranger: gravel bike ride is taking advantage of local roads, started as a fundraiser for the Alliance, is growing every year – place based riding with a purpose.
 - Sharon has a road race in September.
 - Royalton radio sponsors a gravel grinder.
 - Sharon has pond hockey tournament.
 - Horse council trail ride.

What are the Challenges?

- Wildlife is impacted by high numbers of users.
- Forest fragmentation.
- Large forest tracts run through our area and there is a critical portion in Sharon that could add to wildlife connectivity if addressed correctly.
- We are losing snowmobile trails, which can be an economic loss as well as a recreation loss.
- We don't know our baseline populations of diversity of plants and animals so we don't necessarily know what we might lose.
- Posted land can restrict access, and access to private land ebbs and flows.
- Invasive species.
- Walkability and sidewalks could be better.
- No bike lanes.
- Class 3 roads can be dangerous for non-motorized use.
- We don't have an integrated process that looks at road walkability and connection with trails.
- You need to have to have an adventurous streak to stitch together all the recreation opportunities – opportunities could be made more user friendly.
- Milfoil is a problem in the CC pond in Sharon.
- When roads wash out, fill that gets brought in can have invasive species, which contributes to spreading.
- Many trails are on private land and not protected by easements so the public could lose access if land changes hands.
- We would like to know more about what river water quality is like due to erosion and livestock close to the river.
- There are no great places to stay if people are visiting for recreation.
- Salt on roads can impact nearby plants.
- The White River in Sharon has been closed often because of sewage upstream.
- We could use a bike shop in South Royalton.
- We have an accessibility issue of not knowing where to recreate at different times of year. If people who don't know who live here, how would visitors know?
- Litter is a problem particularly at river access points. There are groups working on litter issue, including the Lions Club.
- Branches of the White River are impaired with E.coli but the main river actually has very high water quality.
- There is not necessarily clarity on exactly what trail use means: Foot traffic only, bikes, horses, snowmobiles? Should use be restricted to certain user groups?
- Lack of cell service and internet can be a challenge for people visiting.
- Tar dripping off of bridge.
- Trail maintenance – it's hard to maintain lots of miles of trails over a large dispersed area, and the more trails you have the more work to maintain them.
- It is a struggle to find enough volunteers because there is a limited pool of participants.
- People like to use trails but don't commit time to keeping them up.
- Balancing traditional hunting resources with other recreation uses.
- More Airbnb's/rentals could be good in some ways but could also hurt the housing market.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- We often only hear about assets word of mouth – it would be great to have a way for community members to connect about local resources and share knowledge. We need user friendly ways to access information.
- Schools could be strong users of trails and other natural resources, and could get linked in through being involved in trail maintenance.
- There is an opportunity for more connection between our different trails and recreation resources.
- We need maps for all kinds of outdoor/natural resources opportunities – these could be dispersed in town hall and town libraries.
- It would be great to have a place where people could go for meet-ups, such as a website to see what others are doing and join in.
- Develop more places to camp.
- If you are going to increase public access to trails you have to increase parking. We need some coordinated parking planning and mapping.
- A solution for the litter issue could be to adopt a section of ponds, rivers, trails, and this program could be open to groups and businesses.
- Upper Valley Trails Alliance is a resource for us in trail development.
- Trailfinder is another resource – it could have more trails on it for landowners that are open to it.
- Lack of cell service can be a barrier for people feeling safe when getting outside.
- Community-organized outdoor events can be a good way to get more people involved.
- The Alliance plans to have public walks in new Ashley town forest (Sharon & Strafford), which is in process of creating legal and management structure, and will have trails and be an actively managed forest.
- One way to strengthen the protection we have for our natural resources would be to have more effective land use planning.
- Land use protection could be accomplished through easements, zoning regulations, and possibly other mechanisms.
- Density limitations are a way to control forest fragmentation.
- Easements can only take you so far, so we need to have a variety of mechanisms for land use protection.
- Increase in recreation visitation will come with development of infrastructure.
- Public-private collaboration can lead to longer trails, heightened partnerships.
- It would be great to have a mechanism for rentable, borrowable equipment – there are rentals available at ski center but

- this could be expanded to paddling and other types of recreation so that cost is not a barrier for recreation.
- For increased visitor number, there is the opportunity of individuals making small campsites on their land.
 - Green Mountain Club could be a resource for trail development.
 - Water trail network includes a network of volunteer stewards – this may be a model that is transferable to other water bodies.
 - A large portion of town residents are not using our natural resources right now, so there is an opportunity to get more community members involved, such as involving kids through schools.
 - It has not seemed like there has been lot of talk tonight about economic development from town residents.
 - We should examine how transportation interacts with increased trail use and connectivity and explore the role for public transportation and public parking into the future.
 - Sharon summer camp is most affordable in the state, but the pond is threatened by pondweed, so there is a chance for town to invest in a better mechanism to keep the pond clear.
 - There may be more than one pond with this problem, if we came up with enough places that need mitigation there would be a more compelling need.
 - Some challenges are due to funding so we should examine possible sources of grants to undertake projects.
 - We could bring in experts in forestry, wildlife to explain what is coming in terms of invasive species:
 - Japanese knotweed
 - Emerald ash borer will have ripple effect
 - Invasive pests in forest
 - biodiversity will be affected by these changes
 - economic costs also arise from these changes
 - White River partnership has data about water quality
 - We could invest in community swimming pools.
 - To encourage cycling tours and community biking we should invest in more signage and safety considerations.
 - Study what town citizens want recreation to do: do residents want to bring people in from other places or increase community use? This would drive what kind of investments we need to make.
 - Sharon and Royalton have recreation committees
 - Recreation committees are currently focused on town rec programs – could grow to include trails.
 - There is concern around gentrification if we start catering to non-residents instead of existing community.
 - Tick education is an increasing concerns. The Department of Public Health provides free signage that could be placed at trailheads, town halls, etc.
 - Other towns have created local maps that are distributed in town, but not put on sites like trailfinder – this could be a middle road for increasing community awareness of resources without doing any heavy advertising.
 - We need a gathering place that can be a jumping off point for recreation, such as a pub.
 - If liability insurance is an issue for landowners wanting to increase access, we should expand our knowledge of VT's very supportive regulations around people recreating on private land, as well as possibly explore insurance options.
 - Strafford has had lots of invasive eradication and there could be a lot more.
 - We should map and link core habitat areas. The Conservation Commissions are starting to work on this together.
 - Google earth overlay of accessible recreation resources is a mechanism for mapping.
 - Ideas to bring younger families into the area: we could market this alongside our outdoor recreation assets.
 - There should be a community discussion on loving our resources to death, and include plant and animal health in the discussion.
 - Bring back some more tow ropes for skiing and advertise them.
 - Schools could have more opportunities on their grounds to get outside and recreate, such as trails or rope tows.
 - The river and the highway divide the towns – pedestrian bridges could overcome this.
 - Outdoor gear cost can be prohibitively expensive. One way to address this is that libraries in other places are renting out affordable equipment.
 - We should have a 4 town Ultimate Frisbee team for middle schoolers and others.
 - Strafford ski center has a donation area, other towns should consider doing this to address access to affordable equipment.
 - Law school connection: VLS has a resource on hikes and trails in the area that could be shared more widely. VLS students could also be recruited to volunteer, including an active outdoor club that has weekly hikes that are open to public. The VLS Frisbee team would likely be open to teaching others. Students are looking to get involved in the community more.
 - Community conversation around wildlife will be important.
 - Tool lending shed in Norwich could be used for trail building.
 - Experienced trail builders could have a clinic to help landowners develop more trails and connectivity between landowners.
 - Central recreational indoor & outdoor community center – community should consider big investment and staff it.

Reflections of the Community Visiting Team

- Themes: Recreational connectivity – how can that be improved? Issues with landowner permissions. Focusing as much as possible on people who live here and include youth and adults.
- Transportation issues associated with increased recreation could be an area to focus on.
- There are challenges and consequences associated with increased numbers of recreation users – this can lead to water quality, pollution, wildlife impacts. A more town based approach to zoning could be a mechanism to address this.
- Trails are a network that bonds community and this increases community health by connecting them to each other. There are lots of examples of strong trail communities where people

build the trails for themselves, and there are people who are excited about this and want to help.

- Randolph started with a VCRD process, and already had a trail organization that was strong and established. There can be fear around approaching private landowners, and from Randolph's experience they saw a lot of trust in relationships with landowners because there was an existing organization that would focus on stewardship. Is there an opportunity for a 4 town trails alliance that can weave towns together and be a liaison with landowners and for mapping & connectivity? Having structure around a trail group can help these ideas advance.
- Having more informed residents and more trail users can lead to increased health, increased interest in conservation, and increased interest in wildlife management. Given that this area is in between two major recreation areas (greens & whites) means that it's unlikely you will have an issue with too many users. People are the main resource here, so connect with companies or large organizations to develop volunteerism.
- Mapping is critical, but it can be done in a variety of ways that are sensitive to private landowners. Upper Valley Trails Alliance can be a resource for mapping.
- Valley Quest (Vital Communities) treasure hunts could be a way to connect kids and recreation.
- Sharing knowledge of resources with our neighbors is very important, and adding signage & mapping means resources will be more accessible to more residents.
- There can be a strong message that rural Vermont is not succeeding, but this 4 town conversation makes it clear that there is energy and commitment to improving your towns.
- There is a lot of power in engaging the next generation, and outdoor recreation is a good tool for attracting young families, reaching new potential volunteers, etc.

Education

Visiting Team: Celia Cadwell, *VT Community Foundation*; Megan Camp, *Shelburne Farms*; Sherry Carlson, *Let's Grow Kids*; Paul Costello, *VT Council on Rural Development*; Gemma Del Rossi, *VT Council on Rural Development*; Beth Roy, *Vital Communities*

What are the Assets in this Area?

- White River has a school music program.
- We have great schools and preschools in all towns with a group of dedicated educators.
- We have a deep pension of community volunteers.
- These communities have many creative individuals with a lot of different skill sets/things to offer the community.
- We are close to Vermont Law School.
- Sharon has a great outdoor education program.
- Great farm-to-table program in the elementary school (unsure which elementary school referred to).
- Strafford and Tunbridge have a "Forest Kindergarten" for outdoor elementary education.
- All schools have high speed internet access.
- There is a career and technology center for students who choose not to pursue higher education.
- There are a lot of programs within existing systems such as public libraries, community centered schools.
- We have the Seven Stars Arts Center (Sharon, VT).
- There is school choice for students in Strafford, Sharon, and Tunbridge (but not Royalton).
- Sharon Academy is an asset to the community.
- Our schools have a good balance of extracurricular activities for students to get involved in (sports, theater, and outdoor education).
- Our communities are dedicated to other schools working together.
- Small size of schools let people (parents, teachers, and students) know each other – there's no anonymity.
- Some schools are developing personalized learning programs and community-based volunteer programs.
- All schools have PTA/PTO's, which shows the dedication of parents in the communities.
- Students have access to recreation/recess.
- We have a lot of school board involvement which shows the energy of people who want to serve.
- We have the learn-to-ski program at Suicide Six Ski Area (Woodstock) for school children.
- The One Planet program our supervisory union put together is an asset for all communities involved.
- Our communities have a lot of good early education resources.
- Vermont adult learning center is located nearby in White River Junction.
- Center for cartoon studies is located nearby in Hartford.
- All communities have great outdoor skating rinks.
- High horses therapeutic horses riding program is located in Sharon.
- White River Junction has an aquatic center.
- There is an Art Start program at Dartmouth College (Hanover, NH).
- There is the Upper valley Music Center in Lebanon, NH.
- We have a community arts bus.
- The theater program run by Moon Stage (unable to find online?) is a community asset.
- We are close in proximity to Vermont Technical College.
- We have The World's Fair!
- Strafford has a visiting artist program.
- Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) has the Elf Youth Science Program in Hartford.
- Tunbridge library has a community room and Bethel has developed a co-working space.
- Royalton recently signed a contract to expand town library with a community room and maker's space.

What are the Challenges?

- Poverty is a challenge – some children are hungry/don't have support at home.
- It takes a lot of time to get to activities so we have to spend a lot of time in cars or school buses.
- Royalton does not have school choice.
- We have declining enrollment in Strafford, Royalton, and Sharon (Tunbridge is flat).
- There is high turnover of leadership in schools.
- There is high anxiety and depression rates amongst school age children.
- We are dealing with the drug epidemic amongst both children and parents.
- Students spend too much time in front of the screen.
- We have inadequate internet access (didn't specific at home or in schools).
- Our literacy rates could be better.
- We don't have a tax base or economy to build/strengthen local schools.
- We currently have an income-based support system.
- There are increasingly high expectations for teachers with the balance between teaching curriculum and teaching to the test.
- There are an increased number of children coming in with trauma.
- A challenge for parents are dealing with work schedules conflicting with drop off and pick up times for students.
- There is inadequate training for teachers in helping kids reach goals.
- Both students and teachers are facing increased pressure from standardized testing.
- The general public has a lack of understanding about governance of the whole education system.
- There is a loss of local control with Act 46 and the shift in individual school decision-making to increased involvement of the state government.
- We have difficulty in attracting talented teachers.
- There is a disconnect between results of funding and the mechanisms of funding; it can be hard to understand the connection between passing school budgets.
- Our schools are small, and don't have the depth for opportunities for students to compete against in other areas of the country.
- The school district supervisory union has equal representation but not taxation. Some pay more in taxes but don't get more representation.
- School safety is a concern. How do we fortify/increase security without being intrusive to student learning?
- We have a high percentage of homeschool students in area. Challenge to include in opportunities in the community.
- Dynamic between Royalton and Sharon academy isn't always positive.
- Vermont is highly white. How does the lack of cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity impact students?
- It's hard to hang onto early childhood education. Pay isn't high enough to keep them.
- The nature of learning is changing, so how do we engage students in education effectively? Hard to motivate students to do things that are difficult/challenging.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Include structured ways members of community can become involved by mentoring students, presenting, teaching courses, etc.
- We want more gathering to help brainstorm ideas! Currently there is not a forum for people to gather.
- "The children belong to all of us." It's our responsibility to educate all of us.
- Invest in public spaces to let kids gather outside of school. All towns have libraries – are they connected?
- Market ourselves as one of the safest places to raise kids (best place in world!).
- Increase school collaboration/sharing resources with things like AP courses. No existing vehicle to get students around between schools.
- Communications omnibus to make sure everyone's communicating with each other, between faculty members and school boards (inter & intra).
- We need to reframe thinking of schools to positive assets about schools rather than deficits.
- Create activities that all towns are invited to participate.
- Acknowledge the importance/specialty of educators and schools.
- Create a talent search committee in the form of outgoing volunteers ("nice people") to be face of communities to attract more people in the future.
- Double down on existing resources (rivers, forests, hunters, farmers) help us find community identities as a place of strength.
- Legislation should shift away from property tax to income tax – lobby the state of Vermont.
- We need more support from the state (or help identifying resources) to deal with youth depression and anxiety.
- Integrate food production with therapy based solutions in the form of farm-based learning.
- Look for skilled volunteers with unique roles and have them contribute pro bono work to help "market" schools to bring in new community members.
- Work to cultivate future leadership actively in schools by doing service-learning projects or volunteer work.
- Seven Stars Arts Center offers music program with kids in Sharon, could include other communities.
- Put together a brain bank of skills. Community identifies talented/skilled/creative people and their contact information to put on a volunteer listerv so schools can gather experts for visits, lessons, presentations, etc.
- Increase education work force development in the state – encourage school leadership and teachers.
- Create a 5th and 6th grade ultimate Frisbee tournament between all four towns.
- Increase towns' partnership and collaboration with Vermont Law School.

- Set up a survey to ask what people are interested in learning about.
- There are opportunities for adult and young adult education in technical skills. Create an organizational way to teach skills instead of being passed down generationally.
- We need to decrease the stigma to safely talk about anxiety and depression.
- Find ways to limit screen time both in school and out of school for kids.
- Increase mindfulness-based education in all school districts.
- Extend efforts for digital communication structures to break down walls between the four towns.
- Continue nature-based/place-based education.
- Look into Feinberg diet for school lunches to help bring healthy foods into the school district.
- Create personalized learning plans for those who might not be able to attend community college to get them ready to test into community college. Can pair with mentors to create plans for kids to be on track for when they graduate.
- Have a student exchange between the high schools in the four towns. Allows students to see what they like about other schools and bring back to home district. Improves all schools!
- Serve food at supervisory union meetings to get greater town participation.
- Create a network for all 4 towns to communicate and video chat (look into Zoom).
- Create a Youth Conservation Corps to do trail work in summertime.
- Have a welcome packet for new families who enroll in schools. This can get information out to new families and build local communities.
- Ask the kids what they need!
- Collaborate with VT State Police and community (Tunbridge is already doing so).
- Create a four-town babysitters club.
- Create an orchestra or band between all four schools.
- Develop a craft co-working space to learn skills, arts, crafts, etc.
- Create a youth center (look to Chelsea HS for an example).
- Use the aging population to teach for free in spaces such as libraries, schools, etc.
- Greater connection, interaction, and outreach with the homeschooled children in the area.

Reflections of the Community Visiting Team

- Need to determine supervisory union within boards – how often are they meeting as unified board? We need folks coming together as an ultimate SU board.
- Increase professional development on the SU level.
- Look at universal school meals, which is a free breakfast and lunch for every child. We need to frame universal school meals as a community investment.
- Community meals and bringing people together. Reframing as a positive
- The brain bank is an awesome!
- Impressed by the richness of the four communities. Seemed like there was no reluctance in the communities for tearing down the invisible walls.
- Community based service learning projects for youth development is important.
- There was a lack of conversation about early education. Look at ACCESS programs - tap into talent of existing communities. Look to the rest of the state for examples.
- Ideas presented tonight are simple, powerful, and doable... It's about lining up resources.
- There was a theme of lifelong education.
- School choice and Act 46 is a wound- directed a lot of the conversation at the meeting.
- There are so many more opportunities to engage youth, communities seem well geared to do so. How can the four towns collaborate and share resources?
- There is a tension between each town where they want to be unique and place based while still sharing resources and innovation within schools.
- Lack of communication exists between schools.
- We need to remember the importance of asking students what they want. Makes sure we are addressing authentic need by students and educators.
- There is a desire to know what's being done in other towns – collaboration and communication. The challenge is scaling things up without removing town character.
- There is a willingness to drop borders and act as region. This creates an opportunity to share collective strengths – but how do we get schools talking and mentoring each other?
- It is important to build a connection point between Sharon/Royalton to stop any potential animosity.

Addressing Poverty

Visiting Team: Ben Doyle, *USDA Rural Development*; Paul Dragon, *VT Agency of Human Services*; Peter Gregory, *Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission*; Bob Haynes, *Green Mountain Economic Development Corp*; Jenna Koloski, *VT Council on Rural Development*; Chris Meehan, *Vermont Foodbank*; Haley Pero, *Office of US Senator Bernie Sanders*; Kevin Wiberg, *VT Community Foundation*; Sarah Wraight, *Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission*

What are the Assets in this Area?

- The food shelf. There's one in each town.
- All of the schools are part of the health hub program—school based health clinic. Also a dental trailer that goes to all of the schools. This is now open to adults. Really positive thing.
- The regions have a lions club that helps with eyeglass access.
- Each town was given 10K by the church of latter day saints (this year).

- The town of Sharon health initiative which provides support to community members trying to make their way through the healthcare system.
- The neighbors helping neighbors program (not in Tunbridge)
- Strafford has a trust fund that is used to help “needy” people—administered by the town.
- Also a scholarship fund for kids in Strafford.
- The towns have a network of free meals (meal sites).
- The thanksgiving dinner at the law school is really well run and attended (a model program) and they deliver. Couple hundred folks are served.
- The law school offers free tax services for community members (earning under 50K)
- Bus service at the park and ride that goes to the upper valley (Stage Coach) goes north and south.
- Some employers contribute to transportation subsidy.
- There is a school backpack program (kids take meals home) in Tunbridge and working on Strafford.
- Royalton serves an “afterschool meal”
- The health care systems that cover the area do a nice job of accepting Medicaid but also donating care (uncompensated).
- Local health care services.
- Gifford offers services for income qualified services.
- Senior meals on in all four towns also a senior advocate.
- Royalton has a community garden (10-20\$ cost per plot)
- Fuel assistance program (ben Wolfe) in Tunbridge
- Capstone community action provides services to all four towns.
- Two parent child centers in the area they offer some discounts.
- The transfer station has a free stuff exchange.
- Two communities have access to the Ronald McDonald care/dental mobile. Tunbridge and So. Royalton
- Royalton has two thrift stores
- Feast and field in Barnard offers cultural events.
- Royalton town band plays (free) every week in the summer
- Seven stars arts center, historical society, libraries, Royalton Community radio.
- Low cost theater in Barn Arts.
- Brown bag lunch on the green in Royalton.
- Farmers market in So. Royalton.
- Listserves are an asset that helps people request help/connection.
- Afterschool programs/summer programs (One Planet)

What are the Challenges?

- The food shelves could be coordinated more successfully.
- Cost of housing is prohibitive.
- Transportation network.
- Cost of medicine (healthcare in general).
- Aging population on a fixed income are adversely impacted by any cost.
- It’s tough to keep track of seniors and know that they are getting the services they need.
- There is an overall lack of knowledge about the programs available to help alleviate poverty.
- The cost of car maintenance in mud season.
- Childcare—there isn’t enough affordable childcare.
- Still not a lot of employment opportunity in the area and folks need to commute too far.
- The school lunch programs are inconsistent from school to school.
- Summer food program in Sharon, but people fail to pick it up. Kids do get summer meals at school program.
- The opioid crisis is real here.
- Challenge to identify the people in need and aren’t willing to come ask for help.
- A resources/help book was published but few folks seem to take advantage of it. The stigma of poverty is a problem.
- People are overwhelmed and people don’t know where to start. People need an advocate to help them navigate the system.
- A lot jobs around here are non-standard hours so the public transportation schedule doesn’t work. Similarly is hard to find drivers that can bring people back from hospital appoints.
- People are willing to help—but it’s knowing about how to connect neighbors that is the challenge.
- People don’t know where to go to get help (someone who is obviously disabled has trouble).
- There are people who want to work but encounter the benefits cliff. It’s hard to get ahead given the restrictions. It’s too bad when someone wants to work but can’t because of the cliff. It’s a national problem.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- The community should have an advocate that can help people navigate the system. A navigator for local resources. An extension of the work that the Sharon health advocate is doing.
- A dedicated regional social work could resolve a lot of the gaps and help people not have to travel. Could the towns pool resources?
- A fulltime position.
- Gifford has a blueprint position that could be leveraged to help fulfill this need (they have a free health coach).
- There used to be a 211 service but again it seems overwhelming.
- Answering service (model exists) of volunteers, but people who are knowledgeable enough to make referrals to services in the region. More than a 211 service, but a real neighbor.
- Gifford and Dartmouth could collaborate on joint “colonoscopy day” to share ride service.
- Community members need to approach folks and offer help more. If you see someone in trouble, say something.
- The community garden should be managed so that surplus land/food become a resource. Open the garden up for more community members.
- Create a central place for the four town region, not just physical place, but also centralized services and a staff that can help. This would help provide consistency in the services

provided. In Hartford, tax experts help seniors fill out takes—it takes coordination, cooperation, and a little bit of centralization.

- A van that brings services to people around communities.
- Put something on the town tax bill where people could check the box and donate \$50 to a fund.
- Explore community solar array that could help defer energy costs.
- Improve road conditions—it's a significant cost for low income people.
- A community garage that could help people fix their cars and teaching people how repair cars themselves (Good News Garage model).
- The garage could be in a central location.
- Use the new park and ride to park the "good car" and then taking a truck home 2 or 3 miles off dirt road.
- Look for opportunities to expand mental health care opportunities. Find "wellness" activities.
- Improve food access to students with mental health issues.
- Contract with the Clara Barton center to provide mental health care in schools. Some schools take advantage of this now.
- Increase access to farm to school program and enhancing existing programs. Encourage schools to explore opportunities.
- Vital Communities also has a program could be leveraged.
- Create a time bank that could help people share tasks.
- Could the fuel loan program be paid back through working at town events (pay back with time/labor)?
- There are massive opportunities for volunteer time—but they need to be centralized. A clearing house. We don't have a lot of financial resources.
- Creating a spirit of volunteerism helps the entire community (including the volunteer).
- Create a formalized system that would help transport food from foodshelves. Neighbors helping neighbors program already does something like this. Find a way to run the food shelf to people not the other way around.
- Expand the model from the VLS thanksgiving dinner. Again, deliver the food. Find a way to identify these folks.
- Find a way to connect neighbors to build community capital and resiliency.
- Use student drivers to deliver food (they need the hours for their license).
- Focus on the home—help people learn how to budget and buy healthy food. Reintroduce home economics (maybe in some kind of informal way).
- Proactively call people who the food shelf coordinators think might want home deliveries.
- Utilize the existing resources of the school (space/computers/family connections) to help educate families about opportunities. Provide adult education community education. Open up home etc.
- Have a cooking class at the foodshelf.
- Community garden become a community farm and ultimately a community food hub. This could become a community center (thinking of Shelburne Farms and CAE)
- Teach people how to cook—otherwise food is being wasted.
- Create an initiative to build accessory units to address the housing shortage and build community connections.
- The rec program is already doing a lot around education and could continue/expand this work. Cooking for Life is a program that has been in the region.
- Find a farm where poor people could work/farm.
- Expanding gleaning programs and connect.
- Attend Vermont State Police community meetings about how "take back" communities.
- Financially incentivize people to take a budget/business program by paying them upon completion of the program.
- We need to work quickly give resources to kids before they leave for them summer. Needs to be greater intervention.
- Needs to be great prevention work in the schools.
- Encourage exercise programs that could be used as prevention/recovery efforts. Think of the Phoenix program in Barre.
- Look at a safe injection sites as a way to save people lives from the cold. It's a way to shepherd youth and people who are struggling.
- A resource center for people struggling with addiction.
- How do we engage the youth in substance abuse prevention and activities?

Reflections of the Community Visiting Team

- Maximize volunteer capacity through coordination.
- Continue to work as a region.
- It's important to destigmatize substance abuse disorder and poverty.
- Think of this as an economic development issue—the lost potential of the community.
- Do an inventory of the four communities to look who does what well and that will lead to stronger connection. The towns can educate each other.
- It's really about sharing resources.
- Find balance between grassroots and decentralized. Make sure there is no wrong door—everyone knows enough to make a referral.
- Really about eliminating the stigma.
- Common theme was that it was overwhelming. Foster a reciprocal relationship—make sure people feel like that they can give back and receive. Time banking is a great model.
- Coordinate the four foodshelves to coordinate on home delivery.
- Look at Phoenix CrossFit program through Green Mt. United Way.
- Housing issues: need to look at innovative programs homeshare, accessory dwellings. Again coordination is really key.
- Attention to different levels of problem. Important to include people in poverty in the conversation.
- Two Rivers can help on the housing and transportation conversations.

Youth Forum Notes

Compiled from a youth forum held with Sharon Academy students and VCRD staff on March 11, 2019.

What do you like about this area?

- Quality drinking water, you can drink from the tap.
 - Sense of community in each town.
 - Safe, good place to grow up because so much nature.
 - Good food establishments.
 - Bears and wildlife.
 - Good duck hunting.
 - Downhill skiing.
 - Free to be your true self, not a lot of judgement.
 - Sense of community on a small town scale. People know each other.
 - Good sports programs in the community and through the school.
 - Good hiking and walking trails.
 - Low traffic makes it safe for bikers and walkers, and runners.
 - People who care about how things are.
 - Don't have big box stores, billboards, not a lot of development, a rural community.
-

What do you dislike, what are the challenges?

- It's freezing
 - Takes a long time to drive places and gas is expensive.
 - Small feeling, not a lot of diversity, isolating.
 - No place for youth to hang out without driving far.
 - When you have a high school in your town, you have to go there.
 - Lack of high paying jobs for high school students.
 - Housing prices and cost of living is high.
 - Nice if live near center of town, but more rural is isolating. Can't walk to town.
 - Lack of diversity in the area.
 - A lot of old people here.
 - Lack of social activities or places to go for high school students and people in their 20s.
 - When it snows, it can take a long time for power to get turned back on.
 - Lack of opportunity – limited experiences like no ocean here, not a city.
 - Not great public transportation.
 - Instate tuition for colleges is high compared to rest of country.
 - Drug use.
 - Quite a bit of xenophobia here.
 - Sheltered place in VT and people are progressive until it's in front of them, and then they aren't.
 - Gun laws are different than other states, too lenient.
 - Lack of religious diversity.
-

Ideas for action

- More places for youth to hang out – bubble tea.
- Coffee shops could have events focused on teens or young adults.
- More affordable restaurants.
- Recreation buildings for soccer or basketball court.
- Replace Sandy's with something useful – it's not open in winter. Something more positive for the community.
- Used to be restaurant Dixies that was taken out with Irene. It was next to Sandy's.
- Indoor pool.
- Something open all year to gather and have jobs.
- Gym that don't have to pay to get into.
- Improve hours of public transportation of Stagecoach.
- Improve ride-sharing opportunities.
- A zoo.
- Make driver's education more available and affordable to students. Can't drive to jobs.
- Teens without licenses have a hard time getting a job. Closer locations for work opportunities.
- Make the roads safer, too much slush narrows the road, and puddles and potholes. Need better road maintenance or wider roads.
- Road maintenance is horrible.
- Jobs that can be done remotely or where teens don't need a ride to get to.
- Lowering property taxes so can build in more places.
- Having a way for different businesses be able to reach out to high schools and list jobs they think students could do. Online job fair for Upper Valley businesses to connect with students looking for work.
- Free driver's education. It costs \$700.
- Increase opportunities for students to get into politics. Having more things like this and having a bigger role in town meeting. Ways to get engaged in local decision-making.
- Town websites post jobs for local businesses, events. Lot of land in this state. Farmers struggle for land, include land available for farming for rent.
- Better public transportation.
- In town offices, opportunities for internships for young people. Being able to build websites and communication for the towns.
- People abuse substances because there is nothing to do. If our lives weren't boring, people would be less likely to use substances. Provide things to do.
- Decriminalization of weed and don't give people a record with low level offence. Hard to get a job and money after that they'd be more likely to do drugs.
- Access and funding for treatment options. Securing funding to help people with public transportation to help get those

- people to treatment – the closest place is probably Wilder. Or bring the services closer here.
- Any urban development – malls, office buildings, affordable housing.
 - Maintain things we love about Vermont, so don't bring development without considering that.
 - Transportation to places that have events and services.
 - Keep VT beautiful, so make it accessible so people can go to urban places that want to.
 - Mount Ascutney was reopened this year. Doing a lot with small ski hill, tubing. Inexpensive to go there. The community came together to rebuild it. It gives people things to do and get people outside. Things that combine community with positive things to do.
 - Making those things more known and better maintained. In Strafford there is a town trail with some small signs. But it's not well marked or maintained. Need signage without the giant billboards.
 - Keep the woods but make the village centers beautiful. Plant trees along the street, bury power lines, etc.
 - Faster internet and better cell service.
 - Take what we have and turn it into an attraction. Build something that gives us opportunities for jobs. What we have and love, others want as well. Make it accessible to them and they'll come and pay for it.
 - Incentives for people. There is the will to do things like open restaurants. But high taxes, expensive land prevent people from doing stuff. Help businesses want to come or start here but they can't.

Additional Action Ideas

Here are the ideas residents contributed through an online survey

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- The two small underpasses at either end of the Village on Route 14 in Royalton are assets. These underpasses limit the size of the vehicles passing through the village. Larger vehicles should use the interstate and not overburden small residential villages. Encourage and promote this asset to encourage families to live in the village without the commotion of heavy traffic.
- More action and involvement in our food system. We need to develop hubs like the South Royalton coop and improve production, trading, and storing.
- Develop mixed income housing that includes affordable and elderly housing in Royalton (easy commutes with many services and stores).
- Develop water and sewer in Royalton to increase capacity for housing development.
- Develop some kind of industry near the Exit 3 area for jobs in all communities. The area would be accessible to the interstate and the railroad.
- Adjust regulations, rules, and taxes so small businesses can grow. Encourage local buy-in of small businesses.
- Re-map the flood zone to correct inaccurate mapping and include buildings that were flooded during Hurricane Irene.
- Focus on job creation for underskilled citizens.
- Develop affordable housing.
- Encourage openness to change rather than "we've always done it this way and we won't change."
- Have an open and honest community conversation about what happens to undereducated folks who cannot get jobs and see their lives ruined by a DUI or substance abuse challenges.
- Keep libraries open late to host gathering places.
- Host community potlucks/suppers more frequently with focused discussions
- Decriminalize hitchhiking and offer education and support for ease of travel locally.
- Share neighbors helping neighbors resources beyond Tunbridge.
- Build a laundromat in Tunbridge.
- Publicize food shelf hours and make it easier to access those resources.
- Start an adult sports league for volleyball, softball, soccer, ultimate, tug o war, etc.
- Develop a give and take place like the Bethel Transfer Station has and like the Red Barn in Strafford.
- Address how our 4-Town region will address climate change and other environmental issues. How it will affect not only us but other animals and plants. What can we do to mitigate this? Improve carbon sequestration in trees and soils. Plantings along waterways that benefit all lifeforms.
- Media literacy programs in schools and open to adults in the community that teach about internet privacy, safety, how to install parental controls and use some of the media-blocking apps on computers, phones, tablets. Encouraging, through community educational presentations, parents to turn off wireless at a prescribed hour every night. Through education, create an environment where unrestricted media/internet access is as universally verboten in our communities amongst parents as drinking or using drugs because we may well learn that it is just as damaging to young minds.
- A lot of people are doing really admirable work addressing the effects of poverty but we need to work on understanding the causes of poverty in our area.
- Create a regional/4 town Internet and Media Literacy Coalition. It would be a group of community members, parents, educators, kids, ideally with some IT folks, who would meet on some regular basis, and hold community educational presentations and forums. The goals would be:
 - Educate parents about the dangers of unrestricted screen time for kids, give them ideas and tools to set and hold limits (i.e. how to use site blockers, social media time-out applications, turning off wireless at a prescribed time each

- night, phone curfews, encouraging non-smart phone use for kids.)
- Support parents and kids, especially during tough transitions away from unrestricted media use - provide resources for counselors, mental health professionals, etc.
- Lobby schools to be cell phone free zones to limit distraction, increase productivity, and set the tone for responsible media use in general. Lobby schools to use IT folks to install site blockers, social media time-out apps, etc on school computers. Encourage the option of pen and paper whenever possible (also helpful for kids who don't have internet access at home).
- Help to design and implement media literacy courses in all of our schools which would focus on internet safety and privacy, responsible social medial use, cyber-bullying, study habits to limit distractions from social media/email while doing schoolwork
- Educate adults, especially elders, about internet scams, and safety in general (online banking, password protection). Educate adults about the positives of media use (how to use a pod-cast, library electronic audio books, social media, external hard drives for backing up work, managing photos)