

For Immediate Release:

From: Steve Ames, Morristown Community Visit Chair
888-1261
Paul Costello, Executive Director, VCRD
223-8171
RE: Major Morrisville Projects Underway
Date: July 26, 2011

New Projects Galvanize Morrisville Leadership

Morristown community and municipal leaders are working together on four projects identified this spring to energize the economy, improve the downtown, and advance Morrisville as a dynamic place to live and do business in the future.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) facilitated the four-month long “Community Visit” process that engaged more than 150 people in considering the assets and challenges before the town, developing priority projects, connecting to state, federal, and non-profit resources, building action plans, and setting to work.

Steve Ames, the Director of River Arts agreed to serve as the chairperson of the process and coordinate with the chairs of the new working groups over the next year.

Today more than 80 volunteers are working on four task forces to advance major projects that plan on addressing key concerns from the meetings: develop the economy, improve the downtown, help new businesses grow, expand agriculture, and contribute to the reinvigoration of the whole town.

Ames has been working with each of the groups and municipal staff to make sure each team gets off to a great start. “Each of the task forces has a great mix of dedicated volunteers and it’s been great to have the leadership from people coming forward as chair people for each effort.” With the support and encouragement of the selectboard, municipal staff are also taking the lead.

The first team is working to “Develop a Morrisville Food Coop and Organize the Foods Industry.” Morristown is not Hardwick but has key farms and food businesses that Trisha Follert, the Morrisville municipal community development director is taking a lead role as facilitator and working closely with Susan and Bob Titterton who are acting as co-chairs for the effort. This group is already off and running—several members attended a New England conference on starting a coop and are touring other coops to begin to define the business model for Morrisville.

Tim Lyberger a local business leader who runs a home based internet company is chairing the effort to “Organize a Business Incubator” that will stimulate the emergence of a new generation of small and potentially growing businesses in Morristown. Throughout the Community Visit process, residents pointed to the fact that the key businesses that have

grown in town have often started as microbusinesses in town and evolved to be economic foundations. This group is working to help new and existing small business start ups—and are looking at both services and potentially a location to help entrepreneurs build their businesses in town.

JJ Toland has agreed to lead the group working to “Redevelop Empty Buildings Downtown” - working to evaluate the situation and opportunities connected to key underused downtown buildings and to work creatively with owners to consider ways to move forward. It’s work may connect to efforts around the incubator or coop project as time goes on

Then there is a new and dynamic group dedicated to an effort to “Improve Trails and Walkways and Physically Unify the Town by Building a Pedestrian Bridge.” Bonnie Waninger, the Executive Director of the Lamoille Regional Planning Commission, is taking the lead as facilitator for this effort which will inventory all trails and recreational resources, look at gaps and new connections, and unite all the terrific resources of the town into a system that will improve the quality of life for residents but can also be an economic driver by attracting tourists and shoppers to the community.

As part of the Community Visit process, the Vermont Council on Rural Development brought a team of 40 state, federal, regional and non-profit leaders to listen to residents, facilitate sessions, and lend their ideas for action steps and resources that could help the town succeed in reaching it’s goals. VCRD compares the energy and ambition of Morristown participants in the Community Visit process as very similar to the engagement in towns that have been most successful in using the process like Hardwick, Johnson, Rutland, Bellows Falls and Brandon.

According to VCRD Executive Director Paul Costello, “There is a great deal of terrific momentum in Morrisville. The core priorities are great--really ambitious; bold, but also concrete and do-able. When a town lines up as Morrisville has, and when it sets a clear and bold course of direction, as the town has, it gives us a lot of confidence for success. In this case, that success can have a transformative effect on life in the town. I see what’s going on in Morrisville and the goals set here, and I can’t help but reflect on how similar the process has been to Rutland’s where they have achieved terrific progress.”

VCRD has just published the “Final Report and Action Plan” developed with Morristown in July. Copies are available at the Town Office for all volunteers in working groups and any interested community resident.

The working Task Forces welcome your involvement. Call Steve Ames at 888-1261 to volunteer or to consider where you can help.