

VIII. Let's Take Action Town Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held with over 150 Rockingham community members and the VCRD Visiting Team on December 4 2019, survey and email input, and a youth forum on December 12

Although the prioritization work of the Let's Take Action: Rockingham Community Visit Program requires a town to decide what is most important as it moves forward with Task Forces, nothing is lost in the process from the long list of concerns and ideas expressed in early community focus sessions. Many interesting and diverse thoughts are represented here, and are presented as a reminder of issues explored, and a possible foundation for future projects.

Tourism & Lodging

Visiting Team: Paul Costello (facilitator), Margaret Gibson McCoy (scribe), Michael Harrington, Lindsey Kurrle, Ashley Lucht, Trey Martin, Jon Muise, John Tracy

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Saxton's River Inn, 16 rms. Moore's Inn, 9 rooms. Harvest Barn Inn, 7 rooms, Roadway Inn (motel), 16 rooms.
- 50 to 75 AirBnB's in the town (more in summer).
- Greater Falls Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Rockingham Planning Commission is writing a 20 year plan. They are working on some of these issues, especially as they pertain to the economic health of the community. We need a modern creative professional organization to promote the region. The assets are marketable but not being promoted.
- The Chamber is a membership organization, so they have to be a member to have their events promoted.
- Bellows Falls Downtown Alliance includes other orgs and has a brochure that includes lodging.
- Bellows Falls Historical Society is an asset.
- Greater Falls Chamber, Bellows Falls Downtown Alliance (BFDA), Destination Bellows Falls.
- Store and restaurant off of Exit 6. Talk with people who stop there throughout the year. Looking for things to do in the area. They would like to stay in the area: Chester, Rockingham, Walpole, etc. All need a hotel.
- VT Country Store is a big draw.
- Strong downtown, village center.
- Chefon Restaurant, Popolo, Wunderbar.
- Wunderbar is a night spot great food, drinks, a fun bar with urban vibe. Brings people to the town.
- Transformation is amazing in Bellows Falls in the past 15 years. Petroglyphs, skiing ½ hour away. We should think of ourselves as a destination spot.
- Historical Society land past grist mill started Rosie the Riveter garden. Looking for donations to have a kiosk built for all the women who were Rosie's in VT. Could have a national convention here. Have partial garden now, hope to have a state garden next year. A lot of people could be coming into town. The only town in NE that has anything to do with Rosie the Riveter.
- Booksellers
- New park with labyrinth. Beautiful spot overlooking the river.
- Train station right in the center of downtown, walkable to shops and houses.
- Trail system is growing. Several community groups working to expand it. Potential for cross country skiing and mountain biking. Windham County Trails Alliance. The Saxton's River Trails Initiative. Bellows Falls to Grafton trail – working on it. H.S. has a trail system. Not being promoted. Miners Pond Trail. No trail maps. Rockingham Rec Dept, Bike Project. Goal is to have them all connected. But just under development. The US Dept of Parks and Rec working on signs. Some funds going to creating the trails. Rec area has a new kiosk.
- Arts play a big role in city revitalization. Main St Arts, live theater, film, written arts.
- Rec area with pool and ski area is municipally owned.
- Ski tow is open.
- Bellows Falls 3rd Friday.
- Dozens of potential things in greater Falls area, but don't know where to start to draw tourists.
- Need a paid professional person to put it together.
- Organizations don't talk to each other. Towns don't talk with each other.
- The Rockingham Meeting House is the finest example of 18th century architecture in the country in continuous use.
- Vermont Academy, 4 year boarding school, 500 acre campus. Underutilized in the summer.
- Community radio station, non-commercial reaches 30-40K people
- Connecticut River.
- Grist Mill.
- Fact TV.
- Free parking.
- Waypoint visitor center, no money budgeted to keep it open. 1 chamber director has to welcome every visitor on 30 or fewer hours per week. Location is difficult, hard to find it.
- Audubon Society event that has 1200 attendees annually.
- Flannel festival.
- Gem of a downtown.

What are the Challenges?

- AirBnBs hurt some of the inn business.
- No place for people to stay. Identity crisis in the area. 5 entities in the town of Rockingham. Bellows Falls, Saxton's River, and unincorporated villages. Don't connect the dots. People don't get involved. Same people on boards.
- Lack of money, lack of parking, vacant structures.
- Town acknowledges some things but not other things.
- A lot of imaginary lines. Need to figure out who we are so we can brand ourselves.
- Taxes are high here compared to many towns in VT.
- Almost non-existent volunteerism. Large senior population and high school with a number of kids. They could be your volunteers.
- Working with the high school and the youth needs to be cultivated. Too many restrictions. Good for the kids to be part of the community.
- 60% of community doesn't come into the downtown, rather shop at box stores. Don't have as much of economic engine as we could.
- Need information so people know the options, it's not currently organized. Lots of rooms in different places.
- Sales tax state that borders a state without sales tax. We're close to being a border town.
- Lack of campgrounds.
- Water issues impede ability to use the CT River.
- Town ordinances, bylaws are barriers.
- No signs or map for the assets.
- Incredible small businesses.
- 4th of July celebration in Saxton's River quadruples the population.
- So much here but so much negativity. Same people at all the meetings because they are really invested in the area.
- Capitalizing the hotel in the square, need funds. Expensive project – \$9M using new market tax credits.
- Animosity between the different town governances in the villages and town. All could do better about pulling together.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Grow the Chamber to do some of these things.
- We need a hotel. Bring in Chester and Walpole. From Brattleboro to WRJ there is nothing. If we want people to stay here we need a hotel.
- Hire someone for 15 hrs per week for marketing.
- Targeted marketing to different groups: skiers, hikers, families, etc.
- We should install a cute Bellows Falls sign. Would be nice if it's closer to 91 so people driving that get off would see it.
- Need to have all of the groups have a common way to communicate.
- Uber or taxi service is needed. Pulling the train station and inns together.
- Hire someone who will connect the groups, do a festival as a community, etc.
- Lots of successful events, tour busses come here for walking tours of petroglyphs, great falls. Downtown doesn't have enough traffic. Generate tours out of here with package from train station.
- The bridge, for 10 years NH has not wanted to repair it for vehicular traffic. Could be made into a walking/bicycle bridge.
- Eco tourism like brewery, cheese-making, jelly-making, and experience for tourists.
- Updated website for marketing the area, for the whole town that shows what there is to do here. People who stay or just day-trippers. A brochure.
- Need better signage for parking that's not on the square.
- Need active transportation connection. Need to start with lodging and other stuff will fall into place.
- Classes and workshops, open studios with artists and craftspeople will draw people. Could promote that.
- Tours for maple syrup, wine, cheese, walking, food... engage all of the 5 entities as one.
- Address the transportation gaps.
- Days Inn, Hilton – something between Chester and Rockingham to capture the people to go to the venues.
- Marketing to people from the south. If they end up at the train station, need to refurbish it so it looks welcoming. Need signage to direct people to town.
- Island district needs redevelopment, it's starting and becoming less derelict looking.
- Hotel on the island next to the train station, would clean up the island. There used to be one there.
- Promote trolley, local, long distance. Tie in elements of historical, nostalgic but modernized to shuttle people around. The Current is the bus system.
- Need more participation of community members in the Chamber and BFDA to become part of the solution.
- Signage at Guilford welcome center to try to draw people off of the highway. Costing 4-5K/year as individual merchants.
- Tour groups come to see petroglyphs, industrial buildings, etc.
- Find out what all the businesses are doing to get on all of the websites. Pull together in a unified way. Bellows Falls centric, less about Rockingham, Saxton's River. But needs to include more than just the downtown.
- Communication and pulling together could do a lot to get us moving to take advantage of the opportunities.
- Block grants can be accessed to restore buildings.
- Community newspaper out of middle school. Students interview people. Lack things entertaining for children. Laser tag. Do have arcade and bookstore.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Similar issues from last community visit.
- 251 club, travel the state
- Communities benefit from being branded as 1 community. Events already draw people could be utilized as an engine to

drive people here. Low hanging fruit like signage. Great story here and people put heads together to describe what Rockingham is and brand self.

- Towns that struggle, struggle in the same ways. Clear channels of communication, shared identity and vision for what want to do in the region, manifests in how town works together. When it's fractured, it leads to a diaspora of energy. Towns that are successful face the assets they have. Pulling together around your assets with common vision and leadership. Turn to face it together. Close to the highway, train comes through. 85 M people live within 5 hr drive of anywhere in VT. Can bring in day tourists, weekend, tourists. Come to play, come to stay. How to build demographic and tax base. There is money out there. Community development grants, brownfield grants, tax credits. Have to have a plan first. Stop being unhappy.
- Attracting young people is important. Have potential with rail network. Redevelopment of community centers. State and federal govt putting more funds into rail. Come together on how to share what you have. Have more in common that what divides you so go with that.
- Your problems aren't unique. What are the things that will build unity to drive together to get it done. Can't do 30 things. A lot of low hanging fruit that people would like to see someone else do. No single collective point to drive systems change. Not diffused power. Towns that unite, set direction, build direction start connecting to resources. The bigger you think about framing a collective solution set, the more money is available to do it. Incredible power and opportunity here.

Education: From Early Childhood to Workforce

Visiting Team: Paul Costello (scribe), Margaret Gibson McCoy, Michael Harrington, Lindsey Kurrle, Ashley Lucht, Trey Martin (facilitator), Jon Muise, John Tracy

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Local company trains drivers plumbers, service in AC and heating and teach at local tech school
- Schools
- Fire and police
- Community justice center
- We have our own local TV and radio station.
- Our library is a huge asset for lifelong learning.
- Local newspapers - the Common and Brattleboro Reformer, The Shopper
- Three Regional Papers
- Middle school paper
- Parks Place has a youth group
- The Bike Project
- Outstanding afterschool program
- River Valley Tech Center in Springfield
- Excellence of the school system
- Theatre in Saxtons River...lets kids be weird and develop skills
- Kids are well prepared for whatever comes next
- Farmer's market
- Arts Collaborative in Saxtons River
- Compass School provides for individual opportunity to explore and grow.
- Arts and agriculture
- We have natural beauty here
- Many organic farms
- Farm to School project happening
- Historical society is really welcoming to kids...Grist Mill
- Friends for Change...trauma informed democratic play based youth group (joined us)
- Central Elementary is a wonderful school that supports young children in our diverse community. The school is a Leader In Me school which means that all students are supported and instructed in leadership and personal qualities such as being proactive, listening to others, and synergizing with peers and adults. It is a lovely place to work and a safe and supportive learning environment for our community's children.
- Services for kids who don't mainstream well in the school
- Greater Falls Connections
- Specialized supports

What are the Challenges?

- Transportation is a huge challenge. There is no public transportation. No cab service.
- We have a directive to build personal learning plans to develop career direction, but a disconnect with those doing it. Really challenged with liability for apprenticeships in PLP. Need to make it safe and available.
- 1,600 people commute out and 1,400 people commute in...why don't local folks fill local jobs? Do we need workforce training?
- I would love to see more people living and working in town for ecological reasons.
- Sonnax is a great employer very much seriously seeking local workers.
- Need 20th Century soft skills, show up, used to working.
- Early care and education is critical and essential for jobs.
- If you pay early childhood teachers so poorly it messes up the system
- School is great for some kids, but not for all.
- Early essential education is crucial for success. We need to invest for the whole system and community.
- There's a lack of play and lack of exploration in school. I created a weekly play, but there's liability issues. A lack of unstructured play.
- I moved to Walpole school. Sometimes switching takes time to get used to.
- Communication is a big challenge between employers and community and schools.

- We have a lot going on in town but people don't know how to connect.
- 10 hours of pre-k 35 weeks a year is not enough.
- There are silos of services. Institutions in town aren't interconnected to support the same population served in different groups.
- We have an ever-growing need for support for teens with depression, mental health and other issues that interfere with their education.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Expand Front Porch Forum use
- Integrative town website.
- Education for employers. Employers need to help teach the skills and expectations to new employees.
- We should invest in understanding the two generation approach for kids growing in poverty to help people move forward in a well intentioned way
- Great child-care is essential
- We should have a public pre-school in every elementary school
- We need to expand ways to provide full infant to school programs
- We could integrate services and improve communications between working groups in education and services. We should all be in the loop together for example to address the issues of youth in trouble. We should work like a village. We need clear communications.
- We have the opportunity to train people addressing climate change in a changing economy.
- Let's model roof top solar in our schools and train young people in solar, weatherization, and technicians in cold climate heat systems. This could build new career paths.
- Build a Maker's space combined with craft work. Times are going to change and we will need to learn
- Chemco building could be redeveloped as a school, craft school, a makerspace, and industrial arts space. Building is still sitting there.
- We've been dreaming about a youth center that incorporates much of what we are talking about. A community center for youth, a safe place to be with wrap around services to families based on a partnership and hub between each service provider.
- Different types of education would be good. Kinetic and hands on learning would be a good value add. Some students feel left out by being talked to rather than encouraged to do. Hands on. Practical. Business.
- YMCA is struggling. The afterschool program here is amazing
- BDCC is working with some businesses who are in manufacturing to teach in schools direct for those plants so kids can launch into jobs directly
- I employ a lot of young single moms many of whom need training on how to be successful as moms. Build a program that teaches family literacy.
- Youth need financial literacy classes.
- Should have a course called parenting and childhood development in the HS.
- Rockingham should have exploration for students to choose what they want to learn and get over that boundary. Have a week or a month of exploration and project development.
- Compass school to complement public school. We have the opportunity to partner the public and compass school to partner effectively. Legal structures get in the way of our collaboration.
- We should build a really good website to bring all this together for kids, parents and educators.
- Rockingham needs jobs that provide a livable wage.
- In school, we should teach how to write a resume, write a cover letter and teach financial literacy.
- Service territories are divisive. We need to take down the barriers.
- Rockingham should have enough child care so that everyone who has need has service.

Economic Revitalization and Infrastructure

Visiting Team: Paul Costello (facilitator), Margaret Gibson McCoy, Michael Harrington, Lindsey Kurrle, Ashley Lucht, Trey Martin, Jon Muise (scribe), John Tracy

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Having Municipal Water and sewer.
- The proximity to interstate 91.
- The Health care ctr.
- The School system – specifically having the public buildings renovated and having a tech center.
- The Towns good road system.
- Having an Industrial park.
- Having a great book cellar.
- Having great Cafes.
- Having talented crafts people who make Jewelry.
- Having Amtrak and bus service.
- Having the rivers to recreate on.
- Having a growing trail system.
- Having family owned business
- Having engaged businesses
- Having a great library
- Having lots of buildings with three phase power
- Having a local TV station
- Having a local radio station
- Having relatively fertile soils – and the regions warmer weather (the banana belt!)
- Having a Community garden

- The regions natural beauty
- Having a locally supported movie theater
- The Social service network that exists – Parks Place
- The new town and zoning managers
- Having a 20 year downtown revitalization program
- A well-organized arts community
- The Youth organizations
- Having the longest single span bridge in VT
- The Adams gristmill museum
- Having small food farms, fiber producers and agricultural producers
- The Saxton's river recreation area
- All the Human capital available
- Having inexpensive power compared to other areas near by

- Having Theater and arts org – Main street Arts
- Receiving Tax revenue from power plant
- Having old manufacturer buildings that are of historical significance
- The Victorian architecture – front porch capital.
- The Towns location and proximity to major cities and resources
- RAMP lobby that provides space to local artists
- The Abenaki hieroglyphs
- Having a cleaned up island building
- Being an Opportunity zone
- The Fish ladder
- Accredited school programs – Arts
- The Towns Revolving loan fund

What are the Challenges?

- The state of the Vilas Bridge. It's in disrepair, is critical to infrastructure, having the sewage lines attached to it and that NH appears to be not interested in it.
- All the bridges in town need work. Approximately 30-40 years of delayed work
- The communities aging populations.
- The lack of high paying jobs
- Many buildings, and homes need repair
- The work force is commuting into town vs coming from within the town
- A lack of entry level jobs
- A lack of sites to build new for large companies
- Lack of funding to renovate buildings needing repairs
- The amount of rented housing vs owned
- The lack of taxi services
- A concern that if all challenges and opportunities realized then gentrification could occur
- The lack of high speed internet
- Town has terrible cell service
- The Town is not taking advantage of the Amtrak stop
- Not having a hotel for visitors to stay
- Drug addiction
- Lead paint in many buildings/homes
- The perception of town – people feel it's down in dumps
- That people perceive success is a factory job – economic development definition is old
- That there is child trauma occurring, poverty, and social problems

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Create mentorship program for jobs (truck driver program)
- Use the Brattleboro Development Credit Corp Pipeline program
- The Apprenticeship program need to be marketed
- Continue Arts organization development
- Turn housing into condos for more affordable options
- Have better communication/Coordinating of BFDC, Chamber, etc
- Create a long term vision/plan for Town
- Have a recovery ready workforce – create partnerships between employers and people in early recovery (model IEP invest Burlington)
- Create a business directory – the BFDA Directory needs to be more than just a list of names
- Create a Town web site for business
- Develop a clear vision that all know and could work towards (Business focused)
- A coordinated strategic planning process to be created
- Creation of a group that coordinates employers to employees
- Take a labor perspective on technical training
- Have regional goals and objectives coordinated (BFDC, BDCC, State of VT etc)
- Create concrete specific priorities from VCRD visit with accountability that are acted upon
- Whatever actions taken, take climate change into account
- Whatever is done include youth
- Keep small home business in mind – review town ordinances to support them
- Create a business incubator site/space not specific more general in services
- Create a Town run add space for local business
- Linking land owners for trails and outdoor recreation opportunities
- Directory of local b&b's (only have one now) there are many air B&B's
- Support small business so they can grow here
- Create scalable business marketing for the local café, and housing
- Expanding water and sewer to business park to accommodate future growth
- Business apprenticeship development – develop Mentorships by trades
- Hold a career day to connect business and youth
- update building inventory and the state of need for them
- create community solar
- review zoning to allow mini farms
- create or attract a solar business
- asset map the villages of the town and build on them
- invite/attract refugees to town
- get involved – select board can't do it all
- Develop wind power

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Similar energy to Bennington VT – lots of ideas that need to be prioritized – limit to one or two items to start then add more
- Appears to be duplicative efforts occurring – resources spread thin
- Create platform for economic development
- Identity crisis from regions of town – need to align them (possibly create a common vision?)
- There is a lot to be proud of!
- Many small successes that can be scaled up
- Kudos for investing in water and sewer

Transportation

Visiting Team: Elizabeth Bridgewater, Chris Campany, Erica Campbell (scribe), Ben Doyle, Liz Gamache, Adam Grinold, Martin Hahn, Gary Holloway (facilitator), Ross Macdonald, Bob Stevens

What are the Assets in this Area?

- The Current Bus has fixed route transit as well as some morning and afternoon commuter routes within the region. Their ridership numbers are high. They offer demand response trips for eligible participants through Medicaid funding or Elderly & Disabled funding. These demand response rides for mainly for medical trips as well as some quality of life trips like trips to the grocery store. They offer free fixed route service which is not always the case with other transit agencies.
- The Current has routes that connect to Rutland, Dartmouth, the Upper Valley etc. which makes taking mass transit to cities like Boston possible.
- The Current has busses that go to Walpole, NH shopping centers.
- There is an Amtrak train station. The trains come morning and evening.
- There is excellent road maintenance for removing snow and ice.
- There have been some biking and walking improvements. Recently, the town agreed to put sharrows on the road (bike signage on road).
- Recreation trails are starting to form.
- Many people have bikes from the BF Community Bike Project. People use these bikes.
- The senior center runs Meals on Wheels to distribute meals to seniors.
- Senior Solutions helps with rides. There is a Guest Riders program for the elderly as well as veterans.
- There is a Park & Ride located by the Current.
- Parks Place offers some help to low income residents to help repair car.
- There is a lot of parking.
- Downtown is fairly dense and walkable. It was a good Walk Score (if you live downtown you can get to essential services in walking distance).
- There are hospice volunteers in the community that provide transportation for clients.

What are the Challenges?

- Transportation is challenging in rural areas in general and Rockingham is no exception
- There is very limited cab service in town.
- When new people move here or visit them expect taxi etc. but there are none.
- There was taxi service in Brattleboro, but it has gone out of business. Taxi companies struggle—it's a hard business model so will be hard to attract service in Rockingham.
- Not only is there no taxi serve, there is no Uber or Lyft!
- The Vilas Bridge is closed and the Arch Bridge is going under construction next year. Vilas Bridge needs to be renovated and reopened.
- There is no lighting on the Arch Bridge. There is sidewalk across bridge that needs lighting.
- There is a "car first" mentality. Transit, walking, and biking are not primary modes.
- There are narrow, windy roads. Walking or biking along route 5 is dangerous.
- People don't look for transportation alternatives until it's a necessary.
- The Current Bus does not run late enough to come back from work. It was not cater to workers needing rise to work. They cater to seniors and medical trips.
- The bus stops need benches and waiting areas.
- The bus does not go out far enough. There is no service to Grafton, etc. There are many places the bus does not go.
- There are limited electric vehicles and overall limited thinking on transitioning to electric.
- Some people felt there was not enough parking downtown, while others in the room thought there was plenty of downtown parking.
- There is not a culture of sharing trips, offering others rides.
- Cars are very expensive. It's a barrier for young people, not just old.
- There are a lot of manufacturing jobs in Brattleboro. The evening shifts make more money but there is no transit to many manufacturers.
- Many people on welfare. They can't work without transpiration access to jobs.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Attract a taxi service to town.
- Check to see if there is a town ordinance to regulate taxi service. If so, make sure it does not inhibit new taxi businesses.
- Promote electric vehicles and charging stations.
- Good News Garage does operate statewide. Could we promote this program in this area, or somehow expand their service more to this area? Better carpool or rideshare system.
- Car share program – could that work here? Like Car Share Vermont in Burlington?
- Promote ride sharing. What platforms are there? Front porch forum? VTrans could help with carpooling, vanpooling, ridesharing, etc.
- Employers could offer benefits (extra day off, etc.) for employees to offer other people rides.
- We could create a “Catch a ride” spot? Similar to the Hitching Post in Montpelier (places where people can share rides that include a token system where tokens can be used at local businesses.). Or could there be an App where people are pre-screened that could facilitate ride sharing.
- Change the culture to promote offering rides. Pick up people walking.
- Run an alternative fueled shuttle between Saxon’s River and Bellows Falls.
- Electric bikes and trikes are increasing bike usage on roads. We need to improve bike /infrastructure like more bike lanes, better signage, bike shelters, etc.
- Develop a bike shelter project, which could also be community art project.
- Lighting the Arch Bridge for the holidays? Could be a low cost, quick fix way to light the bridge.
- The Current could change fixed route. They reformatted routes 2 years ago. They held public meetings but did not get lot of input. They are happy to listen and make changes to routes but need to know where people need to go.
- Develop a culture of mass transit through education and marketing. It’s hard to do in rural areas.
- Utilize school busses for other transit riders. When can we get rid of the yellow school bus system and develop a multi-use rural transit system for all?
- Better road signage on and right off the interstate to bring people into town.
- We should focus on people without cars to ensure they have their transportation needs met. Mass transit, Good News Garage, ride sharing, etc.
- Employees could chip in more. They could pay for vanpools, incentivize carpooling, pay for transit, etc.
- Promote statewide commute ridesharing service at VTrans.
- Better marketing, promotion and communication for programs that exist! For bus, ridesharing, biking, etc.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- There is a lot of “us, we” language for solutions. That’s a strong sign for future success
- Parking and lighting can be addressed—these are not super hard challenges to address.
- Income levels impact access to transportation. Many service providers offer some form of transpiration services. Are these coordinated across the community?
- There is an asset in the employment base. How can you better connect employers and employee about transportation needs? Can someone help play this role?
- Demand issue is a barrier for transit. Need people to make it work for “on demand.”
- There is a very walkable downtown in Bellows Falls & Saxons River. Don’t lose sight of that. You can do a lot with that.
- Bike racks and EVs – start thinking ahead now. This will be the future. Think about climate change.
- VTrans could help the community to increase ridesharing, vanpooling, etc. with Go! Vermont.
- Better communication and leveraging what’s here. Promote what is available.
- Maybe SBDC could work with entrepreneurs to start an Uber or taxi service.
- There is a transportation planner right in town.

Building Redevelopment

Visiting Team: Elizabeth Bridgewater, Chris Campany, Erica Campbell (scribe), Ben Doyle, Liz Gamache (facilitator), Adam Grinold, Martin Hahn, Gary Holloway, Ross Macdonald, Bob Stevens

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Rich history, historical buildings, and fascinating architecture
- Town hall
- Movie theater
- Village is beautiful
- Library
- Some buildings are unoccupied
- Hotel Windham
- Train Station
- The river
- The health center. We took a dying hospital and turned it into great health center.
- Great school system
- Roads are very well maintained in winter
- Thriving arts scene to draw people into area
- 1850s to 1950s architecture. Mill buildings and housing.
- Saxons’ River and other areas are also beautiful
- Main St. Arts is a redeveloped building.
- Historic districts overlap in town

- Adam's grist mill along scenic trail front system – Historical Society
- Hydro facility
- New historical downtown building being re-built. Yellow Building.
- 18 Granger St., by river: bought by local welder. People renting spaces like a Maker Space.
- Herrick's Cove – boat landing
- The town has the longest truss bridge in country
- Level of investment has been amazing, especially for a small town.
- State policy invests in village centers. Hope Foundation
- Banana belt of VT. Warmer climate and great soil.
- Public water and sewer infrastructure has capacity.
- Village center has no power lines right in town – all under town.
- Rail road come right through at Waypoint Center. We can't lose Amtrak – we need more rail.
- Town government is stepping up and taking on huge jobs. We are making progress
- Passed a blighted building ordinance

What are the Challenges?

- Cost of redevelopment is really high. Hard to invest in buildings. Roof issues can cause entire places to close.
- Hotel Windham – went to a couple of million to \$9 million. Need grants to fill in gaps.
- Brownfields – Windham Regional Commission has been great. Some people buy property without knowing they are on a brownfield. Phase 1 study has some grants but there is no remediation grants.
- Town ordinances and Act 250 is limiting. Restricts home businesses for example.
- Maintenance sustainability. Historic restoration takes a lot of work. What happens when someone dies?
- How to attack people to buy buildings and restore it?
- Cost of living is so high. Property taxes are high. Double tax. Town, village.
- Railroad is great but no commuting costs. It's \$9 one way. Could there be a commuter ticket?
- Knob & tube homes are a challenge. Weatherization, etc. is limited because most programs won't touch knob & tube even for renovations.
- Vilas Bridge is closed.
- Property taxes are high. When someone can't afford the building goes vacant. Then no one comes into buy building.
- Infrastructure only goes to the north part of town. And it's expensive. Also Saxon's River
- More long term thinking. Need more than quick fixes.
- Saving buildings but then what do you do with it?
- Population is not enough to support what we do have. Small population, so need tourists to support shops.
- Border town by NH which has no sales tax. Stores can't compete easily. People just go to Walmart in NH. Need to shop locally.
- There are few skilled workers in the trades, like carpenters.
- Historic train station needs to get up and running again. Station is not open much.
- It's actually easier to get to NY than Boston on train and bus.
- There is a perception that this is a dying town. People ask if it's worth it investing in. There is a misperception that it's not worth investing in. Self-fulfilling prophecy problem.
- Investment does not always lower tax rates. How can we focus on investments that will lower taxes?

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Hemp & marijuana industry – let's bring that to town and support it.
- State-supported public safety rather than paid for by town. (Some people also said they supported having town public safety).
- Develop escrow account for building redevelopment.
- We need signage upgrades. Town bylaws prevent certain signage like electronic signage
- Small rural colleges closing – they need village centers. Saxon's River has VT Academy which helps the town. Could Bellows Falls attract a college?
- Building to house a youth center and child care center
- Develop a food co-op. Building by Miss Bellow Falls could be a good area for the co-op.
- Town energy committee could market that there is a building and energy code. Builders don't always know about it. Best practices for construction, etc. The state will be involved as well with educating about standards, codes, etc. Knowledge of how to interview a contractor when hiring, etc.
- Resources for businesses should be much more clear and coordinated. Outreach to businesses. Attracting business and making it easy for them.
- Town could have more enforcement— several lots open. People walk away and leave sites abandon. Town could be more upfront. Avoid blighted properties.
- Consortium of local people who are invested in town, investors. A Consortium willing to invest in blighted properties. Could town be an overseer?
- Commitment to reducing fossil fuel use. Solar on buildings, etc.
- We need more people here to pay more taxes. Need more tourists. Instead of people going to the VT country store, then can go to Vermont! Walk through Rockingham.
- Think more regionally with our neighboring towns. We can't do this as a single town.
- We need a hotel downtown.
- Town entity needs to take stock in and compile list of abandon properties. Inventory of what can be developed. And not have Act 250 impede development. And then market the properties.
- Fund for people who need to upgrade blighted homes.
- Communication of what is already happening.
- Local investment institution to re-invest in community.
- Municipal bonds to invest in the community.

- Look at Utica NY. They are buying buildings and investment.
- Public safety is draining community. Regional policing not local.
- Planning commission can be an asset
- Communications about revolving loan fund
- Retaining young people – agency to try to bringing businesses in. invest in housing.
- Lost 7% of commercial industrial from grand list. Tax rate has gone down. Chroma, etc. Investing in remaining properties (demo or preserve) for entrepreneurial activity. Value of grand list would go up.
- Downtown parking (some thought there was enough, others not enough).
- Light rail train through downtown (that idea was met by a few laughs).
- Buildings have been put off to repair buildings until it was way too late. Robertson Paper was sad to see go. There are so many ways to repurpose buildings. Town should be more mindful before.
- Nutrient management for town sewage.
- Ability to explore other uses for industrial
- Chemical company – could be used for solar. Solar on Brownfields.
- Building for vocational schools.
- Start a maker space or co-working space.
- Attract and retail young people in town.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- TIF district?
- The strong love of communities comes through – love of old buildings.
- Sense of pride and sense of place.
- Public waste water. Lack of current industrial space but there is potential to build more.
- Village – sense of pride. Authentic. Real VT.
- Cost of redevelopment is so high. Solutions are tied to the faith of the people in the community. Believe that you can make a difference.
- Commercial grand lists – things changed in last 30 years where they lost value, and the tax burden shifted to residence taxes. Increase commercial assets value to reduce taxes.
- Communities focus on what they don't want as opposed to make it really easy to develop what they DO want. Focus on what you do want and make it easy.
- Affection or place and buildings. Does not always translate to affection for each other. That is one of your biggest barriers.
- Love of place and community pride. You can use that to attract resources.
- Strong leadership and faith in the new leadership
- Town is easy to work with for new developments. They are welcoming investors.
- Bellows Falls Garage will be mixed income residential apartments.
- Homeownership Center to Park Place in town.
- Bellows Falls has an identity. Optimism. Change is happening. Pitch packets to market properties, resources, pro-active approach. Go to Utica! Peer learning.
- Communication can we better. Show up and be active. What can you build into town plan?
- The amount of transplants are investing in the community.
- Involve young people more in redevelopment. Co-working spaces.
- Connect back to community! It's about quality of life, values, etc.
- Encouraged by conversation – so many assets! Positive community members to talk with select board etc. – not just complaints!

Housing

Visiting Team: Elizabeth Bridgewater, Chris Campany, Erica Campbell, Ben Doyle (facilitator), Liz Gamache, Adam Grinold, Martin Hahn, Gary Holloway (scribe), Ross Macdonald, Bob Stevens

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Beautiful historic houses
- Good housing stock in Bellows Falls – 900 apartments – 400 in assisted housing
- Unused housing stock
- Walkable, dense community – close to amenities
- Streets are in good condition
- Saxons River – sidewalks make a community
- Village clusters and rural space balance – working landscape is preserved
- Section 8 housing
- Owner occupied buildings
- Windham Winsor Housing Trust and Housing Vermont has done a great job adding housing and fixing up buildings
- Canal
- Pathways Vermont downtown – help with housing for mental health issues
- Community Action weatherization work
- HCRS helping folks to navigate system
- AHS – support for aging community
- Good support services for disabilities, mental health, aging, etc.
- Planning commission developing new town plan – how the community can support housing – focus on what you want, not what you don't want
- State policy is directed towards downtown development and smart growth development
- Homebuyer assistance programs – VHFA, USDA
- Structure of housing in neighborhoods is intact and not in flood plain
- Town owned land that is developable

- Land that can be used more effectively
- Landlord group formed to strengthen access to education and resources and get the right mix of housing
- Food Shelf helps folks find housing but limited resources
- Case managers helping transitional housing folks that have drug addiction, convicts, etc. – the challenge is not enough resources and wait time is long

What are the Challenges?

- Gap around senior housing
- Waiting list for energy efficiency upgrades with community action group – 2 year wait
- Not enough affordable housing for younger population
- Barrier for entry into renting a place
- Size of place that works for a family but is still affordable
- Challenge around incorporating renewable energy into housing
- Generational poverty district – families are receiving state assistance, trying to find a job and housing, transportation – barriers are keeping them from getting into housing due to criminal records, no credit, etc.
- Squatters in vacant housing
- Tenants destroy apartments and make it difficult on landlords – they are discouraged to be a landlord – many are absentee landlords and don't always maintain properties
- No housing committee – planning and zoning did create a blight ordinance for properties
- General lack of contractors – carpenters are some of highest in demand
- Many contractors don't know energy code
- Saxons River – one person living in large houses is prevalent – seniors need to have more options for smaller housing units and offer the larger houses for younger families
- Lead issues in housing
- Need more transitional housing for folks with drug addiction, convicts, etc. – long waits for folks to find housing

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Informal case managers to check on folks in housing that have needs
- Possible model for Rockingham - Great River Terrace in North Brattleboro – motel apartments that house homeless folks, mental illness – case management life skills, community programming, relationship building in a community setting – need housing vouchers and strong partners to duplicate this in other communities
- Hetty Green Motel is empty and could be converted to transitional housing – do a feasibility study
- Look at potential sites for permanent supported housing – need to determine if the community has capacity to take on this type of project – 3 components - infrastructure, vouchers, supportive services
- Community Restorative Justice Center – recovery coaching – expand these types of services
- Get to know the landlords so they can serve their tenants better
- Revolving loan fund for first time homebuyers
- Increase communication about the resources available
- Town fund training for increased capacity for weatherization
- Co-housing – partner with those in need of housing and elders who may have larger space – resource available to cohabitate and have a resource to support the tenant – Homeshare Vermont could be a place to support this
- Housing needs assessment was done 10 years ago – Windham Windsor Housing Trust has date on Bellows Falls
- Energy Committee could use volunteers to help with thermal program for homes
- Leverage Old Home Day and other community events to educate and bring awareness
- Skills training for folks to maintain their own home
- Volunteerism – schools are required to do 40 hours per week
- Hire someone to help coordinate all the organizations volunteer needs
- Marketing for community events need to get out to a larger population that really need to hear it

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Focus on people with greatest need is very impressive by folks who showed up to meeting
- Windham Windsor Housing Trust is one of strongest housing organizations in the State
- Accessory Dwelling Units can be added
- Recovery housing can be added
- Form a housing committee – start with select board and have a group appointed
- Discussion on fragile populations and need for section 8 housing is appreciated by those attending the meeting
- Income is 60% of State of medium income and rent is 80% of medium income
- Windham Windsor Housing Trust to work on directly marketing to landlords – this starts with conversations with landlords to understand needs
- Homeownership center moving to Rockingham
- Look at different models of homeownership
- Conversation about what a more diverse population looks like in Bellows Falls
- Young professional group could be a conduit to homeowners
- Block party to help bring neighbors together and have conversations around housing
- Sidewalks are nice and help to attract people to a community
- Landlord connection important to understand different needs – housing committee formed, housing needs
- Community Restorative Justice Center to help overcome challenges
- When thinking about converting tenants to homeowners – folks have cash flow issues – is there a creative solution to help people cosign on housing
- So much potential in Bellows Falls
- Caring people, inclusivity is important, get youth more involved

Attracting & Retaining Young People

Visiting Team: Xusana Davis, Rebecca Ellis, Scott Finn, Jenna Koloski (facilitator), Sarah Lang, Karen Mittelman, Buzz Schmidt, Tim Tierney, Becca Washburn, Kevin Wiberg (scribe)

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Easy access to the outdoors
- Grandchildren want to come back.
- Walkable town. Don't need to drive everywhere
- Internet access in some places
- The river, setbacks, walking trails
- Trail systems are being developed
- Young people value an active lifestyle
- Cost of living—housing more affordable
- Good bookstore, medical, dental, coffee shops...
- Vibrancy of downtown
- Arts and music opportunities
- Boston is on 2.5 hours away. NYC and Montreal, 4 hours. I89 and I91
- The Library—great programming, great place to meet people
- Train station and bus station
- The people, wonderful, generous, kind, thinking of others.
- Location near other great communities
- Connection to agriculture. Strong farming community. Knowing where your food comes from
- Love our parades
- Community spirit is second to none
- Sports teams are doing great—community pride in the schools
- Low ambient stress. People are friendly and kind.
- People are involved
- Main street arts, town supported movie theater, gym all in downtown
- Small businesses that have been here for generations. Offer employment.
- Number of bars
- Rockingham Rec
- Public Access TV

What are the Challenges?

- What am I going to do for work
- Lack of mid-level housing
- Lack of affordable childcare, especially infant care, for working single moms
- Low wage jobs
- Aging population, need more people and a larger tax base
- Not a lot of housing for sale. Decaying housing stock. Costs of fixing up housing. Town nuisance ordinance.
- Property taxes. Some of the highest in the state.
- Geographically limited, not a lot of open spaces left in the villages that are available for development for housing for new families
- Difficulty of having home based businesses because of ordinances and other barriers?
- Is Amtrak getting enough business to hang on
- Dilapidated, unsafe housing
- Lack of transportation
- Vehicle vandalism
- Lack of sufficient policing and services in Bellows Falls
- Unsafe, lack of public lighting
- Not a lot of jobs
- Some residents not getting the needs mess
- How to keep the small town vibe if/when the community grows
- Not a lot of people know BF exists.
- Lack of spaces and places where young families, professionals can meet with their peers. Wonder Bar, example. Caffeine coffee shop
- Perception that there aren't a lot of young people in BF
- Low percentage of voters
- Lack of connections to places, issues, activities
- Poor cell phone coverage

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Town-wide Internet connectivity, high speed, not just in villages
- Solar panels, as a means of reducing costs, taxpayer burden
- Updated contemporary, town website
- Community asylum seekers project needs more support and hosts.
- Refurbish dilapidated housing to attract and house families (asylum seekers).
- Subsidize getting fiber internet access for everyone
- Co-working space in town
- Make sure what is done is inclusive, people of different abilities, e.g.
- Build a bowling alley (other places where people can socialize)
- Tear down eyesores, build smaller houses—house flipping cooperative. Contractors have steady work—more cost effective
- Bellows Falls as a learning place to try new things (house flipping, apprenticeships, etc.)
- Marketing strategy/plan for BF, SR and Rockingham in general, that showcases the area's assets
- Friends for Change, to give kids something to do besides bars and pizza places that is safe and affordable
- Take advantage of natural, recreation assets, build mountain biking trails, make the river accessible for canoeists/kayakers, etc.
- Multiple programs at the local library—a free and safe place to go.

- Invest money in community and not in policing
- Neighborhood watch
- Communicate what is already available.
- Apprenticeship programs, mentors, hosts
- Hemp
- Teach high schoolers how to start businesses, have an incubator space in town
- Maker space
- Opportunities to learn about cultures of asylum seekers. Attract and retain them. Help spread the tax base.
- Trade school (to train asylees)

- Support the chamber in marketing the area.
- Fiber optic cable
- Indoor swimming pool/athletic center.
- Quarterly events for new residents. Welcoming and intro to the area and resources.
- Create opportunities for 18-24 year olds. (Find a job and a mate!)
- Community calendar online. Kiosk webcam.
- Hemp and marijuana economic development. A growing facility.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Themes of outdoor recreation and Community wellness
- Recreation can stabilize local economies
- Kernel of an idea – around housing. Housing stock is an asset and a challenge. Ideas about creating affordable housing, jobs in creating housing
- Easy win Front Porch Forum
- Ask young people to join boards. Express interest in them
- Identity and belonging – how do we treat new people? Are we creating an environment that is welcoming?
- Collective benefit for equity. Inclusion, housing, employment and wages.
- Downtown has great bones. Connections to river could be better.
- Housing concerns/issues but also opportunity
- Community governance structures, village vs. towns
- Need to be positive, inclusive, Let people know that the arts are for everyone.
- Explore model programs such as maker spaces and co-working space that exist in other communities around VT.
- Develop a dance club!
- Marketing Coordinator and Grant writer to help raise resources for arts and culture. Chamber could use some volunteers for increased capacity.
- BF Downtown Alliance, events calendar.
- Radio station advertising and live reads over the air.

Arts & Entertainment

Visiting Team: Xusana Davis, Rebecca Ellis, Scott Finn, Jenna Koloski (facilitator), Sarah Lang, Karen Mittelman, Buzz Schmidt, Tim Tierney, Becca Washburn, Kevin Wiberg (scribe)

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Bellows Falls opera house
- Main street arts theater program (4 productions annually), concerts, performances, arts classes, a gallery.
- Thriving community with arts, restaurants
- RAMP organization for artists network Rockingham Arts and Museum Project
- Southern VT creative network
- Music performance
- Stone Church Arts
- Amazing public school music teachers
- Open mic at Flat Iron every Wednesday
- Poetry group that meets at bookstore – River Voices
- Vibrant group of writers
- Stage 33
- Wool Radio
- Local access TV
- The Library- writing groups, workshops, free and open to the public. Robust programming for all ages.
- Mini concerts at local bars and eateries.
- Karaoke Night (Karaoke all the time)
- Trails and other hidden gems. Saxton River Valley Trail Association, Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association. Trail from downtown BF to Saxton's River (in the works)
- Canal Street Art Gallery
- This is an arts town (Bellows Falls)
- River Arts Craft Cooperative

What are the Challenges?

- Wonderful things happening but not well communicated.
- Hard to get more than the regular faces attending arts events.
- Cell service and connectivity has varied from villages to more rural parts of Rockingham
- Do better at communicating that arts is one of our biggest assets
- Sustainability of arts organizations (they all need money)
- Limited number of people/businesses that can support the arts financially, ads, raffle prizes, etc.
- Decline in school age population. Eventually fewer volunteers, fewer patrons on the arts (ticket buyers)
- Challenge to get the word out. People don't read newspapers anymore. Word of mouth gets the most response.
- Need more media coverage in this part of the state. More coverage from VPR.
- Seven Days won't publicize events.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Arts business incubator, small tech assistance, Like Hannah Grimes space in Keene. Having artists feel supported in their business
- More workshops to make arts available to the public
- Murals with a walking tour (RAMP is working on this)
- Windham antiques window display is art itself. More window displays downtown to bring the arts top the community – art “on-the-ground”
- A newspaper that is just the town of Rockingham. A whole page about Main St. Arts, a public schools page.
- Working with the trails systems to create art along the trails
- Fun found art event. Explore and find art.
- Competition for Artists, present to the town, one winner
- Something like the Putney Craft Tour for area artists.
- Arts and poetry living side by side at area storefronts. Poetry/Art Walk.
- Artist open studios with demonstrations
- Learn from BRIC in Springfield (Matt Dunne)
- Cell phone, text updates – consumer opts in
- Southern Vermont magazine for coverage of arts and culture events
- A more unified Rockingham FB page
- Resources to make programs more accessible and cheaper. We need the full community to feel that art is for them – not just for an “elite” subset.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Community has a lot of assets.
- Need to market and communicate what’s available in Rockingham
- Connect arts with economic development, recreation, etc.
- How to connect the villages and the town – unified identity
- Arts and culture to make the community more hospitable to different cultures.
- Rich and vibrant arts community – how do we modify how we communicate to engage younger people. Create opportunities for younger people in leadership positions.
- Who we are who we claim to be and how do we want to see our community in the future.
- Passionate people about the arts. Need for more volunteers. Creative economy and what does being an artist mean? Outside of traditional arts, crafts, music.
- Incredible assets here. So many ideas for action items—creativity and energy. Go into the discussion of challenges more deeply.
- This is a big karaoke town!
- Synergy between arts and recreation. Experience the arts outdoors. Arts in the landscape.
- Organizational sustainability. Volunteers, new audiences, collaboration, sharing services and expertise. Leverage what community organizations do well.
- Decline in journalists in Vermont. Add revenue is going to online companies
- Nonprofit media is trying to step up.
- Betty Smith, founder of VPR is now arts reporting for the Upper Valley
- Tough to get the word out about arts and opportunities.

Recreation

Visiting Team: Xusana Davis, Rebecca Ellis, Scott Finn, Jenna Koloski (facilitator), Sarah Lang, Karen Mittelman, Buzz Schmidt, Tim Tierney, Becca Washburn, Kevin Wiberg (scribe)

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Great swimming pool
- The River
- The trail network that is expanding. Oak hill trail network 40 acres.
- Town Forest 100 acres which is underutilized
- Saxon River Valley Trails Initiative, gravel pathway connecting HS trails, Oak Hill trails.
- Enthusiasm for outdoor trails and connectivity.
- Riverside Park with labyrinth, Middle St.
- The Rec Center
- BF Community Bike Project, pump trail, youth can get free bikes, can build bikes, meeting space for other bike groups
- Ski hill with rope tow
- The new playground. Youth helped to build
- Ice rink
- Rec center is accessible by sidewalks
- Vermont Academy rec resources available t
- Saxton’s River rec center
- Hockey
- Community garden
- HS youth sports—super good, community pride
- Kayak – CT River Valley Canoe Trail
- Wildlife preserve, Herrick’s Cove
- Friends for Change play based programming
- \$5 movies
- Main Street Arts
- Wool Radio
- Senior Center, rec activities and meals
- Community energy, people are moving things forward
- RAMP
- Third Friday Art Walk
- Cool class 4 roads network access to the back country, highly attractive for bicyclists
- The library programs

- Frank Dewilder (legendary frame builder). Has a shop here. Trying to create an industrial making space. Provide trade skills to youth in the community.
- River with dam releases.
- Greater Rockingham fitness center (older youth and adults)

What are the Challenges?

- Lack of water fountains at parks and rec center
- Communicating the assets that we have. Need for marketing.
- Organizations could benefit from volunteers/staff with tech stuff
- Access is a barrier. Sometimes it is transportation. Some youth don't feel welcomed on sports teams, lack of money for sports equipment, funding, access to spaces
- Creating rec opportunities for families who live in poverty. Youth feeling like they're welcome
- Youth perception that there's nothing to do, unless you're on a school sports team
- Cost barrier
- Bike project seems to be closed a lot. Insufficient funding.
- Lack of bike lanes in town, unsafe.
- Fewer kids coming to the rec center. Kids are spending their time on screen.
- Portaging around the dam owned by Hydro Quebec

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Build a wave in the river, time dam release, engineering a wave
- CT River Valley Canoe Trail
- Northern Forest Canoe Trail system – create camping sites
- Making sure that river access is affordable/accessible
- Different skill level access to the water
- More accessible and bigger youth center, add on to the rec center
- Trauma informed and healing youth center. SUD impacted, multigenerational poverty. Third space HUB for connecting youth to recreational opportunities.
- Indoor pool with year round access.
- Create bike lanes and paths
- Volunteers and funding to develop and maintain trails
- Technical assistance in trail development
- Pop up festivals to build interest and passion for biking, canoeing, kayaking, trail running
- Community event fundraiser that benefits other community based efforts (e.g. food shelf)
- Offer tai chi classes at the Stone Church, other places
- Roots on the River music festival
- Bass tournament
- Herrick's Cove wildlife festival
- Town Forest. Split by I91. Need to address access. Landowner support exists. People power and money.
- Multi-generational center, walkable and accessible.
- Health equity—making rec opportunities accessible to all.
- Sustainable Valley Group. Offer educational opportunities on sustainability. Commercial food incubator.
- Investigate available community spaces.
- Develop a vision for the island.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- A lot of opportunity and things going on along with a lot of barriers.
- Community has good energy and desire to solve problems together.
- Breadth and depth of existing programs and assets
- Community grant program- VOREC – outdoor rec economy
- Urban and community forest program works with communities on recreation planning. Toolkit available.
- Natural assets as a foundation for recreation, community wellness, engaging and retaining youth, attracting young families
- The island is a stunning community asset
- Potential for capitalizing on a regional identity
- Delivering farm shares via bicycle.
- The island as a park with amphitheater
- Equitable access, neurological differences, people with disabilities, racial and ethnic access.
- US Park Service survey, 7% of visitors were African American. How do we market activities and spaces for people who never thought they were for them?
- \$200K in VOREC funding available.

Youth Forum

Compiled from a youth forum held with students and VCRD staff on December 12, 2019 at Greater Falls Connections in partnership with Friends of Change

What are the Assets

- The math teacher at the school.
 - The school food is really good. Especially the pizza and the mac and cheese!
 - The 6th grade teacher, Mr. Ferenc
 - Some teachers are nice and understanding and cool
 - Gym class at the school
 - The math system at the school is good
 - The Bike Project
 - The Library
 - A wooded area in town with a swinging rope
 - The theater and \$5 movies
 - Outdoor areas to play in town
 - Friends for Change
 - Trails for biking and walking
 - Officer Paulette
 - There are programs for people to find housing like Pathways
-

What are the Challenges?

- The school doesn't recognize our value
 - Poor people that can't afford much food
 - Violence – especially among students. It starts small but grows and there is no system to stop that or talk about it
 - Money for clothes, food, and kids. Many have trouble making enough money.
 - No busses or transportation.
 - No jobs
 - Saxtons River is in the middle of nowhere. There is the Inn and the store and that's it.
 - I don't like my neighbors.
 - There isn't a lot for kids to do.
 - There are no gyms, no activities.
 - Not enough free activities. Adults say that kids are always on our phones but if we had something fun to do maybe we wouldn't be on our phones as often.
 - There is not a lot to do, especially later in the day.
 - It is not safe to walk through town alone.
 - Addiction is an issue. "It affects me personally."
 - There are not a lot of housing options. Especially for people in recovery.
 - Housing is unsafe, low quality, and ugly.
 - It is too easy to get drugs in my neighborhood.
 - It is unsafe – someone broke into my house.
 - Some people live on the street.
 - My neighbors steal things from me.
 - I feel unsafe.
 - There is a lot of judgement just because I live in a certain area in town.
 - I am not treated fairly in school. The rules are not fair for everyone.
 - Some areas are unsafe – especially downtown.
 - Bullying is a HUGE problem. Kids yell at other kids from the busses and no one does anything about it.
 - Bullying is an especially huge problem for gay youth.
 - There are no jobs for young people.
-

Action Ideas

- We need an indoor swimming pool and a bowling alley.
- We should build a homeless shelter.
- Training for early childhood teachers
- Help people find jobs.
- Jobs for people who just got out of high school.
- Help people with economic problems
- More summer jobs for young people
- A TikTok room
- Taxis that are free to the public
- More busses
- Busses that use biofuel
- Better times for the bus schedule that fit with peoples' jobs
- Busses that go to less populated areas
- Car sharing and rentals
- More bus stops that run later in the day
- Flexible jobs that provide support for childcare and family
- Community college in Bellows Falls
- Community College should be free
- Teachers that care about me
- Teachers that are trauma informed
- More access to career and tech centers
- Individual/open frame for school days
- Respectful bus drivers
- Teachers that actually let me go to the bathroom and get drinks
- Get rid of landlords that don't take care of their properties
- Sue landlords for not dealing with lead paint
- Use recycled materials to build homes and use a lot of plants
- Housing for youth – transitional housing
- We should get a Phoenix House
- Safe hosing
- Recovery housing
- Update homes
- Transitional housing
- Develop a local boxing club
- Make homes more affordable
- Develop a community garage where community members can fix up cars, lawn mowers, etc.

- A Youth Center that would have a ropes course, a gym space, workout space, a kitchen, art space
- A community greenhouse/garden
- More food for people that don't have enough money
- Community kitchen
- More community dinners
- Free food station
- More fast food options – Wendy's, Taco Bell, Five Guys, KFC, Macdonalds, Chick-Fil-A
- Good food that is free
- More food for the homeless
- Youth businesses

Additional Action Ideas

Here are the ideas residents contributed through a paper and online form

- The rec center needs a water fountain inside and a water fountain outside
- Bike park and bike playground. Quality features and modern bicycle infrastructure.
- Develop trails in Bellows Falls Village Forest and fun activities for parents and kids
- Bike lanes
- Some sort of incentive to attract a brewery on the island
- Town website that is easy to use and modern
- Bike infrastructure – bike lanes from Springfield to Brattleboro
- Boat launch
- Programs that help local businesses
- Co-working space
- Repurpose historical buildings rather than just preserve
- Bike lanes
- Moth story-telling style events
- Trivia night events
- Country store bike tour
- Conversations with various groups in the town – born and raised here with folks who have moved here – young adults and elders- rural and villages
- Become a sanctuary for asylum seekers using Community Asylum Seekers Project as a model. Could attract and maintain 100s of young, motivated men, women, and children
- Concentrate on rebuilding Windham Hotel into a multiuse building including a micro hotel
- Get Lyft or Uber to service area
- Aim a lot higher than Budget 8
- Pay someone to put these things together – 12 things are great and clean them up
- Older trades people (builders, plumbers, etc.) to teach younger folks the trades
- Makerspace
- Co-working space
- Build a skateboard park on the site of the Chemco building - by the river. Seek grant funding to build the park, as well as to have murals painted on the walls, inside and out. The park would be right next to the new trail being created by the Saxton's River Trails Initiative group.
- Find a creative way to locally promote the use of Amtrak such as incentives and signage
- Capitalize on the river frontage and easy access in several locations.
- Bring in middle income condos with parking, Promote the arts, antiques and food right in town, and develop a taxi business for Rockingham and surrounding towns.
- Establish a committee to investigate what changes can be expected in our community due to climate change and how best to prepare for those changes.
- Establish a committee to determine how our community can best deal with a steady-state economy or even a declining economy as opposed to the growth economy we have been experiencing for generations.
- I am a 32 year old living in Bellows Falls, I love it here! I think the fact that everything you could need is walkable from downtown is a plus. The outdoor activities are just outside the door, the friendly and welcoming nature of people here made my move to a town where I knew no one much easier. I have been living here for almost 5 years. However, I am starting to think of a family, child care I know is an issue. I also am able to work here because I have found a job where I can work remotely. When my friends visit from other parts of New England they comment on how beautiful this town is and I have even had 3 look for jobs in the area. However, that is where it ends. There aren't enough high paying jobs that are available. I also think that suitable housing is an issue. Many of the apartment options aren't up to the standard of more affluent areas. When I moved into my apartment there was chipping paint, holes in the walls, windows that didn't close or open properly with gaps in the frame (these are still in my apartment) stairs that were broken. Luckily my landlord fixed some of these issues and gave me permission to paint but for some this would be a deterrent. I think we need to look beyond affordable housing but also to housing that is affordable for those who make more than a "low income wage" but also is kept up.
- I truly hope I can stay in this area long term but am unsure I will be able to.
- I'd love to see a Hostel set up for bike touring folks, historic tours and other non-snow related tourism. Especially connecting the train system for tourists (like at the national parks where you have to park your car and use the public transit.) Also, let's support, create incentives for local motels to have rooftop solar.
- Bike lanes and trails, bike racks, bike paths that link the villages of Rockingham and other nearby towns. Piggy back off the "Chittenden County sustainable-transportation action list"
- Train-centered tourism ads. Public bus to Saxton's River, Cambridgeport, Brockways Mills and Bartonville. Electric car

chargers in the Square, at the grocery store, at the library, and the schools. Support e-cars, e-bikes, (new and used) especially sales and service locally. Motivate the Current buss system to have an e-bus. Problem solve to get public transport for folks who live in the rural parts of town to commute to and from work.

- Systematically welcome people to the area.
- include climate solution education at all age levels. Set up a "Fix - It Clinic" to motivate lifelong learning and sense of community resilience. Schools as demonstration sites for solar PV (and cold climate heat pumps) installations monitoring and maintenance as well as a hands on learning location to train solar installers and service people. Train green contractors real estate appraisers and real estate agents to understand the best practices of green building.
- Building re-development: use this chance to weatherize and switch to all electric use and install solar pv. Along with Econ. Redev. and housing include projects like the community solar set up by SEVCA.
- Arts & Entertainment: The Opera House is a great resource - let's use it more for community education during daytime hours or evenings when available - film discussion series, for example. Or workshops in public speaking and the use of a PA system. How about school for arts and crafts? And or a "Maker Space." We need one coordinated calendar for all events in town. Intergenerational choir that sings for events and gathers just for the fun of singing together.
- Econ. Revitalization and Infrastructure: Set up a way for landowners of rural property to collaborate with young farmers who need land to care for and use for soil regeneration and to grow nutrient dense local food. Promote the use of the regional food hub "Food Connects".
- Housing: promote cluster housing in each of the traditional 5 villages of Rockingham with public transportation linking them. Cooperative housing for mixed ages that welcome young families. Actively plan the transition to fossil free housing over the next ten years and work with the local heating oil companies to help them also prepare and transition out of selling fossil fuels. Enforce energy efficiency standards that are in the building codes, but don't have "teeth".
- Recreation: Connect tourism and transportation. Combine community fun with useful activities for the environment such as tree planting, repair of river side areas damaged by H. Irene, creating pollinator gardens and community food gardens. Create outdoor community gathering spaces. Make a new location for a new community garden that is not at the base of the ski slope where fencing has to be removed every year.
- I was thinking about something called, "Crafted at The Falls." It is inspired by, "Crafted at the Port of L.A." in Los Angeles, a weekend-only indoor craft fair type space where local crafts people, artisans and artists can showcase and sell their goods. They also have a local brewer in the space so people can drink and shop, and they used to (not sure if they still do) have local food trucks come park there on the weekends. They also host "classes" (by the vendors) and I'm pretty sure they do live

music sometimes (if they don't, we should!). This could possibly be combined with the Maker Space we discussed, and maybe folded into the commercial kitchen that I believe is already available. The "market" could be open on weekends, Friday afternoon/evening through Sunday, and could even serve as a winter home for our local farmers' market. There could also be an event space which could be rented out for private events (or community events!). This market could be built in an existing but dilapidated building on The Island, and could maybe be an eco-model building, using as much "green stuff" as possible (in fact, there could be an ongoing display about how the building was retro-fitted in an eco-conscious way, which could serve as marketing for local construction and consulting companies that helped with the project). I've been thinking about this idea since we moved here, and I'm really excited to have a place to share my idea. Thank you for this Let's Take Action project, it's fantastic :)

- A Non-Judgmental Empathetic Ear, meaning "It's Not About ME, it's about WE". If this is applied to any of the 9 categories during the decision making process, Rockingham, and it's Peoples will prosper. I'm a native of Bellows Falls, 51 years, and this community is poorer than ever before. Most folks I know are wrapped in a constant need for the basics of life, and deep fried in the fear of not having what is needed for loved ones and themselves. If our friends and neighbors have basic needs met, and in turn have the ability to care for their families basic needs. then they become the light shining on our home that is Rockingham, once again Vermonters will be able to show the world how its done. A community's strength is its people, for without them we are just a place. We as a people are dealing with a social fear of not having what is needed in life. The only path through this is: A Non-Judgmental Empathetic Ear, meaning "It's Not About ME, it's about WE". It's what this program is all about.
- Enhancing Workforce Training, Transportation and Child Care services/supports.
- The immediate emergency is to find funding and re-roof the Adams Grist Mill, Amtrak station and the Methodist Church the former YMCA building. If we lose any of these buildings, we lose our history which is the soul of the town.
- We need to find our identity. Prior inhabitants attempted to merge the areas, but folks with cognizant dissonance and prejudices have impeded such an action. How can anyone (young or elderly) expect to move to Rockingham and establish a home and business when there is an identity crisis and 3 areas out of 5, don't exist half the time. And most of the existing inhabitants don't know what to say when asked where you live. (Rockingham or the sections known as Bartonville, Bellows Falls, Cambridgeport, Rockingham, Saxtons River.
- I believe the area has too many imaginary lines called (Incorporated Villages) that want to stay defined as such. They fear if they merge and become one, their taxes will go up, so I've heard. As it is, the inhabitants living within these imaginary lines are paying two sets of taxes (one

to the town entity and one to a village entity) without having any additional services in certain instances. It also sets up to alienate other inhabitants who live in the same labeled area (ie Saxtons River). Having all these imaginary lines, doesn't make it a cohesive, collective entity. There are services such as police who only patrol the area known as Bellows Falls, while the rest of us don't have any services. How can people moving into the area justify their property taxes against no services? Any

inhabitant living outside of the imaginary lines don't get any local services.

- I believe homeowners who want to open home businesses and businesses who want to set up shop are greatly affected with all the local and state articles ie. (Town Bylaws, Town Ordinances, Permits, Fees, Signage, Act 250 etc), Most of the processes are either outdated, restrictive, or redundant.
- Reduce barriers and support and attract a diversity of local businesses