



Our 4-Town Future

Community Visit

Report and Action Plan ~ July 2019



Produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development
in partnership with the Vermont Community Foundation



Scenes from the "Our 4-Town Future" Community Visit process.

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Vermont Council on Rural Development
PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601-1384
802-223-6091 | info@vtrural.org | www.vtrural.org

Jon Copans, *Climate Economy Model Communities Program Director*
Paul Costello, *Executive Director*
Margaret Gibson McCoy, *Operations and Communications*
Jenna Koloski, *Community and Policy Manager*

Photos: VCRD staff and Michael Sacca

I. Introduction

“We all face a lot of town-specific issues. We also share a tremendous amount in terms of common interests, common landscapes, common needs for solutions to the problems of creating affordable housing for young people and old, forging our collective ways toward saving this environment that we all cherish, improving the schools we all rely on, making it possible for young families to thrive here.”

These were the words of Kate Siepman, read by Toni Pippy (both Strafford Selectboard members), to open the final meeting of the “Our 4-Town Future” Community Visit Process. This sentiment perfectly summarized the collective feeling in the room – while each town of Royalton, Sharon, Strafford, and Tunbridge have their own unique assets, challenges, and “feel,” when residents came together over the course of the winter/spring, it was apparent that there could be real opportunity in moving forward together. Residents shared a collective love for the landscape, the scenic backroads (despite meetings taking place during a particularly challenging mud season...), and the way the communities support each other and come together to share, celebrate, recreate, and create. When faced with a challenge to their collective future, these communities joined together to stand up for what they believed in, and then made the bold and forward-facing decision to join together again to say – “What’s next? Where do we go from here?”

Throughout the process, Visiting Team members observed that residents in these four towns were eager to collaborate. The over 320 people that participated in community forums, decision-making, and action planning were deeply dedicated to this place, to the future vibrancy and sustainability of their region, and most importantly, to their friends and neighbors – regardless of which side of town boundaries they live on. This is a region of dedicated leaders and committed residents who are smart, resourceful, and deeply caring.

The deliberations of the residents were thoughtful, and sometimes profound. Focus forums identified great ideas around regional communications, housing, social services, outdoor recreation, events and activities, strategies to attract young people, local food, a business association and childcare. In the end, however, a strong consensus emerged around priorities that can lay the groundwork for regional collaboration to support growth, sustainability, and the vitality of the area.

The key Priorities established by the region and now led by citizen Task Forces include:

- **Develop Area Housing and Build a Senior Housing Community**
- **Support Economic Development in the Region**
- **Conserve Natural Resources and the Working Landscape and Create a Regional Agricultural Network**

And, after the prioritization session on 4/25, BALE saw interest amongst the community in another opportunity that was presented and has formed a group to:

- **Create a Regional Timebank/Skill-Sharing Program**

VCRD and all its partners look forward to working with the 4-Town Task Forces as they frame and implement these projects step by step over the course of the next year and beyond. They are already hard at work—please support their efforts, or join them by reaching out to their chairs (listed in the work plan section of this report).

VCRD has the wonderful opportunity to see towns where residents recognize the challenges ahead, but line up effectively together to set vision and practical efforts to overcome the obstacles to their optimal future. This is a region that has been through a lot together – which made it especially inspiring and exciting to see the willingness of folks across the region to step up for the future

alongside their neighbors. Admittedly, VCRD was unsure what the outcome would be of the first-ever four-town Community Visit, but in the end we are confident in the collective momentum, the shared leadership, and the dedicated and hard-working volunteers heading up the new Task Forces to move priorities forward. Again, Toni Pippy and Kate Siepman said it perfectly as they opened the final Resource Day meeting, “by putting our heads together, by investing our time and effort together, we can get amazing things done.”

There are many people to thank for making the “Our 4-Town Future” Community Visit a success.

We would like to thank the Selectboard of each of the four towns who initially invited this process and participated in such a positive way throughout it—especially our 4-Town leadership team with representation from each Selectboard including Joe Ronan and Kevin Gish (Sharon), Toni Pippy (Strafford), Gary Mullen (Tunbridge), and Sandy Conrad (Royalton). We also deeply appreciate the work and leadership of the members of the Steering Committee who helped guide the process by developing the key topics and invitation process to start the effort: Nicole Antal, Sandy Conrad, Donna Foster, Xia Gillespie, Kevin Gish, John Hawkins, Nancy Howe, Raelene Lemery, Josh Moore, Gary Mullen, Toni Pippy, Earl Ransom, Joe Ronan, Kate Siepman, Shannon Varley, Christa Wurm, Chris Wood, and Grant Young. Thank you also to all of the community leaders and organizations who worked together to spread the word about the event and made sure everyone in town was invited and encouraged to participate!

This 4-Town process was very special because communities hosted not 1 but 4 spectacular community meals—one in each town. Thank you to the community volunteers who organized, prepared dishes, served food, cleaned up, and more. We especially appreciate the dinner-organizing leadership of Shannon Varley in Strafford, Nicole Antal and Donna Foster in Sharon, Nancy Howe and her team in Tunbridge, and Grant Young and his team of from Vermont Law School and the Royalton community.

We are very thankful for the use of the White River Valley School in Royalton, Barrett Memorial Hall in Strafford, Tunbridge Elementary School, Sharon Academy, and the Sharon Elementary School for hosting the 4-Town Community Visit Meetings.

Thanks to the students from Vermont Law School and Sharon Academy who provided childcare during sessions and to Christa Wurm and Grant Young who helped organize the childcare.

Michael Moser and the UVM Center for Rural Studies are terrific allies in our efforts, and we appreciate their help building a briefing profile for the VCRD Community Visit Team and to share with the communities.

Thanks must also go to our partners at the Vermont Community Foundation and the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and who contributed funding to make this process possible.

VCRD calls state, federal and non-profit leaders to participate in Community Visit processes. We are proud of the partners we get to work with—and especially the 4-Town Visiting Team—they are the best of Vermont’s public servants (some attended all four of the community forums!).

Getting things done is all about leadership, and all of the towns should be grateful to those who’ve stepped up to serve as chairs of the task forces: Sarah Danly, Support Economic Development in the Region; Michael Sacca and Shona Sanford-Long, Conserve Natural Resources and the Working Landscape and Create a Regional Agricultural Network; and Ken Wright, Develop Area Housing and Build a Senior Housing Community.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development helps Vermont citizens build prosperous and resilient communities through democratic engagement, marshalling resources, and collective action. VCRD is prepared to support the efforts of the four towns as they move forward and to provide follow up help to the Task Forces as called upon. VCRD will also serve as an advocate for task force projects with appropriate agencies and organizations in Vermont. Call on us, and on Visiting Team members (listed with contact info in the back of this report), when we can be of help.

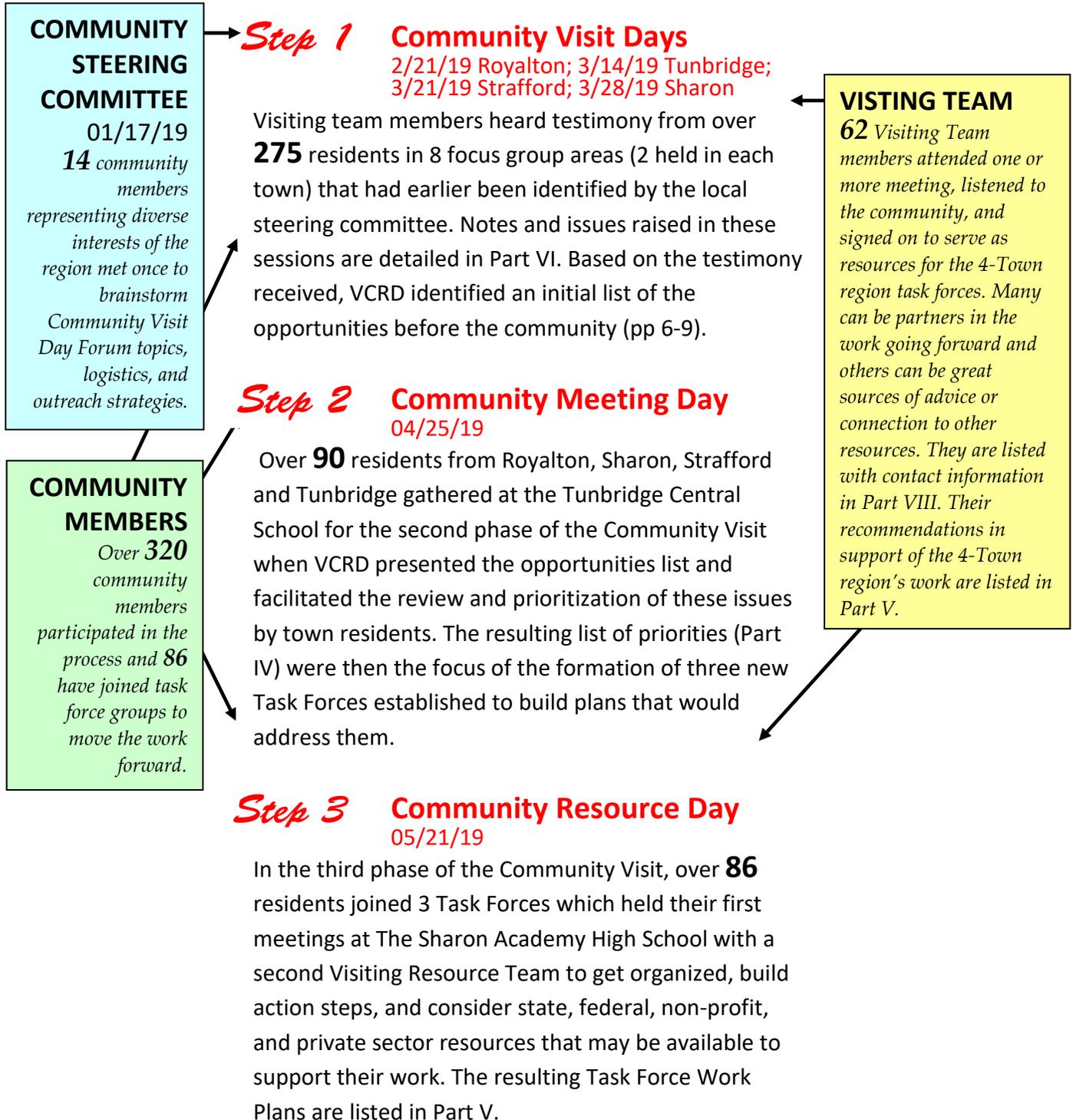
VCRD works to facilitate the Community Visit process in partnership with the Vermont Community Foundation which is devoted to the progress of Vermont communities; VCF supports and helps guide visits, and provides significant resources to community projects throughout Vermont.



Left to right from top: 1) Steering committee members planned strategies to get the word out about the process; 2) each town held a free community dinner on forum day – here at Sharon Elementary School served by the boy scouts; 3) residents participated in forums held in each of the 4 towns to share assets, challenges, and ideas; 4) community members selected their top priorities with colored dots; 5) after the dot-voting exercise, community members signed up to join task force groups to take action on the selected priorities.

II. The Our 4-Town Future Community Visit Process

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) Community Visit Program is a structured process that enables a community to identify and prioritize goals, fosters local leadership, and serves as a catalyst for the development and realization of concrete, achievable action plans. **The program in Royalton, Sharon, Strafford and Tunbridge consisted of three phases depicted here:**



III. Vision for the 4-Town Region's Future

These points of vision were compiled from vision statements that were shared during Community Visit Meetings and supported by the majority of participants at the Resource Meeting and an online survey. The statements represent broad hopes that the majority of responding residents have for the long term good of the 4-Town region community.

Residents from the 4 towns look to a future for the region where:

- ❖ We promote our region's outdoor recreation assets to local citizens and visitors while protecting and conserving our environment and natural resources.
- ❖ Homeowners growing their own food is part of our cultural heritage.
- ❖ We protect and support agriculture in the region.
- ❖ We take care of our soil and water.
- ❖ We preserve the character of our towns while also maintaining the infrastructure that supports residents and businesses.
- ❖ Our communities understand the coming impacts of climate change and we build community by integrating solutions into local initiatives and decision-making.
- ❖ We are resilient in the face of climate change and weather-related events such as flooding; we integrate resilience when we design projects.
- ❖ We focus on solutions for transportation, home heating, and weatherization for low-income homes to address the climate change challenge.
- ❖ There is affordable housing in the area.
- ❖ Our region attracts and supports young families, new residents, and businesses.
- ❖ Our communities are welcoming to people who are new to the region.
- ❖ The community supports seniors, which helps them stay in our community.
- ❖ Our 4 town region supports diversity, people across demographics and ages, those in the workforce and those that are retired, and those of all income levels.
- ❖ We build engagement through creativity, the arts, music, and beauty.
- ❖ We have great schools.
- ❖ School lunches are healthy.
- ❖ Childcare is available when needed.
- ❖ The schools offer skills and trade education.
- ❖ There are opportunities for our young adults so they can stay in Vermont if they choose to.
- ❖ We look at economic development through a land-based economy lens as a way to focus our efforts – we preserve and maintain the open and working landscape.
- ❖ Vermont Law School's free and low-cost entrepreneurship services are integrated into the region and help launch green and sustainable businesses.
- ❖ People think creatively and consider the needs of folks that are different than themselves.
- ❖ People know their neighbors well enough to know when they need help and they offer their support; we make sure nobody is hungry.
- ❖ Our 4 towns collaborate, communicate, and work well together and connect well beyond our region.
- ❖ The region is an exciting place for people to come and stay and there are opportunities here.
- ❖ We embrace the hard work ahead.

IV. “Our 4-Town Future” Priorities

Determined by Royalton, Sharon, Strafford, and Tunbridge residents at the 4-Town Future Community Meeting, April 25th 2019

Proving that those who live, work and raise their families in a community are best qualified to understand its needs and potential, Royalton, Sharon, Strafford, and Tunbridge community members whittled down a list of 24 issues through discussion, reasoned arguments and thoughtful reflection. In the end, voting with dot stickers, residents chose three action ideas that offer opportunities to enhance existing resources, and to strengthen the town through exciting new ventures. Residents concluded the April 25th meeting by signing up for Task Forces in the selected areas.

Residents of the four towns selected three priorities for future action:

✓ **Develop Area Housing and Build a Senior Housing Community**

A housing task force can assess current housing needs and explore options to increase new or renovated affordable housing for renters, homeowners, and seniors including co-housing, duplexes and apartments, and other multi-family units for mixed ages and incomes. This task force can also connect buyers and sellers or property owners and renters and offer support and resource connection to area residents looking to purchase, rent, or repair a home. Many expressed interest in capturing private investment and collaborating with regional, state, and federal partners to develop a senior housing development to serve the 4-town region; potentially located in Royalton for its infrastructure and access to services.

✓ **Support Economic Development in the Region**

An economic development committee can work to identify economic and business development needs and develop a plan, strategies, and funding opportunities to meet those needs. The group can collaborate with regional, state, and federal partners to attract businesses to the area, develop necessary infrastructure to support business growth, and develop a fund to support local businesses and provide incentives to do business in the region. The group can also help area residents connect to jobs by sharing opportunities and hosting job fairs to connect employers with potential local employees.

✓ **Conserve Natural Resources and the Working Landscape and Create a Regional Agricultural Network**

Many residents would like to plan for the future by protecting valuable working lands and natural resources, addressing climate change, and improving resilience through local conservation efforts. A working lands task force can identify priorities for conservation and reforestation, build funding for conservation efforts, and look into opportunities around carbon sequestration markets, land adoption programs, and partnerships with foresters and farmers in the area to protect land while supporting the working landscape. In support of this work, the task force can create a regional network of area farms, connect new farmers to land and other resources, facilitate shared resources and equipment, and support production, storage, processing, marketing and distribution. The group can also identify and share funding sources and support for farmers transitioning to new products, diversifying their production, or shifting to organic farming practices and organize community work days to support area farms and increase market opportunities such as an annual market and farm celebration at the Tunbridge Fair. Additionally, the group can evaluate a central physical location to serve as a food hub for the region.

After the 4/25 prioritization session, a group has formed to work on this opportunity:

(For more information, or to get involved, contact Chris Wood at BALE at chris@balevt.org).

✓ **Create a Regional Timebank/Skill-Sharing Program**

The region could build a “time bank” as a platform to offer, access, and trade services among community members. Residents could trade time and skills around tax preparation, cooking and nutrition, music, art, yard work, repair and maintenance, exercise and wellness, IT support, and more. This program would recognize the skills and expertise that currently exists in the region and connect residents to what they need right here in their community.

Other Opportunities identified by the community:

Along with the three chosen priorities, the key opportunities listed below reflect other potential ideas for action that community members shared at Community Visit Day forums held in each town. Though these opportunities weren't chosen as priority projects through this process, community members may find the list useful as they look to expand on current projects or take on new ones.

Organize a Regional Community Health and Wellness Initiative

Residents from all four towns praised the success of the Sharon Health Initiative and shared interest in expanding that program to all four towns. A task force could form to develop a regional community health and wellness initiative to expand the program, coordinate nutrition and exercise programming, and organize volunteers to help other community members navigate support services, resources and programs. The group could also work with area emergency services and health care providers to improve access to health clinics and other programs to ensure area residents get the care they need.

Expand and Coordinate Outdoor Recreation and Trails

A regional task force could form to build connections between existing community trails and expand trails and outdoor recreation. The group could produce outdoor events and educational opportunities, build access and parking, and improve signage as appropriate. This group could make a deliberate effort to engage youth and students from the Law School and area K-12 schools as volunteers and partners.

Address Substance Abuse and Addiction

A task force could form to identify and implement community-based strategies for addiction prevention and recovery such as organizing educational events, promoting wellness and prevention activities such as exercise or recreation programs, and identifying ways to make sure those affected by addiction have access to the services they need in a safe and judgement-free environment.

Improve Transportation Options

Transportation limitations came up repeatedly around access to services and childcare, job opportunities, youth engagement, recreation opportunities, and community connectedness. A Transportation Task Force could form to improve options in the region and better connect communities to each other and to other regional hubs. The group could work to expand Stagecoach offerings, look into an Amtrak stop, and develop other options such as ride sharing and shuttles. The group could also explore ways to improve affordability and access to driver's education for youth in the area.

Improve Walkability and Bike-ability of the Region

A group could work with municipal leaders and regional, state, and federal partners to improve roads, paths, and village centers to make the area accessible and safe for bikers and pedestrians by improving signage for walkers and bikers, promoting safety and awareness for bikers, walkers, and drivers, and exploring pedestrian bridges at dangerous road and river crossings.

Create an Arts and Crafts Cooperative

A task force could identify, plan, and develop seed funding to bring together artists in a central place that would offer shared studio space and a public market. The cooperative would connect artists and crafters to each other, help get their art and products to consumers, and celebrate the creative talent of the region.

Advance Regional Communications and Connection

A group could form to build ways to connect and communicate across the region by creating and managing a 4-town listserv in partnership with Vital Communities and working to build a regional calendar and hub to share upcoming events, activities, jobs, housing, volunteer opportunities, available land, and resources and services. The group could also plan events and partner with schools and community groups to offer community gatherings, celebrations, and networking get togethers throughout the four towns. It could promote an adult sports league, potlucks, concerts, festivals, and events that celebrate the diversity and culture of the region and beyond.

Improve Cell and Broadband Service

The four towns could convene a partnership of local residents, municipal officials, businesses, school leaders, and others to work with regional, state, federal, and private sector partners to bring improved broadband and cell coverage to the region. The group could also facilitate access to broadband right away by helping to make locations available for people to use high-speed connection such as libraries, town offices, and schools and explore community Wi-Fi networks and cell phone repeaters in village centers.

Form a Regional Business and Entrepreneur Association

A task force could form to bring local businesses and entrepreneurs together to improve coordination and collaboration and identify opportunities to share resources and lend mutual support. The group could market local businesses of all sizes and sectors, identify technical assistance and funding opportunities in support of local businesses, and could even explore a shared office space, or co-working space to support technology-based or other currently home-based businesses and entrepreneurs.

Attract and Support Young Residents and Families

A task force could form to make the 4-town region the best and most welcoming place to live for new residents and young families by creating a “welcome wagon” program, developing an area guide and directory, and coordinating events to network and connect such as concerts, arts events, and recreation and outdoor activities. The group could develop a marketing campaign for the region and area schools, share stories of young people living in the community, and identify strategies such as down-payment incentives to make the area more attractive to new residents.

Cultivate Community Gathering

Residents would like to see more opportunities and places to gather. A task force could form to inventory current gathering places, identify what is missing, and develop a plan to fill the gaps. Action could be taken to highlight and utilize current spaces such as libraries, Seven Stars, Town Halls, cafés and restaurants, and other locations while work could be done to develop new gathering places such as a café and pub, a community pool, or a recreation and community center in a central location.

Boost Childcare in the Region

A Childcare task force could build a new childcare program and/or help current programs to expand their facilities and services. The group could facilitate educational and professional development opportunities for early childhood education providers and could consider other, community-based childcare models such as coordinating connections between potential providers and those that are looking for childcare during the work day, in the summer months, during school vacations, and after school.

Expand Alternative Energy

A group could form, or existing energy committees could come together, to expand alternative energy and efficiency in the 4-town region, including community solar projects, regional biomass projects, small-scale hydro, home and business efficiency campaigns and other actions to make energy greener, cleaner, and more affordable.

Coordinate a Regional Food Access Initiative

A Task Force could form to improve food access by fostering coordination among and access to food shelves and local delivery, especially for seniors. A community garden could donate surplus food to schools and food shelves, the backpack program could be expanded to reach all four towns, and new or expanded summer and after school meal programs could be developed. The group could host more community meals to improve connection and food access and could develop a series of cooking and nutrition classes open to all.

Develop a Regional Neighbors Helping Neighbors Program

Area residents care deeply about making sure all community members can meet their basic needs. A task force could form to connect volunteers in the area with those needing rides to appointments and services, assistance with home repair or meals, or other challenges. The group could collect donations to build a community fund that could help neighbors in need with costs such as home repairs or emergency expenses.

Coordinate Municipal Services and Planning

Representatives from each town could come together to identify ways to save money and streamline municipal services through collaboration and coordination. Some ideas for shared services could include solid waste handling, regional recycling coordination, gravel and sand purchase and storage, a regional composting facility, alternative energy development, emergency services, hazard mitigation and resilience planning, shared equipment, and/or road maintenance.

Start a Community Garage and Repair Program

Volunteers could start and maintain a community garage where residents can work on their cars and have access to shared tools and local experts that can provide help and support. The garage could also host community “repair cafés” where anyone could work with skilled volunteers on a range of repairs from small engines to cars, farm and yard equipment, and more.

Build a Regional School and Community Partnership

A group of school and community representatives and students could form to foster a partnership among area schools and between schools and the communities. The partnership could place volunteers in schools to share skills, trades, and community stories and place student volunteers in the community for service learning with community and municipal groups. The Partnership could foster connection between area schools from the elementary level to high school to Vermont Law School by hosting and facilitating access to regional educational events and activities, and ensuring that schools are sharing successes, challenges, and strategies together. Additionally, the group could help schools and students to connect to critical regional services such as health care, food assistance, dental care, and mental health support to ensure area students have what they need to thrive.

V. Task Force Action Plans

Resource Meeting, May 21, 2019

Montgomery Task Forces are comprised of community members and an appointed chairperson. On Resource Day committee members worked closely with a facilitator and a visiting resource team to develop step-by-step action plans and a list of human and financial resources to help achieve their goals. This final phase of the program marks the time when residents truly take ownership of the work, and begin the exciting process of turning ideas into action.

✓ Develop Area Housing and Build a Senior Housing Community

Community Chair: **Ken Wright**

Facilitator: **Paul Costello**, *Executive Director*, Vermont Council on Rural Development

Resource Team Members: **Kathy Beyer**, *Vice President for Development*, Housing Vermont

Michael Kiess, *Workforce Housing Coordinator*, Vital Communities

Beth Long, *Chief Financial Officer*, Twin Pines Housing

Ramsey Papp, *Family Development Specialist*, Capstone Community Action

Gus Seelig, *Executive Director*, VT Housing and Conservation Board

A housing task force can assess current housing needs and explore options to increase new or renovated affordable housing for renters, homeowners, and seniors including co-housing, duplexes and apartments, and other multi-family units for mixed ages and incomes. This task force can also connect buyers and sellers or property owners and renters and offer support and resource connection to area residents looking to purchase, rent, or repair a home. Many expressed interest in capturing private investment and collaborating with regional, state, and federal partners to develop a senior housing development to serve the 4-town region; potentially located in Royalton for its infrastructure and access to services.

Action Steps:

1. Develop an assets list for the four towns using Housingdata.org.
2. Conduct an overarching needs assessment – including a market study of family and senior housing needs, a survey of what people want, a clear definition of “affordable” and ultimately wrap all findings into a feasibility study for a housing project that best meets the regional needs.
3. As part of this effort, also consider ways to work on retrofits, energy efficiency, and weatherization.
4. Outreach – get the word out that a housing initiative is happening with social media and a press release.
5. For committee members to get a feel for how housing developments proceed and to learn from the experience of other places, do a tour of affordable and senior housing in the region.
6. As a particular type of project is determined, conduct an inventory of incentives, funding, and spaces for redevelopment.
7. Chart what do each of the town would allow and not allow in their zoning and regulations.
8. Review and learn from the history of housing efforts in Strafford and Tunbridge.
9. Consider this working team a 4-town cooperative or housing committee.
10. As a place to start, the task force could evaluate the opportunity to purchase and rehab one or more single family homes to expand to duplexes/affordable housing in the region.

Resources

- Housingdata.org.
- Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission could help with a housing study and grant writing. Contact Peter Gregory at pgregory@trorc.org or 457-3188.
- New market tax credits and opportunity zones
- Twin Pines Housing could be a partner. Contact Beth Long at beth.long@tphtrust.org or 291-7000.
- Upper Valley Habitat for Humanity has a focus on workforce housing. Contact Eva Loomis at office@uppervalleyhabitat.org.
- Vermont Housing Conservation Board could help with housing funding and expertise. Contact Gus Seelig at gus@vhcb.org or 828-3251.
- The Vermont Community Development Program could be a potential housing funding source. Contact Cindy Blondin at cindy.blondin@vermont.gov or 828-5219.
- The Accessory Dwelling program in Brattleboro
- Home Share Now is a statewide organization that could help facilitate house sharing arrangements.
- To learn about community-based efficiency/Vermod type housing. Contact Phoebe Howe at Efficiency Vermont at phowe@veic.org.
- Historic Preservation Tax Credits could be available through the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. Contact Caitlin Corkins, Tax Credits and Grants Coordinator at 828-3047 or Caitlin.corkins@vermont.gov.
- USDA Rural Development could provide funding. Contact Ben Doyle at Benjamin.doyle@vt.usda.gov or 828-6042.
- Northern Borders Regional Commission could be a grant funding source for planning or project development. Contact Tim Tierney at tim.tierney@vermont.gov or 505-5496.
- Vermont Law School could be a technical assistance resource or even a project partner as it considers student and staff housing needs.
- The Boston Fed Working Communities Challenge could be something to explore.
- Capstone Community Action – contact Ramsey Papp at rpapp@capstonevt.org.
- Efficiency Vermont could help with weatherization and efficiency efforts. Contact Michelle McCutcheon-Schour at mmschour@veic.org.

Task Force Signups

Deadra Ashton
Emma Basham
Lori Campbell
Sandy Conrad
Sarah Danly
Dave Dumais
John Dumville
Richard Dybvig
Greg Elder
Brenda Field
Dee Gish
Joan Goldstein
Kevin Grady
Lynne Hadley

Warren Johnston
Mike Kiess
Marybeth Lang
Jenna Lapachinski
Heather Leavitt
Eva Loomis
Ashley Miraldi
Sue Sellew
Carol Sheldon
Wally and Barbara Smith
Cece, Cameron Speth
Gus Speth
Bridgett Taylor
Ben Wolfe
Chris Wood
Ken Wright
Christa Wurm

Visiting Resource Team Recommendations

After Community Meeting Day, Resource Team members, representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, submitted their recommendations for other potential actions and resources the task force might consider as it moves forward. These recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community's unique assets and needs.

Action Step Recommendations

It may be a good starting point to review previous efforts and develop a plan for moving forward as well as learn from models around the state where various types of community housing has been developed. To do this, the Task Force could invite non-profit housing organizations and potential funders for a site visit/meeting focused on possible projects. This could include Twin Pines, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Housing Vermont, Vermont State Housing Authority the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, the Agency of Human Services who can provide supports for low-income people in housing, and the Department of Aging and Independent Living to explore senior housing along with the Blueprint for health to discuss SASH (Support and Services in Housing). This group can help inform the strategic thinking of the task force along with the funding opportunities and service supports.

Note that the development of senior housing is a lower priority than family (general occupancy) housing for most funders.

Home sharing could be an interesting strategy to explore and promote in the region.

It may be helpful to gather data in order to understand and prioritize the housing needs and project wish list for the region. Seek data and consultation with housing professionals to confirm needs and identify solutions. Strategies for building a new multifamily Senior Housing Development will be very different from a HomeShare or existing housing repair program, making the prioritization by the Task Force critical to moving a plan forward.

The group could reach out to existing intentional communities across the state to see what they have developed and to identify pitfalls and potential challenges in advance.

The Task Force could survey older community members to see what they might want or need.

Consider how to incorporate “universal design” into whatever is created in order to ensure ongoing utility and the ability to re-purpose or re-use whatever is created.

Check in with the Survey and Certification Unit at the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living to examine current regulations about any type of age-specific residential facility if that becomes an area of interest.

The Task Force could review the zoning by-laws in each town and seek to make them as housing friendly as possible. Housing friendly zoning, designations and town plan language have been developed by the Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development.

The group could establish a 4 town housing trust fund to serve as seed capital to start the priority projects. This flexible funding could be extremely helpful for some of the pre-development costs and initial proof of concept needs.

The group could work with TRORC to develop a housing needs assessment. TRORC could help to structure the assessment and understand the kinds of information that should be collected.

Connect to your State legislators to communicate your community’s need for safe, affordable senior housing.

Investigate other housing-related models such as home sharing and Supports and Services and Home (SASH) that support healthy aging in place.

The group could look at the Vermont Law School model of connecting renters and landlords and how those groups communicate and collaborate. Maybe the communities can play the “middleman” role that VLS is playing.

Build on any existing landlord and tenant groups to help them offer support to potential landlords.

Realtors are already trying to connect owners and landlords with buyers and tenants. Connect with local realtors and bring them in as resources.

For the senior housing, it would be helpful to search out and talk to people who have done it before including Twin Pines and VHCB or maybe places like Maggie Pratt in Bradford. As the project considers how to meet needs of seniors, see who else might have similar needs and whose presence would enhance the quality of community. That might include people in recovery, single parents without support networks, AmeriCorps volunteers, etc.

Determine where housing should be located – will the task force focus on all four towns, or in a chosen hub? Perhaps not all forms of affordable housing are suitable in each community, so the task force and, ultimately, each community should make decisions individually and collectively about where housing should be located.

Housing will need to be tied to transportation and employment options. Ensure the strategic housing plan includes an analysis of transportation options along with employment opportunities. Work with Vocational Rehabilitation, Vermont Adult Learning and the Department of Labor to provide access to an employment specialist for the area. This person will have access to job opportunities including job training and try outs as well as access to a range of adult learning programs.

Technical Assistance/Financial Assistance/Peer Connection Recommendations

Bristol Co-Housing project is an example of infill development with reuse of historic properties as a central component.

Contact Kathy Beyer at Housing Vermont at 802-863-8424 or kbeyer@hvt.org.

TRORC can facilitate meetings, provide data, do some mapping for site selection, conduct workshops on housing and prepare and administer grant applications. Contact Peter Gregory at pgregory@trorc.org or 457-3188.

Central Vermont Council on Aging provides information and assistance/case management to residents of this region and will continue to do so. We can be a clearinghouse for housing information and resources, especially if new options become available. We also have (limited) funds to assist with home repairs. Contact Beth Stern, 476-2676 bstern@cvcoa.org.

Connect with Vital Communities Workforce Housing Program: Mike Kiess michael@vitalcommunities.org or 802-291-9100 x113 (<https://vitalcommunities.org/workforce-housing/>).

Home Share Now could be a resource to explore home sharing in the region: 479-8544.

Andrew Winter the Executive Director at Twin Pines would be an important partner: andrew@tphtrust.org, 291-7000

Contact Martin Hahn, housing director at VHCB: mhahn@vhcb.org, 828-3259. Gus Seelig at VHCB would also be an important resource to walk through critical next steps and potential partners. Contact Gus at gseelig@vhcb.org or 828-3251.

Jess Hyman is the Fair Housing Education and Outreach Coordinator with Thriving Communities (a program of CVOEO), <http://www.thrivingcommunitiesvt.org/> 802-660-3456 ext 110 or jhyman@cvoeo.org.

Katie Merrill manages the VLS rental program: KMERRILL@vermontlaw.edu

Sara Kobylenski Sara is great at advising communities to get things done and knows the housing scene in the region well CommunitySLK@gmail.com.

Seth Leonard is the managing director of community development and has great partnership and funding knowledge around housing: sleonard@vhfa.org.

Erhard Mahnke is the Coordinator of the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition. He has a lot of great Montpelier and federal connections/access and has worked in housing and community development in Vermont for more than 25 years: erhardm@vtaffordablehousing.org.

Kathleen Berk is the Director of the Vermont State Housing Authority Housing Program Administration: 802-828-3020 or kathyb@vsha.org.

Upper Valley Dual Career Network site is an example of passive networking to help families find housing: <http://uppervalleydualcareer.com/index.php/faqs>

Buff McLaughry is a community motivated and highly experienced realtor: buff.mclaughry@fourseasonssir.com.

Lynne LaBombard is a realtor specializing in finding rentals and representing buyers: lynne.m.labombard@gmail.com.

Both the Champlain Valley and Central Vermont have home sharing organizations that might be able to provide information, even if they may not serve the area.

Sean Morris, a recent UVM masters graduate (MS, CDAE) has done a lot of work regarding co-housing and is potentially looking to set up a co-housing consulting business. LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/seanjmorris/> Cell phone: 978-505-9348

USDA Rural Development could be key development and/or funding partners. Contact Ben Doyle at 828-6042 or Benjamin.doyle@usda.gov.

✓ Support Economic Development in the Region

Community Chair: **Sarah Danly**

Facilitator: **Ted Brady**, *Deputy Secretary*, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development

Resource Team Members: **Ben Doyle**, *Associate Director*, USDA Rural Development

Jeannette Eicks, *Director*, VLS Center for Legal Innovation

Bob Haynes, *Executive Director*, Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation

An economic development committee can work to identify economic and business development needs and develop a plan, strategies, and funding opportunities to meet those needs. The group can collaborate with regional, state, and federal partners to attract businesses to the area, develop necessary infrastructure to support business growth, and develop a fund to support local businesses and provide incentives to do business in the region. The group can also help area residents connect to jobs by sharing opportunities and hosting job fairs to connect employers with potential local employees.

Action Steps

1. Define and organize a regional economic development committee.
2. Engage with EC Fiber and other providers. Invite EC Fiber to come to a committee meeting to explain current status and plans for the future of quality broadband
3. Frame a vision by:
 - a. Conduct a strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat analysis
 - b. Map existing businesses in the 4 towns
 - c. Convene GMEDC, TRORC, VLSell, Center on Rural Innovation, and the White River Chamber to brief the committee on economic development activities and to identify ways to build partnerships and support
 - d. Review 4 town plans to identify common themes and opportunities.

Resources

- Bob Haynes at Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation. Contact him at rhaynes@gmedc.com or 295-4231.
- Tucks School and VLSell students (for VLSell contact Jeannette Eicks at 831-1005 or jeicks@vermontlaw.edu.)
- Matt Dunne at Center for Rural Innovation <https://ruralinnovation.us/>
- ACCD Municipal Planning Grants – contact Cindy Blondin at cindy.blondin@vermont.gov or 828-5219 or Nathan Cleveland at Nathan.cleveland@vermont.gov or 585-5659.
- Peter Gregory and TRORC – pgregory@trorc.org or 457-3188.
- Vital Communities – contact Tom Roberts at tom@vitalcommunities.org or 291-9100 x101.
- Vermont Community Foundation could be a funding source for economic and community development projects. Contact Sarah Waring at swaring@vermontcf.org or 388-3355 x283.
- Ben Doyle – USDA Rural Development – Benjamin.doyle@vt.usda.gov or 828-6042.

Task Force Signups

Ina Anderson
Lorraine Atwood
Mark Black
Ian Blackwelder
Abigail Bower
Lori Campbell
Sarah Danly
Joan Goldstein
Chelsea Hadlock
Kathy Hassey
Jenn Hayslett
Megan Helm
Jenna Lapachinski
Nancy LaRowe
Michael Livingston
Anne Peters
Toni Pippy
Alli Rogers
Joseph Ronan
Kate Siepmann
Kyle Thygesen
Todd Tyson
Chris Wood
Grant Young

Visiting Resource Team Recommendations

After Community Meeting Day, Resource Team members, representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, submitted their recommendations for other potential actions and resources the task force might consider as it moves forward. These recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community's unique assets and needs.

Action Step Recommendations

The group could learn more about the Community Supported Enterprise model to see if an initiative in the 4-town region could be a good fit. To learn more contact the Preservation Trust of Vermont.

The taskforce could seek changes to town plan language and zoning that encourages economic development. The group could develop a plan to determine where each town would like to see development, then institute proper zoning to enable such development and protect areas where we do not want development.

Organizing local job fairs could help to connect area residents to more opportunities.

The group could host a meeting with representatives from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation, the Regional Planning Commission, and others to help inform a strategy and best practices.

Reach out to local career and technical centers to see what opportunities they have to train students and adults. These opportunities could be shared regionally to make them more available and accessible.

Based on the existing businesses and the interest of community residents, decide what type of development makes sense in the individual communities and the region and put a plan together to help bring new business,

expand existing development and brainstorm about what future regional and community needs may be. For example, Burke determined that it wanted to capitalize on the mountain biking business that existed in the area and have made the region a go-to mountain-biking destination.

Technical Assistance/Financial Assistance/Peer Connection Recommendations

Connect with the Bethel Revitalization Initiative to learn about grassroots revitalization and supporting entrepreneurs. <http://bethelrevitalizationinitiative.org/>.

There is an Agency of Human Services Business Account Manager, Hugh Bradshaw, under the Creative Workforce Solutions program in this area who facilitates a network meeting of employers and service providers and does outreach to area businesses. Hugh could meet with the committee to understand the work that is already happening and how it can be maximized and streamlined and targeted to the four towns. Hugh will also have access to the local Workforce Investment Board who should also be brought into the discussion. Contact Hugh Bradshaw at hugh.bradshaw@vermont.gov or 241-0319.

Rebecca Sanborn Stone in Bethel is a private consultant who does a lot of work with “placemaking” as does AARP. AARP also provides some grants as do a number of organizations. Contact Rebecca at rebecca@communityworkshopllc.com and Kelly Stoddard Poor at AARP at kstoddardpoor@aarp.org.

The group could connect with the Vermont Law School Legal Lab for Green Entrepreneurs and/or the VLSell program. Contact Jeannette Eicks at 831-1005 or jeicks@vermontlaw.edu.

The Northern Borders Regional Commission (NBRC) could be a potential funding source: <http://www.nbrc.gov/> Contact Tim Tierney, (802) 505-5496, tim.tierney@vermont.gov.

USDA Rural Development can help to guide and fund economic and community development projects. Contact Ben Doyle at Benjamin.doyle@usda.gov or 828-6042.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) can help with guidance and support for businesses in the region. Contact Darcy Carter at darcy.carter@sba.gov, (802) 828-4422 x 203.

Tap into existing action steps identified for the creative sector of Orange and Windsor Counties. Contact Amy Cunningham at the Vermont Arts Council to find out more at acunningham@vermontartscouncil.org or 828-5423.

Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation will be a key partner. Contact Bob Haynes at rhaynes@gmedc.com or 295-3710.

Ask for assistance in planning & zoning strategies from the Vermont Department of Economic Development and the designations that promote dense infill development from the Vermont Department of Housing & community Development. Contact Joan Goldstein at joan.goldstein@vermont.gov.

There are planning grants available to help with this process. Contact Cindy Blondin about Municipal Planning Grants at cindy.blondin@vermont.gov.

The Vermont Creative network zone team for this region are the drivers for overseeing/coordinating some of the recommendations from this plan. Contact Kimberly Gilbert to learn more at kgilbert@trorc.org.

VHCB’s Rural Economic Development Initiative is available to help small communities apply for grants. Find more information here: <https://vhcb.org/redi>.

✓ Conserve Natural Resources and the Working Landscape and Create a Regional Agricultural Network

Community Chair: **TBD**

Facilitator: **Jenna Koloski**, *Community and Policy Manager, VCRD*

Resource Team Members: **Karen Freeman**, *Conservation Director, VT Housing and Conservation Board*
Nancy LaRowe, *Local First Food and Farm Coordinator, Vital Communities*
Peter Gregory, *Executive Director, Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Planning Commission*
Monica Przyperhart, *Community Wildlife Program, VT Fish and Wildlife Department*
Anson Tebbetts, *Secretary, VT Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets*

Many residents would like to plan for the future by protecting valuable working lands and natural resources, addressing climate change, and improving resilience through local conservation efforts. A working lands task force can identify priorities for conservation and reforestation, build funding for conservation efforts, and look into opportunities around carbon sequestration markets, land adoption programs, and partnerships with foresters and farmers in the area to protect land while supporting the working landscape. In support of this work, the task force can create a regional network of area farms, connect new farmers to land and other resources, facilitate shared resources and equipment, and support production, storage, processing, marketing and distribution. The group can also identify and share funding sources and support for farmers transitioning to new products, diversifying their production, or shifting to organic farming practices and organize community work days to support area farms and increase market opportunities such as an annual market and farm celebration at the Tunbridge Fair. Additionally, the group can evaluate a central physical location to serve as a food hub for the region.

Overview of the Issue Today:

Current Challenges:

- Farm viability
- Cost of land
- Subdivision and development
- Agricultural heritage/agricultural literacy
- Declining connection to land, which is critical in order to come together to address climate change
- Posted land
- Price of sustainability produced food and products
- Food access
- Education around local foods, health and nutrition – misinformation
- Soil health – productivity and conservation
- Water quality
- Invasives
- biodiversity

Current work/opportunities:

- Ashley forest proposal led by the Alliance for VT Communities. The proposal will be coming to Sharon and Strafford for a vote – have been working with town leadership and Vermont Land Trust.
- There are Town Forests and town forest committees in all four towns as well as trail networks and committees in Strafford and trails on TSA property in Sharon.
- Have quite a few farms in the region, CSAs, and the South Royalton food coop that sells local food.
- BALE is an excellent regional group that leads in education in this arena.
- Royalton Community Radio has shows on environmental issues and for dairy farming.
- The Tunbridge World's Fair.
- Upper Valley Food and Farm (has led feasibility discussions around a potential food hub for the area.

First Action Steps:

Conserve Natural Resources and the Working Landscape:

1. Research models for strategic conservation and agricultural conservation and support that have been successful in other communities/regions/state. Identify innovative solutions.
2. Conduct an inventory of the land – what is already conserved? What is in Current Use? What land is available? Identify areas/land for strategic conservation that would serve vision and goals (wildlife corridors, public access, agricultural use, forestry, etc.).
3. Bring together representatives from 4-town Conservation Commissions and Planning Commissions in support of strategic conservation inventory and efforts.

Create a Regional Agricultural Network:

1. Build a list/directory of local farms.
2. Host an event to bring farmers together. Perhaps a food and farm party for farmers at Tunbridge Fair grounds. Celebrate our local farmers!
3. Survey farmers (at the event and beyond) about their interest in coming together and what their needs would be (networking, educational opportunities/workshops, collective marketing, tool and skills sharing, etc.)
4. Depending on what is heard, the group could create a series of on-farm workshops for farmers by farmers to share knowledge and skills across the region.

Explore the potential for a central “Hub” for sustainable agriculture:

1. Survey 4-town farms to determine need, demand for and interest in a central food hub.
2. Work with Upper Valley Farm to Food to review feasibility study work and findings.
3. Identify potential funding models and sources.
4. Utilize Royalton community gardens as a starting point and model for education programming and food access initiatives.

Other potential action steps/initiatives:

- Develop compost facilities to support local agriculture.
- Come up with a model for land-use arrangements and play a matchmaker role connecting land owners with stewards who share similar management values and goals.
- Work with legacy farmers in support of their transition/succession plans – what support is needed?
- Facilitate connections across food service providers in the schools in support of utilizing local foods in schools.
- Organize community work days in support of local farms.
- Offer community education around agriculture, conservation, home gardening, and more.
- Increase access to school programming connected to agriculture and natural resources. Develop a regional sustainable farm and garden program.

Resources

- The Department of Fish and Wildlife community wildlife program can support mapping, planning, and convening in support of strategic conservation efforts. Contact Monica Przyperhart at monica.przyperhart@vermont.gov.
- Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission can help with regional planning, grant writing, mapping, educational workshops, and more. Contact Peter Gregory at pgregory@trorc.org or 457-3188.
- Vermont Land Trust could be a conservation partner. Contact Bob Linck at blinck@vlt.org or 861-6403.
- The Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions (AVCC) is a great resource for sharing and gathering information. There will be a statewide Summit on 9/28.
- The Agency of Agriculture can be a resource around ag education programming and conservation/production efforts.
- Center for an Agricultural Economy could be a model/resource/partner.
- USDA Rural Development could be a potential funding source. Contact Ben Doyle at 828-6042 or Benjamin.doyle@vt.usda.gov.
- Vermont Community Foundation could help to identify funding sources for these initiatives. Contact Sarah Waring at 388-3355 x283 or swaring@vermontcf.org.
- Forest, Parks, and Recreation has grants available for conservation/recreation efforts. Contact Becca Washburn at Becca.washburn@vermont.gov.
- VLS Center for Agriculture and Food Systems.
- NRCS.
- Cold Hollow to Canada could be a regional conservation model.
- Cabot Working Landscape network could be a model to learn from.
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board – contact Karen Freeman at karen.freeman@vhcb.org or 828-5067.
- NRCS
- VT Healthy Soils Coalition.
- New England Regional Conservation Partnerships

Task Force Signups

Peter Anderson

Emma Basham

Steve Basham

Elizabeth Billings

Abigail Bower

Heather Buckner

Lori Campbell

Nancy Chapman

Amy Chiriatti

Sarah Danly

John Dettwiler

Donna Foster

Megan Fuerst

Betsy Gaiser

Laura Ginsburg

Kevin Gish
Caroline Gordon
Ryan Haac
Lynne Hadley
Paul Harwood
Elaine Howe
Nancy LaRowe
Elisa Latreille
Jo Levasseur
Stuart Levasseur
Steve Libby
Suzanne Long
Christina Marts
Jeanne McMahan
Rachel Milito
Gary Mullen
Sean Ogle
Wendy Palthey
Annette Petrucelli
Kevin Rose
Michael Sacca
Brad Salzmann
Tim Sanford
Shona Sanford-Long
Sue Sellew
Henry Swayze
Kyle Thygesen
Jennifer Thygesen
Shannon Varley
Chris Wood

Visiting Resource Team Recommendations

After Community Meeting Day, Resource Team members, representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, submitted their recommendations for other potential actions and resources the task force might consider as it moves forward. These recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community's unique assets and needs.

Action Step Recommendations

The task force could collaborate with conservation commissions in the four towns to host a series of landowner information sessions to present conservation options and include presentations by landowners who have conserved their land and representatives from one or more of the following organizations: the Nature Conservancy, Northeast Wilderness Trust, Upper Valley Land Trust, and Vermont Land Trust.

The task force could tap the Agency of Natural Resources' BioFinder and Vermont Conservation Design to help identify and set conservation priorities.

Task Force and conservation commission members could consider attending the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions' Annual Summit on September 28, 2019 - focused on Vermont Conservation Design to be held at Middlebury College's Breadloaf Campus.

The Working Lands Task Force could review work done by the University of Vermont and Vermont Land Trust about the potential for owners of forestland to tap into carbon sequestration markets. See the Vermont Land Trust Forest Carbon Report vlt.org/carbon-report

Consider exploring a regional approach to land conservation in the area, which would enhance funding opportunities.

The group could conduct an inventory of all four towns to establish a list of all committees and commissions that are working on land use policy and their goals and then connect with the Alliance for Vermont Communities to integrate efforts.

The group could explore area food hubs - Mad River Valley Food Hub and the Center for Agricultural Economy to determine if this model could work for the four town region.

Look at what has worked in other towns/villages that have similar landscapes and take the time to do market research about promotion and audience to get the best buy in.

Consider alternative funding strategies to build a bank for project work and could be used as match for grant applications.

The task force could lead on a regional land use plan with support from TRORC.

Contact the Upper Valley Land Trust and/or the Vermont Land Trust to explore opportunities for conserving farmland, forestland and natural resource/recreation lands in the region.

Connect and collaborate with people working on outdoor recreation in the area.

With the Orange County Forester (Dave Paganelli) and other possible resource people (VT Woodlands, VLT Forester, consulting foresters) on Town forest management guideline assistance.

The group will be most successful if they identify things that farmers and environmentalists value and can work on together rather than focus on differences.

The group could plan a regional farmers market that is centrally located or a local Coop with Shares perhaps through a microbusiness loan from Community Action. Connect this to AHS Creative Workforce Solutions to link people to businesses. Connect with Vermont DOC to see if they can support through work release programs.

Technical Assistance/Financial Assistance/Peer Connection Recommendations

Contact Vital Communities to learn about their process for thinking strategically about a food hub in the Upper Valley for the past year and a half, and to make sure farmers, especially new farmers, know about the resources they provide (farmer meet-up groups and events connecting farmers with wholesale buyers & consumers). Contact Nancy LaRowe at nancy@vitalcommunities.org or 291-9100 x106.

The Greater Cabot Working Landscape Network. Contact Allison Gulka-Millard <https://www.facebook.com/greatercabotworkinglandscapenetwork/>.

Review Land and Water Conservation fund for possible funding for local land conservation : <https://fpr.vermont.gov/land-and-water-conservation-fund>

Reach out to others who have done similar or related projects – perhaps ACORN in Addison County: <http://www.acornvt.org/>

Reach out to the Vermont Land Trust re: their Farmland Access Project and conservation opportunities: <https://www.vlt.org/affordable-farmland/>

Natural Resources Conservation Service programs help farmers reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, and increase wildlife habitat. They also have grants available for farmers.

Land For Good could be a resource. Mike Ghia lives in Windham County but does statewide work on farm viability and farmland access: mike@landforgood.org.

The Upper Valley Land Trust could be an important partner: <https://uvlt.org/>, 603-643-6626

Nature Conservancy: <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/vermont/>, Jon Binhammer, jbinhammer@tnc.org

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Vermont Conservation Design: Jens Hilke, Jens.Hilke@vermont.gov, <https://anr.vermont.gov/node/1182>

Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions: http://vtconservation.com/conservation_summit/

VHCB could be a great resource and partner in this work. Contact Karen Freeman at karen.freeman@vhcb.org or 828-5067.

NOFA could provide guidance and support around an Ag network and farmer-focused events. Contact Erin Buckwalter at erin@nofavt.org.

Vital Communities has a lot of interest in working with Upper Valley farmers and climate resiliency. Do our area farmers know what they can do with their property to aid climate resiliency? If they do, can they make the change that needs to take place and what is the intersection with the local community? We are looking at applying for funds to work on answering some of these questions and would welcome the towns to join us in this work. Contact Nancy Larowe at nancy@vitalcommunities.org.

Agency of Agriculture has grant opportunities that could be a good fit for some of this work. Laura Ginsburg lives in Tunbridge and works in the Development Division at the Agency and is happy to be an on the ground resource: laura.ginsburg@vermont.gov.

There are planning grants available from the Department of Housing and Community Development to assist in planning and/or feasibility studies. Contact Cindy Blondin at cindy.blondin@vermont.gov.

The Vermont Farm to Plate network could be a resource. Sarah Danly lives locally and coordinates Farm to Plate. Contact her at sarah@vsjf.org or 828-3745.

VHCB's Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program can help farmers and forest products businesses plan for diversification, improve their business management skills, access financing, find land, and transfer their business to a new generation or new ownership. The Viability Program works with established businesses (2 years running the business, at least \$15,000 in sales) but can make referrals for those who don't fit this to other resources. The VT Farm & Forest Viability Program also offers long-term land ownership planning to forestland owners. Families or individuals who own significant tracts of forestland and would like assistance planning for future ownership transitions can get help from a family forester and attorney through our program. Contact: <https://vhcb.org/viability>, email Liz Gleason at liz@vhcb.org or call 802-828-3370.

Vermont Land Link and the New England Land Link are resources for land owners who want to find people to farm their land, or for farmers looking for land. They are both listing services for farmland.

Some USDA Grants to consider (Please contact Senator Sanders' office for a letter of support for USDA competitive grant applications! Erica_campbell@sanders.senate.gov).

- [Farmers Market](#) and [Local Food](#) promotion programs
- [Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program](#)
- [Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education](#) (SARE) grants

Consult the VT Dept. of Forest, Parks and Recs town forest stewardship guide:

https://fpr.vermont.gov/sites/fpr/files/Forest_and_Forestry/Community_Forests_and_Trees/Library/TownForestStewardshipGuide.pdf.

Other towns that have recently acquired and gone through (or are going through) a process to develop a town forest management plan include Richmond, Waitsfield, Newbury and Westford; local members of those towns' Conservation Commissions or other community members may have helpful insights.

Look at farmer coalition groups such as Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition. They share ideas and work together with UVM extension services and state/federal agencies to have creative solutions for modern day farming challenges! Website: <https://www.champlainvalleyfarmercoalition.com/home.html>

Consider NBRC or USDA RD funding for items like shared facilities or equipment. For NBRC Contact Tim Tierney at tim.tierney@vermont.gov. For USDA RD contact Ben Doyle at Benjamin.doule@usda.gov.

Resources for the Agriculture/Climate Change connection (healthy soils, payments for ecosystem services, etc.)

- [Soil4Climate](#), Karl Thidemman, karl.thidemann@gmail.com
- [Vermont Healthy Soils Coalition](#), Cat Buxton, catduffybuxton@gmail.com
- [CT River Watershed Farmers Alliance](#). Paul Doton, pdoton@gmail.com
- UVM Extension
 - Jenn Colby, UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture Pasture Program Coordinator. Jennifer.Colby@uvm.edu. Jenn owns a farm in Randolph.
 - Joshua Faulkner, Farming and Climate Change Program Coordinator, joshua.faulkner@uvm.edu
 - Kimberly Hagen, Grazing specialist, Kimberly.Hagen@uvm.edu
 - Chris Callahan – Chris works out of the UVM Bennington office. He is an excellent Ag engineer working statewide on projects such as cold storage facilities for produce. chris.callahan@uvm.edu
 - Heather Darby – Work out of St. Albans office. A renowned Vermont agronomist, working with farmers on a wide array of hands-on projects like no-till, cover crops, grain production like barley, and hemp production. Heather.Darby@uvm.edu
- [VT Grass Farmers Association](#), Meghan Sheradin, meghan@vtgrassfarmers.org
- VT Agency of Agriculture, Alex DePillis is a fantastic resource for the agriculture/climate nexus (payments for ecosystems services, on-farm renewable energy, farming friendly solar, etc.), DePillis, Alex Alex.DePillis@vermont.gov
- Rural Vermont is always a great partner and resource. They are especially good at lobbying for the needs of small scale farmers at the VT statehouse. Graham Unangst-Rufenacht, graham@ruralvermont.org
- [NOFA-Vermont](#) / [Vermont Organic Farmers](#) – to help farmers transition to organic production. There are [cost share](#) programs for farms in transition. NOFA also offers technical assistance to farmers.

VI. 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 be 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?

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| • High quality soils | • Skiing | • People have a connection to the land. Ownership is often multigenerational. | • Horse farms |
| • Trees | • Hiking | • Sugaring | • South Royalton market as a place to sell local produce |
| • Maple | • A lot of CSAs fosters competition | • Coexistence with wildlife | • Breweries (high number per capita) |
| • Lumber | • Reasonable landowners | • Farmers Markets | • Tunbridge Fair |
| • Firewood | • People know how to work the land | • On-farm slaughter | • Coffee roasters |
| • Water | • Diversified agriculture | • Veterinary services | • 5 covered bridges |
| • Pasture land | • Sheep | • Logging | • Organic dairies |
| • Recreation trails (developed and potential) | • Goats | • Master's degree in forestry and agriculture at VT Law School | • Meat processing in Sharon |
| • Wildlife | • Cows (dairy and meat) | • Ice cream | • Saw mills (permanent and portable) |
| • Moose | • Pigs | | • Strafford Creamery |
| • Town forests | | | |
| • Hay | | | |

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 apps could be a more formal way to decrease miles travelled. Use GoVermont app – 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; cell 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 specify 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 is an 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. Reestablish 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 gleanng 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.

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 to 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 don’t 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 media 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).

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.



Sharon Academy High School students shared their ideas for the future.

VII. Our 4-Town Future Community Visit Participants

Julia Abraham	Mark Chute	Nell Gwin	Heather Leavitt	Sarah Pfeiffer	Art Stacy
Alison Adam	Noah Chute	Ryan Haac	Randy Leavitt	Toni Pippy	Jen Stainton
Ina Anderson	Ira Clark	Lynne Hadley	Raelene Lemery	Mark Pitton	Rob Stainton
Peter Anderson	Rachel Clark	Chelsea Hadlock	Jo Levasseur	Fred Pond	Bob Stoddard
Nicole Antal	Bonnie Clause	Gretchen Hannon	Pam Levasseur	Casey Potter	Bob Stoddard
Chuck Ashton	Sue Coburn	Alyssa Hartman	Stuart Levasseur	Nathan Potter	Mary Stoddard
Deadra Ashton	Jillian Connor	Josh Harwood	Steve Libby	Carin Pratt	Melissa Strayton
Lorraine Atwood	Sandy Conrad	Paul Harwood	Michael Livingston	Denny and Beth Preston	Henry Swayze
Mary Ayer	Eric Cornell	Kathy Hassey	John Lloyd	Phoebe Preston	Laura Tatro
Doc Bagley	John Damville	Walter Hastings	Olivia Lober	Becky Proulx	Bridgett Taylor
Rebecca Bailey	Sarah Danly	Joey Hawkins	Suzanne Long	Israel Provoncha	Meg Teachout
Bower Bakos	Anna Dechert	John Hawkins	Eva Loomis	Randy Richardson	Steve Teel
Yuliya Ballou	Tim Denny	Bob Haynes	Jamie Loura	Jess Richter	Kathi Terami
Gordan Barnaby	Sylvie Desautels	Jenn Hayslett	Peter Lowes	Jim Rikert	Kayla Thibault
Gordan Barnaby	John Dettwiler	Judy Hayward	Gidget Lyman	Kayleigh Rodig	Bill Thompson
Luke Barnaby	Patricia Doyle	Megan Helm	Chris Mabey	John Roe	Mary Thompson
Sue Barnaby	Dave Dumais	Rose Hemond	Mark MacDonald	Alli Rogers	Jennifer Thygesen
Emma Basham	John Dumville	Paige Heverly	Caitlyn MacGlaflin	Charlie Rollins	Kyle Thygesen
Steve Basham	Paula Duprat	Nancy Hobart	Roderick Maclay	Joseph Ronan	Victoria Traudt
Kate Bass Root	Richard Dybvig	Susan Hodges	Christina Marts	Jim Rooney	Judy Tucker
Scott Beavers	Eunice Eavis	Michael Hogan	Emery Mattheis	Kevin Rose	Todd Tyson
Margy Becker	John Echeverria	Margot Holmes	Maeve McDermott	David Rottmayer	Shannon Varley
Jayson Benoit	John Echternach	Allen Hood	Alice McDonald	Lauri Rottmayer	James Weatherbee
Kate Berdan	Karen Eddy	Kit Hood	Marll McDonald	Dick Ruben	David Webb
Lauri Berkenkamp	Elizabeth Edwards	Megan Hopkins	Tracey McFadden	Dan (Rudi) Ruddell	Aaron Weed
Elizabeth Billings	Greg Elder	J.T. Horn	Jermiah McLane	Mario Sacca	George White
Hoyt Bingham	Eve Ermer	Carley Howe	Ann McLaughlin	Michael Sacca	Jill Wilcox
Cindy Binzen	Charlotte Faccio	Elaine Howe	Jeanne McMahan	Brad Salzmman	Steve Willbanks
Karen Bird	Judith Falk	Nancy Howe	Michael McPhetres	Tim Sanford	Barrett Williams
Mark Black	Marie Ferris	Rebecca Hoyt	Lori Mikusa	Shona Sanford-Long	Elyssa Willladson
Ian Blackwelder	Brenda Field	Ted Hoyt	Rachel Milito	Mike Scanlan	Rick Wilson
Kevin Blakeman	Roz Finn	Thomas Hoyt	Eliza Minnucci	Jim Schley	Ben Wolfe
Gigi Boardman	AJ Follensbee	Bill Huff	Andrew Miraldi	Fran Schmidt	Chris Wood
Shirley Boles	Nicole Forest	Robyn Jacobs	Ashley Miraldi	Rebecca Seibel	Ken Wright
Abigail Bower	Donna Foster	Tom Jacobs	Anissa Morrison	Beth Schringer	Christa Wurm
Timothy Briglin	Rebecca Foulk	Mark Jahns	Deb Mullen	Beth Sekinger	Liz York
Heather Buckner	Amy Frost	x Johnston	Gary Mullen	Sue Sellew	Colie Young
Bill Burden	Megan Fuerst	Jack Jones	Bill Murphy	Carol Sheldon	Grant Young
Peter Button	Rocky Fuller	Suzanne Jones	Peter Neri	Chuck Sherman	Jena Young
Cat Buxton	Kim Furlong	Kay Jorgensen	Mary Newman	Elspeth Sherman	Loren Young
Susan Cain	Megan Furst	Josh Kaham	Zoe Newmorco	Lauren Sherman	Shane Young
Lori Campbell	Betsy Gaiser	Rebekah Kallgren	Sharon O'Connor	Kate Siepmann	Melissa Zoerheide
Ben Canellys	Kathy Galluzzo	Bryan Keiser	Ian O'Donnell	Suzanne Skarsten	Janet Zug
Ben Canellys	Mary Gavin	Mike Kiess	Sean Ogle	Adam Smith	and many more...
Sarah Canterbury	Lucy Gibson	Dave Kimball	George Ostler	Wally and Barbara Smith	
Raynald Carre	Laura Ginsburg	Peter Klinck	Becky Owens	Suzanna Smith-Horn	
Janet Cavanagh	Dee Gish	Lisa Kutolowski	David Paganelli	Michael Snow	
Valeria Celaya	Kevin Gish	Lucyanna Labadie	Wendy Palthey	Reuben Sotach	
Peter Chad	Joan Goldstein	Marybeth Lang	Lynn Parker	Cece, Cameron Speth	
Nancy Chapman	Caroline Gordon	Carol Langstaff	Ashley Patton	Gus Speth	
Scott Chesnut	Kevin Grady	Jenna Lapachinski	Russ Patton		
Van Chesnut	Susie Gray	Nancy LaRowe	Anne Peters		
Peter Chesp	Paige Greenfield	Elisa Latreille	Annette Petrucelli		
Amy Chiriatti	Peter Gregory	Lee Lawrence	Anne Peyton		
Matt Christie	Lauren Griswold	Mariah Lawrence			

VIII. Visiting Resource Team Members

Kathy Beyer, *Vice President for Development*, Housing Vermont, kbeyer@hvt.org, 802-863-8424

Emily Blistein, *Director of Business Strategy*, Let's Grow Kids, emily@letsgrowkids.org, 802-391-9801

Ted Brady, *Deputy Secretary*, Agency of Commerce & Community Devel, ted.brady@vermont.gov; 802-828-3080

Celia Cadwell, *Program and Grants Specialist*, Vermont Community Foundation, ccadwell@vermontcf.org, 802-388-3355 x222

Megan Camp, *VP/Program Director*, Shelburne Farms, mcamp@shelburnefarms.org, 802-985-8686 x3

Erica Campbell, *Policy & Outreach*, Office of Senator Bernie Sanders, Erica_Campbell@Sanders.Senate.Gov, 802-862-0697

Sherry Carlson, *Senior Director of Programs*, Lets Grow Kids, sherry@letsgrowkids.org, 802-877-2420

Maura Carroll, *Executive Director*, VT League of Cities & Towns, mcarroll@vlct.org, 802-229-9111

Paul Costello, *Executive Director*, VT Council on Rural Development, pcostello@vtrural.org, 802-223-5763

Amy Cunningham, *Deputy Director*, Vermont Arts Council, acunningham@vermontartscouncil.org, 802-828-5423

Gemma Del Rossi, *Fund Development & Communications*, Vermont Council on Rural Development, gemma@vtrural.org, 802-223-6091

Ben Doyle, *Associate Director*, USDA Rural Development, benjamin.doyle@vt.usda.gov, 802-828-6042

Paul Dragon, *Director of Policy and Planning*, VT Agency of Human Services, paul.dragon@vermont.gov

Jeannette Eicks, *Director*, VLS Center for Legal Innovation, jeicks@vermontlaw.edu, 802-831-1005

Nancy Everhart, *Agricultural Director*, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, nancy@vhcb.org,

Pete Fellows, *GIS Manager*, Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission, pfellows@trorc.org, 802-457-3188 x121

Karen Freeman, *Conservation Director*, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, karen.freeman@vhcb.org, 802-828-5067

Zac Freeman, *Founding Member*, Board of Directors & VP, RASTA-Rochester/Randolph Sports Trail Alliance, zac@jsfreeman.com, 802-272-6214

Kimberly Gilbert, *Regional Planner*, Two Rivers-Ottawuechee Regional Commission, kgilbert@trorc.org

Laura Ginsburg, *Agricultural Development Section Chief*, Agency of Ag, Food & Markets, Laura.Ginsburg@vermont.gov, 802-522-2252

Dee Gish, *Finance Manager and Special Projects*, Two Rivers-Ottawuechee RPC, dgish@trorc.org, 457-3188 x110

Liz Gleason, *Farm Viability Program*, VT Housing & Conservation Board, liz@vhcb.org

Joan Goldstein, *Commissioner*, VT Dept of Economic Development, joan.goldstein@vermont.gov, 802-272-2399

Peter Gregory, *Executive Director*, Two Rivers-Ottawuechee RPC, pgregory@trorc.org, 802-457-3188

Lauren Griswold, *Valley Food & Farm Program*, Vital Communities, Lauren@VitalCommunities.org, 802-291.9100 x 107

Josh Hanford, *Acting Commissioner*, VT Dept of Housing and Community Development, Josh.Hanford@vermont.gov

Robert Haynes, *Executive Director*, Grn Mtn Economic Development Corp, rhaynes@gmedc.com, 802-295-3710

Paige Heverly, *Energy & Transportation Project Coordinator*, Vital Communities, paige@vitalcommunities.org, 802-291-9100

Gary Holloway, *Downtown Program Coordinator*, Dept of Housing and Community Devel., gary.holloway@vermont.gov, 802-828-3220

Monica Hutt, *Commissioner*, VT Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living, monica.hutt@vermont.gov, 802-871-3350

Mike Kiess, *Workforce Housing Coordinator*, Vital Communities, michael@vitalcommunities.org, 802-291-9100 x113

Jenna Koloski, *Community and Policy Manager*, VT Council on Rural Development, jenna@vtrural.org, 802-225-6091

Matthew Langham, *Regional Planning Coordinator*, VT Agency of Transportation, matthew.langham@vermont.gov, 802-828-5578

Jenna Lapachinski, *Field Service*, Preservation Trust of Vermont, jenna@ptvermont.org, 802-552-0659

Nancy LaRowe, *Local First Alliance Manager*, Vital Communities, nancy@vitalcommunities.org

Seth Leonard, *Managing Director of Community Development*, Vermont Housing Finance Agency, sleonard@vhfa.org, 802-652-3403

Bob Linck, *Central Vermont Director*, VT Land Trust, BLinck@vlt.org, 802-861-6403

Sam Lincoln, *Deputy Commissioner*, VT Forests, Parks and Recreation, Sam.Lincoln@vermont.gov

Beth Long, *Chief Financial Officer*, Twin Pines Housing, beth.long@twinpineshousing.org, 802-291-7000

Trey Martin, *Attorney*, Downs Rachlin Martin; VLS Entrepreneurship and Legal Laboratory, tmartin@drm.com, 802-225-5503

Elijah Massey, *Loan Specialist*, USDA Rural Development, elijah.massey@vt.usda.gov

Chris Meehan, *Chief Community Impact Officer*, Vermont Foodbank, cmeehan@vtfoodbank.org

Jon-Michael Muise, *Vermont Area Director*, USDA Rural Development, jon.muise@vt.usda.gov, 802-689-3038

Ramsey Papp, *Family Development Specialist*, Capstone Community Action, rpapp@capstonevt.org, 802-728-9506

Haley Pero, *Outreach Specialist*, Office of US Senator Bernie Sanders, haley_pero@sanders.senate.gov, 802-862-0697

Monique Priestley, *President & Founder*, Space on Main, Bradford, mepriestley@gmail.com, 802-449-6246

Clay Purvis, *Director*, VT DPS, Telecommunications & Connectivity Div, clay.purvis@vermont.gov, 802-371-9655

Randy Richardson, *Development Director*, Upper Valley Trails Alliance, randy.richardson@uvtrails.org, 802-649-9075

Jessica Richter, *Planner*, Two Rivers Ottauquechee RPC, jrichter@trorc.org, 802-457-3188 #125

Gretchen Rittenhouse, *Senior Housing Analyst*, VT Housing & Conservation Board, gretchen@vhcb.org, 802-828-5013

Tom Roberts, *Executive Director*, Vital Communities, tom@vitalcommunities.org, 802-291-9100 x101

Beth Roy, *Valley Food and Farm Manager*, Vital Communities, beth@vitalcommunities.org, 802.291.9100 x 105

Lisa Ryan, *Field Service Representative*, Preservation Trust of VT, lisa@ptvermont.org, 917-2994

Gus Seelig, *Executive Director*, VT Housing & Conservation Board, gus@vhcb.org, 802-828-3251

Michael Snyder, *Commissioner*, Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation, michael.snyder@vermont.gov; 802-828-1534

Beth Stern, *Executive Director*, Central VT Council on Aging, bstern@cvcoa.org, 802-479-0531

Anson Tebbetts, *Secretary*, VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets, anson.tebbetts@vermont.gov; 802-828-5667

Tim Tierney, *Special Project Director*, Agcy of Commerce and Community Devel., tim.tierney@vermont.gov, 802-505-5496

Sarah Waring, *VP for Grants and Community Investments*, Vermont Community Foundation, 802-388-3355 x283

Kevin Wiberg, *Philanthropic Advisor for Community Engagement*, Vermont Community Foundation, kwiberg@vermontcf.org, 802-388-3355 x284

Sarah Wraight, *Regional Planner*, Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission, swraight@trorc.org, 457-3188 x123



Visiting team members gathered to share observations at the end of one of the forum days.



PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601-1384
802-223-6091 | info@vtrural.org

<http://vtrural.org>



3 Court St., Middlebury, VT 05753
802-388-3355 | info@vermontcf.org

<http://vermontcf.org>