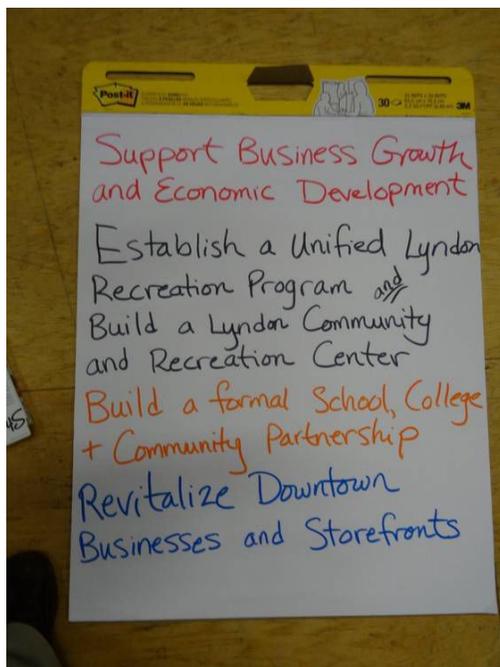




http://www.caledonianrecord.com/news/local/priorities-chosen-for-vt-rural-development-process-in-lyndon/article_a5a72bae-309d-5207-b2ae-09d09639937d.html

Priorities Chosen for VT Rural Development Process in Lyndon

Amy Ash Nixon 5 hrs ago



The four priorities arrived at through a Community Visit with the Vermont Council on Rural Development on Tuesday evening at Lyndon Town School. (Courtesy Photo)

LYNDONVILLE — The community planning process initiated by Vermont Council on Rural Development continued this week with more than 70 townspeople picking priorities upon which to focus their town's energy.

The second gathering of the Community Visit Process was at Lyndon Town School on Tuesday evening.

Jenna Koloski, the community and policy manager for the council, a nonprofit organization based in Montpelier, said the group considered the many ideas discussed during brainstorming sessions held in mid-February.

Four priorities identified this week involve supporting business growth and economic development; establishing a unified Lyndon recreation program, perhaps working to renovate an existing building or construct one for a rec/community center; establishing a formal school-college-community partnership to help foster mentoring and opportunities for students; and revitalizing the downtown business district in Lyndonville.

Steve Nichols, a director and past president of the Lyndon Area Chamber of Commerce, said on Wednesday,

"It's clear that everyone understands that economic development is the number 1 priority." He said the meeting also saw "a lot of buzz about what to do with the Kennametal building."

Nichols said, "It was very positive, very focused and I think everyone left feeling optimistic."

Patty Emery, co-chair of the effort locally said, "Following the meeting, people signed up to work on the various priorities." She said the four priorities were arrived at after two rounds of voting by the group.

Kim Crady-Smith, the owner of two downtown Lyndonville businesses, Green Mountain Books and Prints and the Grindstone Cafe, said on Wednesday, "I think revitalizing downtown is important for the whole community. Having a used and vibrant downtown will, hopefully, give a community sense of pride and people who live here a sense of place. It used to be the hub of Lyndonville and could/should be again."

Below are descriptions of what will now become the four areas of focus for task forces to work on, according to Koloski.

Revitalize Downtown Businesses and Storefronts

Lyndonville's walkable Village Center, lined with local businesses, municipal buildings, and green space is an incredible economic, recreational, and aesthetic asset.

Downtown improvements could include better signage, collaborating with local artists to enhance aesthetics and marketing, improved infrastructure and sidewalks, boosted business growth, improved aesthetics, river access, student and volunteer engagement, and improved walkability and bike-ability.

Establish a Unified Lyndon Recreation Program and Build a Community and Recreation Center

Lyndon is a town rich in recreational assets from youth sports programs to outdoor recreation opportunities to diverse art, science, and music programming.

Many residents would like to see better coordination of these resource and programs as well as a paid staff person whose time is devoted to coordination, marketing, and improvement of these programs and services.

A task force could form to develop a unified Lyndon Recreation Program to implement year-round recreation, arts, fitness, music, and other programming for youth, teens, and adults.

The group could build a brochure and a website as a hub for recreation resources, advertise programming, and work with the Town to identify funding sources to hire a recreation coordinator.

The group could also build and implement a plan to create a community recreation center through either the renovation, repurposing, or coordination of an existing building or space, or developing a new community space.

Build a Formal School, College, and Community Partnership

Lyndon residents would like to build a better connection between the area schools, students, and the greater Lyndon community and better coordinate and streamline resources, events, and services.

A Lyndon School, College, and Community Partnership could form to include members of the community, students, schools, college leaders, and the Supervisory Union to work to expand students' learning and community service activities and engage Lyndon residents with the schools to enrich student experiences.

Support Business Growth and Economic Development

Lyndon is a town with many economic assets including a scenic location, proximity to year-round outdoor recreation opportunities, high quality education, a local Chamber of Commerce, vacant retail and manufacturing space, and a walkable downtown.

An Economic Development Task Force could form to leverage those assets and implement a comprehensive strategy to boost economic development including identifying financing or tax credit opportunities for downtown businesses, attracting industry to the region to boost commerce and create jobs, re-envisioning the Route 5 corridor, and marketing to new and diverse businesses.

Residents see opportunities for a venture center for outdoor gear manufacturers, a brewery, and a local bar or pub. The group could work with the municipality to explore the opportunity to hire a community and economic development specialist to guide this work forward.

Final Community Visit Meeting April 25

The final step in the three-part Community Visit process is planned for April 25 from 6:30-9 p.m., where volunteers who have signed up to be part of task forces to work on the priority areas will begin their work; the event is open to everyone, and as much public participation as possible is hoped for, said Koloski.

That night, she said, concrete action plans will be started, and the council will work to bring together resources, experts, possible funding, and more, to help advance the areas chosen for work in Lyndon.

To register or obtain more information, contact Koloski at jenna@vtrural.org, or call her at 802-225-6091.