

Brownington Connects

Community Visit Report and Action Plan
August 2022



Produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development

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Vision for Brownington's Future

Compiled from vision statements shared during Community Visit Meetings and supported by the majority of participants at the Resource Meeting and an online survey. The statements represent some of the broad hopes that the majority of responding residents have for the long term good of the greater Brownington community.

Brownington residents look to a future Brownington where:

- ❖ there is a strong community spirit and sense of identity
- ❖ a wide variety of residents connect and come together forming a strong community
- ❖ we are welcoming to newcomers
- ❖ families want to live because it is a safe place to raise children
- ❖ we feel safe walking and biking on our roads
- ❖ we embrace a “live and let live” lifestyle where people feel they can live their lives and aren’t told what to do
- ❖ we are a quiet community where you can enjoy the sounds of nature
- ❖ community members feel a sense of belonging, integration, and connection

I. Introduction

As you drive through the villages of the scenic rural community of Brownington, you are treated to views of the Northeast Kingdom that will take your breath away. Looking one way, there is a clear view of the iconic Willoughby Gap and in other directions, the rolling hills, farm fields, and village centers that define the region. Each village of Brownington showcases characteristics that make up this unique community – the Evansville Trading Post, which serves as a key local business and gathering spot, community center points at the Town Office and Brownington Central School, the historic Old Stone House Museum and the observatory that offers 360° views across the region. This is a community deeply rooted in its agricultural history with a wealth of assets and opportunities for the future.

Throughout the Brownington Connects process, the scenery and features of the landscape and community stood out to VCRD staff and the Visiting Team, but in the end, it was the people of Brownington that were most impressive. This is a growing community of residents with true pride of place and a real dedication to the future success of their town and their neighbors. There is a clear commitment to preserve and showcase traditions of the past, while identifying and embracing hopes for the future. Throughout the process, and in the priorities that were selected, it was clear that this is a community that is ready to come together, connect, and take action for the success and vitality of their town.

It is not easy to choose priorities, and there are many other good ideas for action listed in the ‘opportunities’ section of this report that can inform the ongoing work of the Task Forces, but in the end, Brownington community members selected solid priorities for action that will lead to a stronger and more vibrant community and economy for all including:

- **Expand Community Events**
- **Improve Road Safety and Maintenance**
- **Boost Local Food Access, Agriculture, and Business**

These initiatives set challenging but achievable goals. There is a lot of work to do, but task force chairs are coming together to frame a cohesive structure and a path forward. With more than 80 local people from all parts of the community participating in the process, and work already underway to advance these priorities, it is clear that there is a great opportunity in Brownington for forward momentum and progress.

The Task Forces advancing these issues 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 is prepared to support the efforts of Brownington and we look forward to providing follow up help to the Brownington Connects Task Forces as asked.

There are many people to thank for making this Community Visit effort possible.

We would like to thank the Brownington Selectboard and Planning Commission who initially invited this process. We also deeply appreciate the work and leadership of the Steering Committee who helped guide the process from the beginning including: Penny Chamberlin, Bev Davis, Bill Davis, Nicole Davis, Val Faust, Bari Fischer, Larry Fliegelman, Jane Greenwood, Jacquelin Meyer, Hal Reinauer, Andrew Sewtt, Larry Thompson, Molly Veysey, and Beverly White. Thank you also to all of the community leaders, groups, and organizations who worked to spread the word about the event and made sure everyone in town was invited and encouraged to participate!

Thanks also to funding support from USDA Rural Development, the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Community National Bank, and VCRD members and donors who make this process possible.

VCRD calls on 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 Brownington Connects Visiting and Resource Teams (listed in the back of this report)—they are the best of Vermont’s public servants.

Getting things done is all about leadership, and all of Brownington should be grateful to those who’ve stepped up to serve as chairs of the task forces: Donna Dauphinais (community events), Ted Davis (road safety and infrastructure), and David Templeman (food, ag, and business).

VCRD especially wants to thank Nicole Davis for stepping up to serve as the overall chairperson for the Brownington Connects process. While Nicole is newer to town, she has deep roots in Brownington and is dedicated to the success of the community. Nicole has brought an excellent perspective to the process – someone who is dedicated to the future while understanding the roots of the community. It has been a pleasure to work with her and we know the work ahead will be more successful because of her dedication, organization, and drive towards success.

At VCRD, we are so proud to work in places where community is real and strong, where local residents work together to get things done and make their communities the best they can possibly be. It was a great pleasure to work with the residents of Brownington who stand up for the town and who are lined up for the common good and best future for this wonderful community. We are eager to follow your progress and support your success!

III. The “Brownington Connects” Community Visit Process

VCRD’s Community Visit program is a way for towns to engage and bring together their residents, set common goals and directions in a neutral and facilitated structure, and access resources that will help them take action on those goals. **Here is a snapshot of the 5-month process in Brownington:**



Planning Committee Meeting: March 24, 2022

On March 24, 2022, 14 local residents met to plan for the launch of the Brownington Community Visit process. This group came up with a name for the process – Brownington Connects – and helped to plan the kick-off. They decided on forum topics and an invitation process. Through calls, e-mails, and flyers, this team worked hard to promote the kick-off.



The Planning Committee included: Penny Chamberlin, Bev Davis, Bill Davis, Nicole Davis, Val Faust, Bari Fischer, Larry Fliegelman, Jane Greenwood, Jacquelin Meyer, Hal Reinauer, Andrew Sewtt, Larry Thompson, Molly Veysey, Beverly White

Step 1 ~ Kick-Off Forums and Community Dinner: April 28, 2022

Brownington Connects kicked off with 4 brainstorming forums held at the Brownington Central School. Over 40 participants shared assets, challenges, and ideas for action in the following forum topics chosen by the planning team: Community Connection & Communication; Recreation, Entertainment & Fun; Businesses in Brownington; and Infrastructure: Roads, Broadband, Cell. 14 visiting team members participated, learning more about Brownington and providing reflections to the community.

Visiting Team members included: Ted Brady, *Executive Director*, VT League of Cities & Towns; Jennifer Carlo, *Executive Director*, NEK Collaborative; Ben Doyle, *President*, Preservation Trust of Vermont; Josh Hanford, *Commissioner*, VT Dept of Housing and Community Development; Alison Low, *Senior Planner*, Northeastern VT Development Association; Charles Martin, *Outreach Director*, Office of Senator Patrick Leahy; Luke O’Brien, *Field Service Director*, VT Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation; Misty Sinsigalli, *Area Director*, USDA Rural Development; David Snedeker, *Executive Director*, Northeastern VT Development Assn; and Will Stevens, Office of Senator Bernie Sanders.



Vermont Council on Rural Development staff included: Margaret Gibson, *Operations and Communications*; Alyssa Johnson, *Community Projects Associate*; Jenna Koloski, *Community Engagement and Policy Director*; and Brian Lowe, *Executive Director*.

Step 2 ~ Community Meeting: May 25, 2022

After the kick-off, all of the brainstormed ideas were distilled into 15 key areas of action. Over 25 community members joined at the Brownington Central School to narrow the list of priorities for community action. After lively dialogue and a dot-voting exercise, 3 action ideas emerged as key priorities: **Expand Community Events; Improve Road Safety and Maintenance; and Boost Local Food Access, Agriculture and Local Business.** Participants then signed up for task forces that will convene to move these priorities forward.



Step 3 ~ Resource Meeting and Task Force Launch: June 16, 2022

On June 16, 2022, community members, facilitators, and resource team members came together to develop action plans, identify resources, and form task force groups that will work in the months ahead to implement the priorities. From here forward, all “Brownington Connects” action is focused at the task force level.

Resource Team Members included: Jake Claro, *Director, Farm to Plate*; Bethany Dunbar, *Community Programs*



Manager, Center for an Agricultural Economy; Alison Low, *Senior Planner, Northeastern VT Development Assn.*; Jon Ramsey, *Executive Director, Center for an Agricultural Economy*; and Mike Strait, *Hearth and Home Country Store.*

Vermont Council on Rural Development staff included: Alyssa Johnson, *Community Projects Associate*; Jenna Koloski, *Community Engagement and Policy Director*; Brian Lowe, *Executive Director*; and Jessica Savage, *Director of Community Collaboration.*



Community Visit Kick-off day featured a dinner with live music from local musicians Phil and Eileen Baker.

IV. Brownington Connects Priorities

Determined by Brownington residents at the Brownington Connects Community Meeting
May 25, 2022

Proving that those who live, work and raise their families in a community are best qualified to understand its needs and potential, more than 80 Brownington community members whittled down a list of 15 action ideas to 3 priorities that offer opportunities to enhance existing resources, and strengthen the town through exciting new ventures. Residents concluded the meeting by signing up for Task Forces in the selected areas.

Brownington residents selected three priorities for future action:

► Expand Community Events

A task force could form to boost existing community activities, such as Old Stone House events. Additionally, the task force could plan an annual series of events to unify and connect the community and offer entertainment and fun for all ages. Events could include regular potluck dinners, community concerts, a Brownington Day celebration, strawberry and apple festivals, a fishing derby, community sledding events, a community fair, and more. Events could help to bring vibrancy to the community, provide more opportunities for community gathering, and engage youth as well as connect to the Amish community.

► Improve Road Safety and Maintenance

Brownington residents of all ages are concerned about the maintenance of the roads as well as the safety due to speeding. A task force in collaboration with the Town could form to explore potential solutions to slow traffic such as improved enforcement, signage, speed bumps, etc. In the long term, the community could revisit the conversation around speed limits within the town, as well as funding and strategies to improve culvert and road maintenance over time.

► Boost Local Food Access, Agriculture, and Local Business

A task force could form to focus on connecting and supporting existing businesses in Brownington, as well as working with regional and State experts to attract and recruit new businesses that meet the needs of the community and visitors. In particular, residents are interested in seeing the expansion of agriculture and food-related business such as farms, farm stands, food and dining businesses, or a small market to make local and healthy foods more accessible. The group could also consider rebuilding the “Greater Brownington Business Association” by developing a network of businesses in Brownington and around the region and ways to share resources and collectively advertise to locals and beyond.

Other Key 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 on Community Visit Day. 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.

Attract Visitors and Potential New Residents

A group could form to develop and implement a plan to bring more visitors, and by extension potential new residents to Brownington. The group could consider working in collaboration with local landowners and community members to plan a series of large events or festivals that would attract visitors for the area's food, music, and more. The group could consider ways to capitalize on existing assets such as ATV, snowmobile, and hiking trails by developing lodging or camping opportunities, and improving signage and area trail and amenities information. The group could also implement strategies to welcome new residents through sharing area information and resources and connecting newcomers to community efforts.

Improve Community Communications

A task force could form to expand communications for community members. These resources could include an online hub, bulletin boards, mailings, signage, increased Front Porch Forum participation, and a print newspaper or newsletter to keep residents informed and share events, volunteer opportunities, and resources. The group could also help to support and share the development of a new Town website.

Beautify Brownington and Advance Historic Preservation

A group could form to focus community efforts on beautifying Brownington. Projects could include tree and flower planting, improvements to welcome signs at entrances to the community, and public art. The group could lead on local volunteer recruitment and fundraising to accomplish these initiatives.

Advance Outdoor Recreation

A task force could form to celebrate current outdoor recreation assets and work to expand opportunities for a variety of recreation opportunities. The group could work with Kingdom Trails and other partners to expand mountain bike access or gravel bike paths in the community. Recreation events could help to showcase bike and run opportunities for locals and visitors. Additionally, the group could showcase and expand opportunities for motorized recreation such as ATVs and snowmobiles and think about ways to improve access to amenities such as snacks, gear, and lodging along the trails.

Improve Broadband and Cell Service

Brownington residents would like to have better access to cell coverage and broadband internet. Brownington 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 cell and broadband coverage to the community. This could include supporting the representative to the regional Communications Union District to ensure the quickest and most affordable build out options for the community.

Expand Alternative Energy and Efficiency

A volunteer group could form to improve access to affordable options for alternative energy for Brownington residents. The group could invite providers to share resources, support, and technical assistance to community members looking to access reliable alternative energy sources. The group could also find funding and assistance to support more weatherization efforts in the community and also explore building an electric vehicle charging station in town.

Improve Childcare Options

A group could come together to explore options to expand access to early care and education. Additionally, the group could explore alternative models such as offering babysitter training for local youth and fostering connections with families that need care.

Develop Local Recreation Facilities and Programming

A local committee could form to identify funding, technical assistance, and community support and volunteers for recreation facilities and programming. Many Brownington community members expressed a need for facilities such as a skate park, basketball courts, rec fields, a picnic area, and other facilities for the community to gather and have fun. Additionally, the committee could offer free community programming such as a softball or other rec leagues and an equipment lending library.

Address Substance Abuse

Brownington residents, especially youth, expressed concern about drug use in the community. A task force could come together to focus on prevention and recovery and improve access to critical resources for community members that need support. This work could include helping to improve information about and access to local hubs for treatment and services, creating safe disposal sites and addressing needle disposal concerns in community locations, and developing peer and community resources to support individuals and families in need of services.

Identify a Community Gathering Space

Brownington residents would like to develop a space to gather together as a community. Young community members have expressed a strong desire for a place to go after school or on the weekends for activities outside of a school setting. A group, that includes youth representation, could come together to develop a community gathering space or identify existing spaces that would both serve as an area for the community to gather, as well as a space to host recreational space for youth. This space could be incorporated into an existing community building, or could involve the rehab or redevelopment of vacant or “run down” barns and buildings in the community.

Recruit and Retain Local Education Providers and Leaders

[added on community meeting day]

V. Task Force Action Plans

Resource Meeting, June 16, 2022

Brownington 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.

► Expand Community Events

A task force could form to boost existing community activities, such as Old Stone House events. Additionally, the task force could plan an annual series of events to unify and connect the community and offer entertainment and fun for all ages. Events could include regular potluck dinners, community concerts, a Brownington Day celebration, strawberry and apple festivals, a fishing derby, community sledding events, a community fair, and more. Events could help to bring vibrancy to the community, provide more opportunities for community gathering, and engage youth as well as connect to the Amish community.

Community Chair: Donna Dauphinais

Facilitator: Brian Lowe, *VT Council on Rural Development*

Resource Team Members: Mike Strait, *Island Pond Chamber of Commerce*

Community Participants: Eileen Baker, Donna Dauphinais, Bev Davis, Cindy Delano, Marissa Dunn,

and Task Force Signups: Ellen Harvey, Kim Hastings, Jacqueline Meyer, David Templeman, Elizabeth (Liz) Tucker, Molly Veysey, and Kate Wolff

Current Status and Initiatives

- Brownington has a great deal to offer – beautiful landscape, incredible natural resources, proximity to major tourist destinations (like Lake Willoughby and Burke), and its own local attractions (like the Old Stone House).
- From the Community Visit process, many expressed a sense that over the years there has been less connection between neighbors. People would like to strengthen these connections.
- There is not a recent history of community events, holding aside the Old Stone House events. And, sometimes, folks can be difficult to reach – many don't have access to the internet and there are not that many communication channels
- There is a strong interest in working together to strengthen a sense of community and to have a good time together.
- People have lots of ideas of different types of events, and there will be a major event in Brownington in 2024 regardless, with the anticipated full solar eclipse.

Action Steps

1. **Set the first committee agenda (which the group drafted together at the first meeting) and as the first item, confirm the Events Committee charge & goal.** The Task Force group gathered envisions an Events Committee that:
 - a. Plans events specifically for the Brownington community
 - b. Plans achievable events to start – fun, community scale, and not too involved to organize or manage.

c. Works with partners to bring as many people, ideas, or new funding sources together over time.

2. **Review list of events proposed during the first task force meeting.** What is feasible, fun, and will help set up the events committee for success? Initial ideas include:

a. “Empty Bowl” Soup Event & Fundraiser

- Members of the task force have done this before in different places and now how to set it up. It is a fun event and the right scale for a first event – plus, it might help raise a small amount of funds to support future events.
- Set up at the Grange/old grammar school – the Old Stone House is willing to host the event to provide the space.
- Create a fun atmosphere. Use the group’s pottery skills, have games for people to play, and keep it light and low-key.
- Involve the school in some way to help spread the word. The task force thinks that for an event like this, making it multigenerational is a key to success.
- Use local ingredients to make the soups to highlight local farm and food businesses. The task force could talk to the Food, Ag, & Business task force, too to help spread the word and connect to local foods.

b. Music jam session.

- This could also be hosted at the Old Stone House
- The group would need to decide if this was intended as a small event for just a few dedicated musicians or more of an “open mic” style event to bring in new people.
- Task Force members pointed out it could be one style one night and then a different style on a different night.

c. Fall foliage event

- “Brownington: First in Foliage” festival or weekend event in ~September
- All agreed Brownington has stunning fall foliage, but is not as well known as some other areas
- This would require some kind of marketing effort, perhaps in partnership with the Island Pond Chamber or NEK Collaborative or others, and is a larger lift than the jam session or soup gathering.

d. Screen on the Green 1x/month

- Set a goal of once a month gathering people at a location TBD, to watch a movie together in the early evening
- The Old Stone House has some screens that their staff is willing to lend out if Brownington residents want to use them
- The group thought about weekly screenings – but that is a lot to take on. One or two events in July and August could be fun events to build on
- Maybe on the ball fields behind the school as a possible site?

e. Brownington Day (also discussed as involving Brownington in a new way with Old Stone House events)

- The Task Force would like to set a day to celebrate Brownington
- It could be the same day as the Empty Bowl Event
- Another idea was working with the Old Stone House staff to include Brownington in a different way in one or more events

f. Link up with the mountain bike “Enduro” event out of Burke

- Major bike races like this bring in thousands of people to the area
- Brownington has the topography and proximity to participate in an event like this
- The group could consider appointing a point person to explore more about what this would require

g. Plan for the Eclipse days in 2024

- A major event in 2024 expected to draw thousands of people from around the country to Brownington, the event committee could consider some kind of 2023 planning work shops to help residents plan for how to accommodate visitors or how to make money from the event.

3. Identify person to help establish a fiscal sponsor and identify potential fiscal sponsors

- a. Depending on the size and scale of events that the Task Force considers, having a fiscal sponsor could allow the Task Force to apply for grants and secure insurance.
- b. The Old Stone House may be willing to be a fiscal sponsor. Other ideas included the school and the town.

4. Identify a person to set up a community Facebook page and to post paper notices/help identify ways to tell people about events. The group wants to make sure there are communication channels to get the word out, whether through the internet or physical postings, in addition to word of mouth.

5. Think about the task force’s internal strengths – what will be fun, what can you do without it being too much? The group wanted to spend some time at that first meeting making sure that the projects planned reflected the group’s strengths.

6. Identify possible partners who have knowledge or connections that could help plan events or make events more likely to succeed. These are listed under the “Resources” section.

Resources

- Spark! Connecting Communities Fund – Grants of up to \$3,000 for projects that support grassroots work and projects that build social capital. This is a grant that the Vermont Community Foundation has recommended the Brownington Task Forces consider. Deadline: July 18, 2022.
- Northeast Kingdom Fund – Grants of up to \$5,000 to support projects that benefit the people and communities of the region. Again, the Vermont Community Foundation has encouraged the Brownington Task Forces to consider this application. Deadline: July 18, 2022.
- Mike Strait of the Island Pond Chamber of Commerce was an incredible wealth of knowledge, having organized an events committee in Island Pond coming out of the VCRD visit there six years ago. Mike is willing to connect with and advise the task force from time to time with questions that come up.
- Molly Vessey, the new executive director of the Old Stone House, attended the Community Visit and has joined the Community Events Task Force in the hope of finding new ways to support Brownington goals. The Old Stone House has staff, insurance, and experience planning events.
- Local Fuel, energy, and food companies and utilities may not be located in Brownington, but are potential sponsors of Brownington events.
- Kingdom Trails (or other private race or bike companies) might be willing to support a new one-time event or race in Brownington.

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

Keep it simple and manageable by setting small, achievable goals (akin to picking the low-hanging fruit), and using demonstrated successes to build additional community capacity and support.

Develop both short- and long-term goals and objectives, along with suggested action steps, which includes defining what “success” looks like.

Focus on creating a successful first project that can be used to generate word-of-mouth buzz, and interest in potential follow-on events.

Consider how to engage meaningfully with the Amish. Do they even want to engage, and if so, to what extent? If they don’t want to engage, how will they be perceived, and/or their interests be represented?

Potluck dinners are a great convener because families can also attend these to stretch their budgets. If you do host potluck dinners, consider a harvest dinner in the early fall, when gardens are producing!

Debrief successes, challenges, possible improvements after the event to help inform strategies around creating successful future events.

Consider using the school grounds for events, which would be perfect for a community fair in the summer or a winter carnival during February break.

One issue that might need to be addressed up front as we move out of Covid-bunker mentality is how to once again practice meaningful and satisfying social and public engagement. Outside help will be needed for that!

Consider establishing a recreation or event committee.

Technical Assistance/Peer Connection Recommendations

An outside facilitator may be useful. Cindy Cook at Adamant Accord may be available or have suggestions. Learn more at adamantaccord.com/about.html

Another potential outside facilitation resource is Jeff Bercuvitz. Learn more at thesparkcenter.org/about/about-jeff-bercuvitz/

Jen Carlo, Executive Director of the NEK Collaborative, can assist with connecting to other organizations for support and help depending on the specific activities the task force wants to plan. Contact Jen at jennifer@nekcollaborative.org or (802) 586-0387.

Potential Funding Sources

Spark Connecting Community Grants through the Vermont Community Foundation may be available to provide funding. Learn more at vermontcf.org/our-impact/programs-and-funds/spark-connecting-community/.

VNRC Small Grants for Smart Growth “provides seed money for catalyzing, community-based initiatives that are grounded in or help to support smart growth.” Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, and awards range from \$500 to \$1,500 per project. Learn more at vnrc.org/small-grants-for-smart-growth/ and contact Kati Gallagher at kgallagher@vnrc.org

The AARP Community Challenge grant program “provides small grants to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages.” Previous funding has been available for a variety of projects, including those that may improve public spaces and civic engagement. Learn more at aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2022/2022-challenge.html and contact Kelly Stoddard Poor at 802-951-1313 or at kstoddardpoor@aarp.org.

Arts Impact Grants from Vermont Arts Council support organizations, municipalities, and schools in their efforts to create a more vibrant quality of life by providing equal and abundant access to the arts. Learn more at vermontartscouncil.org/grants/organizations/arts-impact and contact Meredith Bell, mbell@vermontartscouncil.org, or 802-402-4478.

► Improve Road Safety and Maintenance

Brownington residents of all ages are concerned about the maintenance of the roads as well as the safety due to speeding. A task force in collaboration with the Town could form to explore potential solutions to slow traffic such as improved enforcement, signage, speed bumps, etc. In the long term, the community could revisit the conversation around speed limits within the town, as well as funding and strategies to improve culvert and road maintenance over time.

Community Chair: Ted Davis

Facilitator: Jessica Savage, *VT Council on Rural Development*

Resource Team Members: Allison Low, *Northeast Vermont Development Agency*

Community Participants: Ray Dauphinais, Ted Davis, Chris Delano, Jane Greenwood, Amber Hastings,
and Task Force Signups: Donna Hatcher, Carl Meyer, and Beverly White

Current Status and Initiatives

- Currently, Brownington has no local speed limits: a ballot item creating speed limits was challenged through a petition, and the petition ending up passing in (xx?) by only three votes and with low voter turnout: is there an opportunity to bring the issue back to the voters of Brownington this year?
- Improved enforcement is a goal, but is complex: right now, the default speed limit is the state limit of 50 miles per hour, which the Sheriff's office notes is not often registered when they are on patrol: given that and a lack of communication with the Sheriff's office, their contract has not helped with the perceived speeding problem
- No real action has been taken yet, but neighbors and the Amish community have noted unsafe driving and complained about it for a long time
- There is an upcoming traffic study in July commissioned by the town: this study will look at traffic flow (where and how many cars are driving on the study roads, and at what speeds): there is an opportunity to use this study to inform a strategy for this group
- Road conditions can be very difficult, particularly gravel roads.
 - Would improving roads lead to more speeding?
 - Can road improvement techniques be used to "calm" traffic?
- Road improvement would be a more fitting goal than "road maintenance", as major improvements need to be made

Action Steps

1. Meet as a Task Force to examine identified action steps
2. Identify interim, immediate traffic awareness/calming methods that are effective, possible, and legal (ideas included lighted signs, "art" installations or tabling near busy intersections)
3. Engage free technical/legal advisor (NVDA/VT Local Roads) and learn about the laws that govern traffic control and enforcement as well as technical methods for calming/slowing traffic
4. Review options for enforcement besides current Sheriff contract
5. Learn about July traffic study and work to understand the details, meet with Doug Morton (NVDA) to advise on traffic safety
6. Meet with the selectboard in an advisory capacity
7. Create a plan for community education and engagement

Other potential ideas for action

- Use the results of July traffic study to discuss speed limits, enforcement strategies
- No signs, no speedbumps, and no changes in enforcement can be made unless there is a vote
 - Most recent vote to lower the speed limit passed, and then a petition was raised that stopped the change
 - Signage can be created following an ordinance. Ordinances must be written by selectboard, and then voted on
- Work to understand the timeline/sequence for all road safety related actions
- Task force could coordinate an information campaign prior to any potential vote on road/speed issues
 - Letters to the editor in local papers like the Barton Chronicle
 - Petitions on local bulletins (like at Evansville Grocery)
- Find a legal advisor for the task force who could provide information on legal and technical aspects of the work
 - The NVDA could provide this information free of charge
- Install speed radars that display speed along with messaging- i.e “Slow Down”
- Communicating with Sherriff’s office has been difficult- this group could all make calls to voice their concern over current contract and enforcement
- Meet with Doug Morton (NVDA) about the results of the traffic study, provide context
- Meet with selectboard and road foreman and offer to act in advisory capacity
 - Selectboard typically welcomes ideas and involvement from community
- Create plan for community education and engagement around road safety issues
 - “Creative, citizen-led efforts”
 - Installations or exhibits that highlight dangers of speeding
 - Reaching people through explaining negative consequences of reckless driving
- Work to understand the bureaucratic and legal timeline for making changes to road laws
- Town website is currently being created- post the results of July’s traffic study here
 - Create a version of study without jargon that is easy to understand
- How can this group “reach across the aisle” to citizens who feel equally impassioned in their stance against speed limits?
 - Understanding their views and what will work
 - Reaching across aisle vs. getting more people who already agree out to vote
- Focus on getting more registered voters to town meetings
 - Calling campaign before any votes
 - Talking to neighbors about town meetings and ballot items
 - Offering rides to meetings
- Share meeting minutes with this group and town selectboard
- Understand what road improvements are needed based on upcoming traffic study, and seek funding accordingly
- Research potential grant opportunities, efforts from other Vermont towns with similar issues
- Meet with state reps to advocate for funding
 - ID all possible funding sources

Resources

- Vermont Local Roads
 - Can help with technical aspects of road safety work
- Our Towns Slow It Down
 - Using this group as a potential resource for comprehensive messaging campaigns
 - Tabling, waving, roadside interaction with drivers
- The local schools
 - Distributing handouts and flyers through schools
 - Using schools as partners for educational events on safe driving
- Finding other examples of towns that coexist with Amish communities
- Potential funding from VTrans
- Municipal Grant Planning Program
- Annual paving funds available in Brownington
- Using Island Pond and Barton as resources
 - Barton fired Sherriff's office
 - Island Pond hired their own constable
- Alyssa Johnson at VCRD can help with grantwriting and technical assistance
- NVDA (both Doug and Allison) can provide assistance as well

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

Identify resources and information sources such as enforcement options and realities (sheriff, state police, DA's, etc.) as a way to manage expectations and frame what's actually possible.

Consider conducting an analysis of the current situation. Potential questions to ask could include:

- Why have these efforts failed to gain traction in the past?
- What will be needed to ensure success this time around?
- What roles do politics, power, inter-personal/generational dynamics, issues, and/or process play?
- Is there a way to "yes" that puts interests above positions?

These questions may involve some potentially heavy introspection! See note about outside facilitators below.

Consider assembling a group of residents at a place like Hinman Settler road on a warm weekend. Get a canopy, refreshments, music, etc., as well as well-placed signage that say things like "Thank you for Slowing Down in Our Town!"

Members of the task force could visit similarly sized communities in Vermont who are working on or have recently undergone this type of work, and meet with the key people in those communities who could explain how they accomplished what they have. See the list of Peer Connection Recommendations for additional information.

Consider the "elephant in the room" of meeting the needs of the Amish, whose interests may or may not align with the rest of the community's.

Technical Assistance/Peer Connection Recommendations

Representatives from Sheriff's Dep't and/or State Police, district attorneys,

An outside facilitator may be very useful for this topic.

Cindy Cook at Adamant Accord may be available or have suggestions. Learn more at adamantaccord.com/about.html

Another potential outside facilitation resource is Jeff Bercuvitz. Learn more at thesparkscenter.org/about/about-jeff-bercuvitz/

"Our Town, Slow it Down" campaign has been used in a number of communities, including Newport. It can involve signage, PSA, etc. If you Google, "Slow it Down in Our Town" and "Our Town, Slow it Down" you'll find lots of examples.

or other communities that have tried similar efforts.

Northeastern Vermont Development Agency (NVDA) can be a key resource for planning and implementation, including connecting with and assisting in grant applications. Contact Doug Morton, Senior Transportation Planner at (802) 748-1221 and dmorton@nvda.net and visit <https://www.nvda.net/> to learn more

Jen Carlo, Executive Director of the NEK Collaborative, can assist with connecting to other organizations for support and help depending on the specific activities the task force wants to plan. Contact Jen at jennifer@nekkollaborative.org or (802) 586-0387.

Potential Funding Sources

AARP has a "complete streets" program that helps communities make neighborhoods and village centers more accessible and pedestrian friendly. Contact Kelly Stoddard Poor at 802-951-1313 or at kstoddardpoor@aarp.org.

The Vermont Arts Council Animating Infrastructure supports community projects that integrate art with infrastructure improvements. Learn more at vermontartscouncil.org/grants/organizations/animating-infrastructure and contact Michele Bailey at 802-828-3294 or mbailey@vermontartscouncil.org.

VNRC Small Grants for Smart Growth "provides seed money for catalyzing, community-based initiatives that are grounded in or help to support smart growth." Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, and awards range from \$500 to \$1,500 per project. Learn more at vnrc.org/small-grants-for-smart-growth/ and contact Kati Gallagher at kgallagher@vnrc.org.

Municipal Planning Grants are available for a Downtown Master Plan or other implementation plan to help support town capital improvement plans and other future planning goals. Learn more at accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant.

AARP Community Challenge Grant can fund permanent physical improvements, demonstration projects, and new or innovative programming or services. Visit aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2022/2022-challenge.html Contact Kelly Stoddard Poor at 802-951-1313 or at kstoddardpoor@aarp.org.

Spark Connecting Community Grant through VT Community Foundation: vermontcf.org/our-impact/programs-and-funds/spark-connecting-community/.

The Citizen Institute for Rural Design offers annual technical assistance grants for a three-day design workshop meant to involve/engage the whole community. Learn more at: rural-design.org/local-design-workshop.

Community Development Block Grants from the Vermont Community Development Program could be used for planning or implementation work. Learn more at accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/vcdp.

The Better Connections Program could fund transportation investments that build community resilience. Learn more at vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/projects-programs/better-connections.

► Boost Local Food Access, Agriculture, and Local Business

A task force could form to focus on connecting and supporting existing businesses in Brownington, as well as working with regional and State experts to attract and recruit new businesses that meet the needs of the community and visitors. In particular, residents are interested in seeing the expansion of agriculture and food-related business such as farms, farm stands, food and dining businesses, or a small market to make local and healthy foods more accessible. The group could also consider rebuilding the “Greater Brownington Business Association” by developing a network of businesses in Brownington and around the region and ways to share resources and collectively advertise to locals and beyond.

Community Chair: David Templeman

Facilitator: Alyssa Johnson, *VT Council on Rural Development*

Resource Team Members: Jake Claro, *Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund*

Bethany Dunbar, *Center for an Agricultural Economy*

Jon Ramsay, *Center for an Agricultural Economy*

Community Participants: Sara Davies Coe, Bill Davis, Nicole Davis, Jane Greenwood, Joan Huguenin,

and Task Force Signups: Roger Shultz, Andrew Swett, David Templeman, Liz Teuber, Larry Thompson, and Elizabeth (Liz) Tucker

Current Initiatives and Assets

- There are existing local farmers and food producers who produce food that could be sold in the community.
- There is desire for year-round eating establishments in the community.
- Potential vision: a snack bar/pub at the Trading Post.
- The Grange is an existing organization and network in the community.
- Old Stone House Museum offers a variety of resources. In addition to the museum itself, there are a number of events and tours.
- Food security is an important topic in the community.

Action Steps

1. Work to revitalize the Brownington Business Association as a platform to connect and share between businesses. In order to do so:
 - a. Conduct outreach to exiting businesses in the community. This can be a way to engage interest from businesses that did not participate in the Brownington Connects process, and to gain a more complete understanding of the businesses that already exist in the community. It can also help invite additional people into the process. Additional specific resources to connect with include:
 - The Amish Community
 - Farm to School
 - Other food cultures in the community, including the Abenaki food movement.
 - b. Work to develop a directory of businesses, and specifically farm and food businesses in Brownington. Include contact information and interests so that folks can connect with those businesses that share resources. Consider both a printed and online version of the guide, potentially connected to the Town website.
2. Research the potential for a food related facility, including options to repurpose the Trading Post.
 - a. Research the potential for a “community sponsored, outside funded” purchase of the Trading Post, such as the Community Supported Enterprise model.

- b. Explore the potential for other potential infrastructure investments or developments. Specific ideas suggested for exploration include:
 - A village pantry, which could support food storage and/or a commercial kitchen, as well as be a resource for local producers to provide food both for those in need, and those that can pay.
 - A community bread oven. The Town of Johnson has an existing model for this that serves as a community gathering space, and supports food security in the community.
 - A micro-pasteurization facility.

3. Advance food-oriented events.

- a. Connect with Events groups to understand what they are focused on, and if there are opportunities for partnerships. Consider the potential for catering at events, as well as explicitly food-focused events.
- b. Consider how to implement food oriented events. Potential event ideas for consideration include:
 - Food trucks and/or a keg truck
 - Food contests, such a chili or barbeque contest
 - Supper club events with local chefs, and/or using local ingredients (maple leaf tamales?!)
 - The potential to expand or combine with the existing Saturday market.
 - Advanced planning for the total solar eclipse on 4/8/24. Programming could include workshops, promotions, sugaring tours, and more.

Additional Potential Ideas and Action Steps

- Promote the “Lawns to Gardens” initiative and produce sharing.
- Consider trail system development, with connection to food and agriculture.
- Create farm tours (which could lead to the pub or other food establishments!)
- Promote regenerative agriculture.
- Market fitness and wellbeing for the area, particularly in relationship with trails.
- “Put Brownington on the Food Map.”
- Consider opportunities for repurposing or revitalizing the gravel pit.
- Work to develop barbecue culture.
- Engage with individuals interested in or participating in foraging.
- Consider the potential for foliage bus tours.

Resources

- Center for an Agricultural Economy, which also runs the Food Venture Center, has a wealth of resources. Their website is: hardwickagriculture.org/
 - Jon can offer tours of the facilities. Contact Jon at jon@hardwickagriculture.org at 802-472-5362 x209.
 - The organization is already providing technical assistance to some producers in the area.
 - CAE can provide agricultural loans.
 - The organization purchases produce, and there is a truck that passes through Brownington. There could be some potential to pick up if there is some aggregation.
- Preservation Trust of Vermont is a leader in the Community Supported Enterprise model. Contact Jenna Lapachinski at jenna@ptvermont.org or 802-552-0659.
- It is important to consider the resources that already exist in the community. Newer folks may not feel invited to engage in the process, and it is important to explicitly invite them.
- Taproot in Lancaster, NH is a potential model. Learn more at taprootnh.org/ and contact Melissa Grella, Founder & Executive Director at melissa@taprootnh.org and (603) 788-4183 ext. 2.
- The Vermont Community Foundation offers a variety of funding resources, including some that are specific to the Northeast Kingdom.

- The Spark Connecting Communities grant program provides grants of \$500-\$3,000 for “grassroots work that builds social capital.” The next round of applications is due July 18, 2022. Learn more at vermontcf.org/our-impact/programs-and-funds/spark-connecting-community/
- The Northeast Kingdom Fund funds grants up to \$5,000 for small, community-based projects. The next round of applications is due July 18, 2022. Learn more at vermontcf.org/our-impact/programs-and-funds/northeast-kingdom-fund/
- Other business owners can be a valuable resource about how to make this type of model work. Considering reaching out to the owners and operators of the Craftsbury and Elmore stores. VT Digger article about the Elmore store: vtdigger.org/2022/01/16/in-elmore-locals-band-together-to-preserve-historic-store/
- Local food trucks can be a resource to connect with, invite to events, and potentially learn from operators.
- Vermont Fresh Network is a resource, especially for agritourism. Learn more at vermontfresh.net/. They also run Dig in Vermont, which is a “online guide for agricultural and culinary tourism in Vermont.” Learn more at diginvt.com/ and diginvt.com/home/resources/
- Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) may be a partner, and previously produced a NEK Food System Plan. Contact Alison Low at (802) 424-1418 or alow@nvda.net
- Northern County Investment Corporation (NCIC) offers a variety of grant and loan programs. Learn more at ncic.org/ and contact Aimee Quimby at aquimby@ncic.org or (802) 748-5101 ext. 2019.
- The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) program can provide grant writing support for projects and other resources. Learn more at vhcb.org/redi and contact Mariah Noth at Mariah@vhcb.org or 802-828-1098.
- USDA offers a variety of grant programs for both businesses and community organizations. Their overview page is rd.usda.gov/vt
 - USDA Rural Community Facilities Grant and Loan program can provide funding for essential community facilities. VCRD staff can also provide support for applications to this program. Learn more at rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program/vt and contact Alyssa at alyssa@vtrural.org or 978-760-1238.
 - USDA Rural Business Development Grants can be used for a variety of purposes to support community and economic development. Learn more at: rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-business-development-grants/vt
 - USDA had programs that offer for-profit entities assistance with renewable energy and energy efficiency. Learn more at: rd.usda.gov/programs-services/energy-programs/rural-energy-america-program-renewable-energy-systems-energy-efficiency-improvement-guaranteed-loans/vt
- Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing has resources available to support business advertising. Learn more at accd.vermont.gov/tourism/promote-your-business. There is tourism research available at accd.vermont.gov/tourism/promote-your-business
- The Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) has a community grant program that may be a fit for trail or other projects related to outdoor development. Learn more at fpr.vermont.gov/VOREC and fpr.vermont.gov/recreation/recreation-grants/vorec-community-grant-program
- Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance may be a resource. Learn more at vermontoutdoorbusinessalliance.org/
- Vermont Department of Health may have funding to support programs. Learn more at healthvermont.gov/local/newport/active-and-healthy-communities
- Old Stone House can be an important partner. Contact Molly Veysey at director@oldstonehousemuseum.org or (802) 754-2022.

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

Identify “needs” so as to differentiate from “wants.” Is the establishment of a small market and/or expansion of ag & food-based businesses a shared goal? If so, what needs to happen in order to make it happen (SWOT analysis, stakeholder ID, etc.)?

If it's a registry of business offerings, are there folks who are willing to knock on doors, use FPF, etc. to begin compiling the list?

Raise awareness of local growers and producers.

Early support and sponsorship of the project from businesses that want to locate or relocate could be very important, so getting the word out early and building support from businesses could be an important first step.

Technical Assistance/Peer Connection Recommendations

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets. Contact Abbey Willard, Agricultural Development Division Director, at 802-272-2885 or Abbey.willard@vermont.gov.

Vermont Fresh Network. Learn more at vermontfresh.net/ and contact Tara Pereira, Executive Director, at tara@vermontfresh.net.

The Farm to Plate Initiative at Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund. Contact Jake Claro at jake@vsjf.org.

NOFA-VT, nofavt.org/

Andrew Graham, Farmers' Market Association, andrew@nofavt.org.

Northeastern Vermont Development Agency (NVDA) can be a key resource for planning and implementation, including connecting with and assisting in grant applications. Contact Doug Morton, Senior Transportation Planner at (802) 748-1221 and dmorton@nvda.net and visit nvda.net/ to learn more.

Vermont Retail & Grocers Association may be a resource. Learn more at vtrga.org/ and contact Erin Sigrist, VRGA President, at 802-839-1928 and erin@vtrga.org.

Front Porch Forum is a great way to start and expand a directory for local foods/agricultural products.

Work with the events committee to include craft and food vendors in local events. A harvest dinner could also be a great way to promote Brownington's local producers!

Jen Carlo, Executive Director of the NEK Collaborative, can assist with connecting to regional organizations for support and help depending on the specific activities the task force wants to plan. Contact Jen at jennifer@nekcollaborative.org or (802) 586-0387.

State of Vermont Tourism and Marketing could be a partner in discussing ways to market Brownington holistically and for individual businesses. Learn more at accd.vermont.gov/tourism and accd.vermont.gov/tourism/promote-your-business.

Vermont Small Business Development Center offers robust services including business advising, training and workshops, and additional resources. They can assist with business plan development and business support. Visit <https://www.vtsbdc.org/> and contact Ross Hart at rhart@vtsbdc.org.

Potential Funding Sources

USDA Rural Development has a variety of resources that could be available for planning and project implementation. Rural Business Opportunity Grants can help economic planning, cluster planning and with groundwork to spur economic development. Rural Business Enterprise Grants can support the progress of particular enterprises and might be especially useful if an incubator project is developed. Visit rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-business-development-grants/vt for grant information, and find contacts here: rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices/vt or 802-828-6000.

If the process involves the development of Community Facilities, the USDA Community Facilities program provides support for a variety of programming. VCRD can provide additional support for developing and submitting an application. Learn more at rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program/vt and contact Alyssa Johnson at alyssa@vtrural.org or 978-760-1238.

Vermont Department of Buildings and General Services has a Regional Economic Development grant program that or capital costs associated with major maintenance, renovation, or planning related to the development of facilities reasonably expected to create or retain job opportunities in Vermont communities. Contact Judy Bruneau at judy.bruneau@vermont.gov or (802) 828-3519. Visit bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants.



VI. Brownington Connects Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held in-person and virtually with over 40 Brownington community members and the VCRD Visiting Team on April 28, 2022, and through a paper and online survey.

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

Community Connection & Communication

Visiting Team: Brian Lowe (facilitator), Allison Low (scribe), Jennifer Carlo, Josh Hanford, Luke O'Brien, Will Stevens

What are the Assets in this Area?

- There is some communication from the municipality, although it was discovered “by accident” by a recent newcomer. This consists of postings, information in local radio, the Barton Chronicle, and occasional (but seldom) communications on the Town list serve.
- There is a “word of mouth” network that exists without coordination that relies on connection to neighbors.
- Local businesses – the Trading Post and Thibault’s Market – provide a good exchange of “local news.”
- The school is very good about sending things home with the kids.
- The selectboard is working on a web site.
- In the pre-pandemic times, Town Meeting Day had a good turnout.
- Valerie Faust – she knows everyone – just ask her.
- The Amish newcomers to the community – “they have the answers.” They do lots of fundraising and community dinners. They know how to get people out.
- The Selectboard, Planning Commission, and School Board all meet regularly and make agendas and meeting minutes available.
- There’s a kiosk at the Town Clerk’s office, and one at the entrance to town.
- Old Stone House (asset and challenge).
- The Grange House and Donkey Rescue can be used for larger gatherings.
- House concerts hosted by the Ceilidh Club since 2013, which are accompanied by potlucks.

What are the Challenges?

- It’s difficult to find postings. One attendee – a recent newcomer – still didn’t know that there were meetings that took place more frequently than Town Meeting Day.
- Australian ballot during the pandemic changed things and eliminated interactions. COVID has put a strain on social interaction in many ways.
- “Brownington has separate communities who don’t share the same politics. It’s a sign of the times.”
- Some people just don’t like change. They need convincing.
- Some newcomers just want to be left alone, and they are not interested in community activities. They have “different lifestyles” (ostensibly from more suburban communities) and don’t regularly interact with neighbors.
- This is largely a bedroom community now, so there are few opportunities to connect with neighbors.
- There are people who resent newcomers.
- Used to know my neighbors. There are people up the road that I don’t know.
- There is a trust issue – repeated several times.
- Relationship with Old Stone House is complicated, and was identified at the root of many “trust” issues. Old Stone House Day does not have just an exclusive Brownington focus. Its focus is on drawing in people from out of town. They are “getting more property and taking from the tax base.” Some people don’t think that they are donating to the Town. Nevertheless, there can be goals to have Old Stone House Day engage with more people in town.
- There are no community events in Brownington Center.
- We don’t know about the all the local businesses that are here.
- There’s more vehicle noise in town (and speeding) – Speed limits have failed to be enforced, and drivers show disregard for people who live in the community
- Need more volunteers to do things.
- Many people are not online.
- The roads are not safe for the Amish in winter. They need snow berms (keep their carriages from sliding off).

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

- Potluck dinners – they can bring people together. Food is a “great convener,” and a Homegrown Dinner can be a simple way to bring people together to celebrate.
- “Just knock on doors – take the initiative.”
- Use a “Welcome Wagon” approach to newcomers.
- Use the Grange or Donkey Rescue for events.

- Implement a communications strategy that's multi-faceted – more bulletin boards, materials sent home from school, lawn signs, adverts in the Chronicle, newsletter from Town that is circulated electronically and mailed to those who are not online
- The Town needs a Web presence that's NOT Facebook.
- An activity that involves kids can help build trust and build stronger bonds with parents of kids, such as a community fair held at the school.
- Have a registry (directory) of local businesses.
- Re-establish a general store (long gone) which was a source of community interaction.
- Host a "Brownington Day" celebration. The Old Stone House Day has been intended to function as that in the past (but currently does not).
- Find ways to engage more with the Amish.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Find the low-hanging fruit and start from there.
- Establish a task force.
- Don't worry about getting communication 100% right – you never will. Just go with what you have and build on it.
- Don't be afraid to start small. You can always build on your successes. Rebuilding trust takes time, particularly as we emerge from extended social isolation.
- Make your event(s) a celebration of what you have, just as local artists, musicians.
- Utilize unique spaces, such as the Grange and the Donkey Rescue.

Businesses in Brownington

Visiting Team: Alyssa Johnson (facilitator), Jenna Koloski (scribe), Ted Brady, Ben Doyle, Christine Hallquist, Charles Martin, Misty Sinsigalli, Dave Snedeker

What are the Assets in this Area?

- A lot of opportunities here.
- People around here are doing air bnb – there is opportunity there.
- Opportunity for farming.
- We have a lot of land here and the Stone House Property – could be a venue for potential events and ways to draw people to the community.
- Stone house does great things in the community – it's a wonderful place. I send my kids to camp there and it hosts wonderful events. They are doing a really nice job.
- The natural surroundings and the geography is an asset – the beauty.
- In the past they used to have a Greater Brownington Business Association – they used to do events, promotional activities, etc.
- The Amish population is an asset.
- Brownington used to have farms everywhere. That has attracted the Amish because there were vacant farms available.
- Historically the 3 villages were separate communities – today it is a lot different than it used to be.
- There is no zoning in town – that can be an advantage but can be a disadvantage in some ways too.
- State Police provide local law enforcement.
- Wonderful local hairdresser who lives here and works out of her home.
- A lot of home-based businesses.
- People here tend to have 3-4 jobs and lots of side gigs
- There are VAST trails here but primarily just for snow machines.
- A lot of people come up to the area for biking.
- We live in a world full of opportunities and they just need to be identified and we need to find funding for them. There is room for growth.
- Snowmobiles are allowed on the road in Brownington.
- There is some broadband coverage.
- The Arnold Barn is open to everyone.

What are the Challenges?

- Huge shortages of things that are needed – childcare, food, other services.
- The dairy industry has centralized so it has almost died right out except for large farms.
- Town has turned into a bedroom community where everyone works and comes back here to live.
- There is only 1 store in town in Evansville.
- A lot of "spaghetti lot" business – Act 250 required a 10 acre minimum and when someone would develop an old farm they would take 10 acres and have some small road frontage but then would stretch way back lengthwise – we rely on the State for a lot of things like that.
- ATVs are allowed on roads in town.
- No senior center, no exercise facilities.
- Limited cell service.
- Finding employees is a challenge (employment and employers).
- Internet coverage is a challenge and is slow.
- Lack of tradespeople – we couldn't find a local electrician
- Reliance on State services.
- The town donates to senior services and other services in the area but nothing located here – services are available you just have to hunt them out.

- Mud season roads and roads in general – it is a challenge to try and stay within the roads budget with things that are coming up and with higher prices.
- Community institutions have fallen apart.
- Poverty has set in or is worse than it used to be.
- Youth are looking for opportunities so they want to leave because they don't see them here. We need to put an end to the falling apart and break the "cycle."
- One of the biggest challenges is today's parents of kids are both working. Years ago there was only one parent working and you had more volunteers and people helping out. For example – beautifying the town and putting flowers around the stone. There are great ideas but they cost money and need people to do that work. It's hard to find people to volunteer in that way.
- Communication is a challenge. People don't see things in newspapers – more on the web.
- But I don't go on the web and only see things in the paper!
- It is a challenge to attract young people here and keep them here. They don't sense a network to get connected in to the community.
- People shouldn't rely on the town for certain things – too much expense. Should rely on ourselves as well.
- For businesses to open, need to go through Act 250.
- It is a challenge to find support for small businesses – limited amount of people locally who provide services.
- There are some challenges with infrastructure and with planning around the Amish. They don't want to engage in the Town, but there are some real communication and infrastructure challenges.
- A lot of people don't know what is available to us or what resources are available. We shouldn't put more responsibility on the Town.

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

- Bring more people here for festivals – we have a lot of land that we could use for educational purposes, weddings, other events.
- Want to see more town beautification. Annuals and perennials planted around the welcome to Brownington signs.
- We should have a place to share volunteer opportunities and ways to engage – a central hub for communications. Especially online – no one buys the paper anymore.
- We should have a Town website. Town is working on this especially around land records. Needs staffing.
- Expanding Broadband access and researching funds available for that.
- Hold fundraisers and that money goes towards beautification and other initiatives.
- Some kind of big event that draws people to the area. For example – the Strolling of the Heifers. It would pick the town up and bring interest into the town.
- The Old Stone House is the biggest draw in town and they have had some marvelous events like moving the grange hall with oxen.
- We should have a music festival here every year. We need to make this place cool!
- To get young families we need a music festival, food services (food delivery for example) for families that move here to live and work elsewhere.
- Newly purchased property in town with ideas! Perhaps a local bakery and developed into a food "emporium" – host local music, food trucks – music festival around total solar eclipse – open to hiking trails, bicycle trails, etc. Old Robie Property – this event could bring revenue and a new generation to town – will happen at the end of sugaring season – could have tours that connect to other aspects of town and workshops, etc.
- We should have a bed and breakfast – a place to relax, places to buy food, farms – we need our business culture back – we don't have enough four-season activities.
- We need ways to retain money in the community.
- Develop lodging – places for people to stay when they come here to ride ATVs, snow machines, etc.
- Places to rent that is connected to the trails – we have all these options with ATVs and snow machines.
- We should connect with Kingdom Trails and bring those trails up – those trails have put them on the map.
- Clean up Brownington Pond.
- Electric car charging station.
- Snack shop – bring that back (and connect it to events and other things that attract people here) – a place like Maya's pizza – build something like that here.
- Sleigh rides, tours, "down town earth" rural opportunities that people would come to do when they visit – sugar on snow, stories, doughnuts and pickles – it's lovely.
- 2 years ago we legalized recreational cannabis here but don't have someone to open a shop. That is a real opportunity here. This is an emerging market.
- Apple harvest event for the community.
- We have to keep supporting local businesses to keep them here. Evansville Trading post needs support to be able to keep operating.
- Attracting more businesses to the community. There is so much potential in this area, but there are funding challenges. Everything is so expensive.
- We need to be more optimistic here – let's explore ideas and not shoot it down right away. An optimism festival!
- For people that open up their properties for public use, insurance is covered by the State.
- Get a website up where people can share services and needs – CPAs, small businesses, etc.
- There are a lot of great resources in the region and state but people need to know where to find those resources.
- Barton has a front porch forum but Brownington doesn't have an active forum.
- Improve and open up a communication network to better share what is going on and the resources that are available. Especially to share Town meeting info and events so that people can better follow what's happening.
- Greater Brownington Business Association.
- More events and bike/recreation races.

- Open a daycare business in the community – maybe use a portion of the school or another idea.
- Open up properties for a campground for visitors.
- Would be great for local farmers to have access to the market in Brownington rather than outside markets – the real money is in prepared food rather than directly to grocery stores.
- Community gardens.
- We should preserve and support local farms and preserve that culture – don't want to see out of staters come in and develop the land.
- Find a way to grow and foster the community without seeing development that we don't want. There is space for development but we want to retain and preserve our fields.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- If you have seen one small town you have seen one small town. This is one of the most beautiful places in Vermont. If you are looking for more vitality and energy the bones are here to do that – have village centers and some interesting attraction. Vermont is going to grow and the question is where do they go? There is an incredible opportunity here with Villages – that built infrastructure is going to be important. You have incredible opportunity here. Events are really important for business and economic development.
- You have a lot of opportunity – especially building on natural resources. There are programs to help on farm businesses, trails, etc. Where we have seen success is where communities have revitalized the village centers – can concentrate the growth there and make that attractive.
- Could be a really good idea to think about that local network/association model as you think about growing businesses. If you have those local chambers they have a relationship with regional and statewide chambers. The communications theme can often be the least expensive problem to fix. Can be an affordable problem to rapidly address.
- Always great to come into a community and see community members come out. USDA RD is in a lot of communities and every town is unique. The communication starting from that foundation is a real opportunity. The ability to get info out through website but also other places like boards, etc. Also see that you all have some really great ideas and as you move forward through this process, really invest and commit. I hear pulling people from out of state – pull people from in state! I would gladly come and visit and live in state – could be a great opportunity.
- Why? Why boost businesses? To see others in the community? To grow tax rolls? To harness what's going on around you? Also – don't worry about geographic boundaries – you have Coventry, Barton, Westmore as neighbors that are interesting and pull people here. This is a cool regional economy. You are a Unicorn – Brownington grew in the last census and you are younger than almost any other community in the NEK. That has something to do with your new Amish neighbors. Not every town has that advantage. I know this town because of Old Stone House and Trading Post – but there are all kinds of other businesses and ways to attract and be “known” – those are businesses you should value. There is a way to tap into the natural resource economy here.

Recreation, Entertainment & Fun

Visiting Team: Brian Lowe (facilitator), Allison Low (scribe), Jennifer Carlo, Josh Hanford, Luke O'Brien, Will Stevens

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Green Up Day.
- Dune buggies.
- Dirt roads, biking and walking on them.
- Rural character – open air, farms, trees, amazing landscapes.
- “The people of Brownington are the biggest asset.”
- Mountains and hiking opportunities.
- The Museum.
- Boat launches and Brownington Pond.
- The VAST Trails, which also has X-country skiing and snowshoeing opportunities.
- The salmon run on the Willoughby River.
- The vital and friendly Amish community, who are reclaiming the farm land and revitalizing structures.
- There are excellent donuts – these are made by the Amish.
- There are many craftspeople who sell their wares.
- Prospect Hill is amazing and has great views.
- It's a safe community.
- The Will-o-Wood Campground has an opportunity for people to use the trails.
- The School, its grounds including the playground, may be an underutilized asset.
- There are summer concerts.

What are the Challenges?

- Traffic and speeding on Hinman Settler Road is a problem and creates dangerous situations for residents, walkers, cyclists, etc. Enforcement is lacking.
- There is a “questionable element” in town – junk accumulation on properties, derelict properties, etc.
- No are no smooth spaces for kid to play – such as paved courts.
- We need a public park.
- Organizing and capacity building is a huge issue in event planning and recreation programming – who is going to do the work? There is a very small pool of volunteers.
- Summer concerts need to be more frequent.
- There are four-wheelers on private land, and they tear up the land.

- Public events need alcohol to be successful – beer brings people out.
- There is no retail in town except for the Trading Post.
- There used to be a tavern on the Old Stone House property, but parking was a hindrance to the tavern.

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

- Brownington is in the path of totality for the 2024 solar eclipse, and we should capitalize on that with a camping or hospitality event where people could come in from out of town and celebrate.
- Look for other concepts to bolster hospitality/camping offerings in Brownington. There is a former gravel pit sites that could function as a camp venue.
- A wedding/camping venue has potential.
- Sporting events such as the trail running races, or gravel/off road bike rides similar to the Dirty 40 in Derby have potential.
- Pumpkin races!
- A babysitter training program with Brownington’s youth could be very popular with young families.
- There used to be, many years ago, a community sledding party that could be resurrected.
- Other possibilities include a kite festival, balloon rides, or a fishing derby.
- Some communities have outdoor movie night. This is done in conjunction with organizations such as Catamount Arts.
- We need to build permanent infrastructure for recreation, such as a basketball court.
- A town-wide scavenger hunt would give people the opportunity to learn more about Brownington’s unique natural assets at each stop.
- There used to a town softball team. Maybe it’s time to start it up again.
- We could host bands regularly on a certain night of the week, like what is done in Island Pond.
- We need to explore the “registry” concept, i.e. directory of events, offerings in Brownington.
- We have a town web site, but it could use a calendar.
- We could establish a community sports equipment lending program.
- We can develop a database of unique skillsets. People here have a broad range of talents to share. We just need to find out who can do what.
- We need to establish a recreation committee and start looking into grant opportunities to fund events and programming.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Turn your assets into capital by leveraging something that’s unique about the town. Turn it into programming or an event, like a celebratory festival.
- Make sure that kids are involved in the programming; that is a sure way to get families to turn out.
- Don’t be afraid to start small. Set an achievable goal and turn it into a win. You’ll be able to build on this.
- Look at the Rochester example: <http://www.ridgelineoutdoorcollective.org/>
- The Rochester Ridgeline Outdoor collective has two recreation seasons – summer and winter – and they promote multi-use trails. They are a nonprofit.
- You don’t really need the authority to do recreation and programming – just do it.
- Look to partnerships with outside people organizations that can provide experience and expertise in running events, such as the Stewardship Center and Catamount Arts.
- Interesting that no one mentioned the Brownington Celebration Day that came up in the first session. We are assuming that is because you’ve already decided to do it!

Infrastructure: Roads, Broadband, Cell

Visiting Team: Jenna Koloski (facilitator), Alyssa Johnson (scribe), Ted Brady, Ben Doyle, Christine Hallquist, Charles Martin, Misty Sinsigalli, Dave Snedeker

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Roads are getting plowed when needed.
- Awesome job taking care of mud season this year (worst folks some year had seen).
- Barton Electric – 4 utilities in the town. In the process of being sold to a bigger outfit (Orleans Electric (has gotten much better), VEC – Town is divided. Going for a grant for a generator – hard to notice the different type of towns.
- We have electricity!
- Broadband.
- Mixed cell and broadband coverage in town.
- Historic Village – Village Center and Downtown.
- School.
- The Town Office building (newer).
- Public works building.
- New cell tower by the interstate.
- Not a lot of controversial or unwanted development in town
- Ambulance service is very good – in Orleans and covers 24/7 with someone at the bay.
- Fire department (covered by Orleans). Orleans manufacturing helps to fund so volunteer but well equipped.

What are the Challenges?

- Places without cell service

- \$10,00 quote to get Comcast service – Hug net satellite was horrible. Starlink came out and was helpful/affordable. Broadband is unaffordable and keeps going up. No choices – runs up by the Village.
- Comcast is the only option.
- Potential asset - NEK Broadband – got a 16 million grant to start building out in the NEK (Amber and Bill are alternates). Looking to build out Brownington in 2024. Nonprofit organization and consortium of towns – already built out Concord, phenomenal reviews.
- Policing is “sketchy” – distance is an issue. Town funds the sheriff.
- Road falling in by the river (Center Road) – plan in place to repair it – working on it.
- Hunt Hill road – runoff deteriorating the road and going onto an individual property.
- Roads will have a culvert on one side, and tires and such have been ridden between top.
- Farming – when they clear the corn, mud concentrates in culverts.
- People drive really fast in the historic Village, and Hitman settler and throughout town.
- Speeding throughout town.
- Speed limit signs. Town tried to pass a speed limit twice. One time passed, one time voted down.
- If you don’t read the paper, didn’t know about the speed limit
- Problem keeping a town road manager – keeps turning over
- Challenging interactions with the public with a past road foreman.
- Several other towns are also currently hiring for road – 5 positions in the surrounding towns are also currently looking.
- 38 miles of road in the town – more than 2/3 are dirt.
- Cyclists have their own issues – 3 or 4 across.
- Noise and safety issue.
- Don’t want on Heymann Settler road anymore because of speed of the traffic (and don’t walk three across).
- ATV traffic is an evolving issue. Most do fine, but a couple can cause problem. Don’t know what the rules are regarding the ATVs, and if existing laws are enforced. Almost killed trying to get pictures of license plates. No way to enforce.
- Gangs of 8-10 ATV going out together. Lots going by on a summer day can be challenging. 2 year ago change with town ordinance by the select board to allow on town roads.
- Speed on gravel roads pushes the gravel off to the side – and gravel costs a lot to put on the road and to put back onto the road. Bad for windshields too.
- Speed beside 50 will help with gravel.
- Town ordinance needed for speed enforcement.
- Concerns with speeding and Amish because very hard to see the Horse and Buggys.
- Blend right in – need more reflectors.
- Also some close calls with the road crews.
- Amish interaction – in part, but not coordinating on infrastructure issues.
- Have to speak with the Amish men individually – if it was something they felt strongly about, may indicate support. Not on the voter checklist – don’t want anything to do with the government. Adamant about being separate.
- Lack of mufflers.
- Noise pollution.
- Cell service – cell tower down the road, but no service. If you don’t have a landline and using a cell phone, have to have service.
- AOT/Sate police antenna.
- Cell tower on 5A as well.
- Visitors to the area ask about EV chargers because they don’t want to get stranded. If systems were better in place, might be an option.
- Andrew should get an EV charger :)
- No water or wastewater – all springs, wells, septic.
- Not concentrated enough to justify infrastructure.
- Compost and garbage and trash – most communities supply with a compost bucket. Have the recycle place do one?
- Have a recycling station – take the caps off.
- “There’s a term for that.”
- Trash goes to Coventry or you have to afford pickup.

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

- Compost drop off where they grind it so you can include everything.
- Putting an EV station somewhere in town (already Ralph’s gas station).
- Tie into existing grid??? Secondary three phase in the Village??
- Cell phone service – if you give Verizon grief, they will walk away.
- How do we get the message about better service – “I think they might” - “Find the right amount of squeak”- squeaky wheel gets the bridge.
- Get more folks involved with weatherization and alternative energy – what is available, cost. Poor community, so has to be fundamental.
- More alternative energy – solar, wind.
- More options available for folks who may be there. Sustainability – easier to use and get to. Saturdays 8-12 is the only window right now. Make folks want to come to a community and stay.
- Invite solar companies to come in and talk to residents in one room or one building – they’re at the markets and fairs, but not in this area.
- Grants to get people started in these areas???
- Woman with 200 acres she wanted something to do with – put in a giant solar array.
- “For some unspecified amount of money, you can acquire devices that record information about the noise and speed and information about vehicle.”
- Town meetings to educate folks about why these things are important – need vote for the fill town of Brownington to do that.

- Needs to be a petition to do it. One side of town doesn't want it, one town does. Longer time town thing. Different between education and rules/laws.
- More law enforcement for speed enforcement.
- Dave has speed and traffic counters in his office to help with planning.
- Sherriff department speed carts.
- Enforcement.
- Change in law.
- Blinking signage.
- Derby paved their road and starting to fall apart – underpart isn't the best.
- Center road solution is advancing.
- Street names properly spelled???
- Culverts, etc. cost money.
- Get a budget, but quick to spend it
- Matching 10-20% for grants is a lot.
- Culverts program from the state has been challenging (losing state aid if didn't update drainage).
- Strings attached to more intensive funding (larger culvert, etc.).
- Funds – town plan opens up funding – funds you're not able to applied for? "We apply for every grant that is out there that is possible – and it is very time consuming, especially if it has to do with FEMA" (Which is what Brownington Center is).
- Road foreman wrote the first one, and Bev wrote the last too.
- Road was \$500k, now \$1.2 million.
- Professional grant writer.
- Usable buildings – barn torn down in Newport. Think it's better and most cost effective to demolish buildings??
- Reusing buildings, making in vision.
- Preserve the barn.
- Red barn next to stone house – in a family issue right now. Used to be an old tavern at the house.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Done a nice job maintaining public buildings with town offices, garage, school. Some of the things interest in – road and speed- organization can help with. Renewable energy and weatherization. Working with Molly at Old Stone House – regional event to learn more. State department of public service had driven everywhere with cell service to reach out to providers.
- Blown away by the school. Idea of rural sustainability – historic preservation idea. People want to be interesting and places with a sense of place and identity and how to combine with sustainability. Cell coverage (Montgomery, Craftsbury) – squeaky wheel gets the grease. Deserve/demand coverage!
- Speeding- would help quantify the issue so folks could see. Basics about keeping people safe. Starksboro, Burke, Craftsbury have all done this. Connect to SAFETY.
- Great assets and infrastructure in schools and buildings – took time and work to make improvements. Nothing happens overnight. Make speeding a community wide issue that will grab attention. Dave and resources will help. The group has identified really specific ideas – seem like a lot to you all, but you all have some you could really tackle. Not quickly, but soon. Applaud to make the town even more enjoyable.
- Pallet of cash - \$400 million – decide how to use a pallet of cash. A little more complicated. Next meeting- decide what to work on. CUD politics to get there sooner.
- Start marching an idea forward.
- Some of what was talked about was low hanging fruit – missed vote notices, a speeding ordinance, increase on enforcement.
- More money around – "New Deal Era of our time."
- Will provide support for various letters of support – Charles email will be shared.

Additional Action Ideas

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

- More community events. Formal barter organization.
- Compost bins / pickup.
- Trash pickup.
- Former Greater Brownington Business Association, which ran.
- Strawberry festival.
- Scavenger hunt day.
- Potential for an Amish family to educate others about their lifestyle.
- Encourage more businesses.

Ideas from Brownington Students

As shared in a group conversation with Brownington Central School students on 5/17/22

What do you like about living in Brownington?

- Wildlife and outdoor access.
- Lots of wildlife around.
- Good oxygen.
- Access to rivers and lakes, good fishing.
- Hiking and walking trails (Pisgah, Haystack, Bald).
- Center Church Youth Group.
- Old Stone House.
- Roads and trails open to ATVs.
- Four wheelers, ATVs, "mudding," just driving around.
- Snowmobile areas.
- Biking.
- Some dairy farms.

- Horse riding stables.
- Donkey Rescue.
- Local snack bar, offers ice cream in the winter.
- Swimming holes.
- Amish community.

- Community dinners.
- Raised money for a baby's heart surgery.
- They all help on building projects.
- "Moses is helping my mom build a porch."
- Labor/food trades with Amish community.
- Farmstands.

What are the Challenges of living in Brownington

- Quality of paved and unpaved roadways.
- Huge potholes, no one comes to fix them.
- Conditions in the winter can be difficult.
- Grass clippings onto road, fallen trees/branches.
- Overcrowding at beaches from out of staters.
- Road safety.
- Lots of speeding, "crazy drivers."
- Feels unsafe to walk along the main roads.
- No sidewalks, people have to walk in road or through yards.
- Drinking and driving.
- Lots of needles discarded in public spaces, drug challenges.
- Most stores are outside of Brownington.
- Trading Post is being sold.
- Stores that are open don't always stay open for long (close permanently or weird hours).
- 20 miles from stores like Walmart, Tractor Supply.
- Lack of grocery/food stores.
- No places for kids to hang out in town.

- Most hang out at home.
- Wouldn't necessarily recommend living in Brownington.
- Utilities aren't super reliable, electricity out a lot during storms.
- Not a lot of opportunities (education and jobs).
- High schoolers get jobs in Newport, but only people with access to vehicles can do that.
- Free food fridge available, but gets vandalized.
- Trash gets left out in the road, in people's yards.
- Dumping is a big concern.
- Lots of broken glass.
- Hunting safety concerns, people hunting on others' property.
- Crime is a rising concern, mostly vandalism or theft.
- Seeming lack of enforcement.
- Cost of heating connected to stealing gas.
- No police or emergency services actually located in Brownington.

What can we do?

- Build some sidewalks.
- Near the church, near the Old Stone House, near the Trading Post.
- Better paved roads, pothole repair.
- Speed radar, cameras in high concern areas, more law enforcement.
- Land bridges for animal crossing in high concern areas.
- Indoor recreational facilities or community spaces.
- Hospital or health clinic to bring services closer.
- Better services for substance use.
- Newport has BAART sober living/counseling, Brownington could use something similar.
- Safe needle disposal, harm reduction services.
- Regular check ins for families who struggle with substance use.
- Support for children of parents with substance use disorder.
- Better entertainment opportunities for kids and families.
- Arcade.
- Skate park.
- More restaurants with entertainment for kids and teens.
- Laser tag.
- Water park.
- More beach access points at local lakes - Willoughby only has two.

- Bike path around town for safer biking.
- Mud bogs (!)
- Cab services to discourage drunk driving.
- Bringing public transportation- busses (RCT?).
- Adding a stop on already-existing network of busses.
- More food stores, more produce.
- Access to healthy/natural foods.
- Pet food, pet supplies, farm supply.

Artwork on display at the Brownington Central School



VII. Brownington Connects Community Visit Participants

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Cover photo courtesy of Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village



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