

POWNAL COMMUNITY VISIT

REPORT AND ACTION PLAN



**VERMONT COUNCIL ON
RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

JUNE 2006

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Introduction

As the state's southwestern gateway, Pownal has played a key role in the history of Vermont. Today, while facing strategic choices and economic challenges, Pownal has unprecedented opportunities for progress. Real progress is all about local leadership; in the context of a Community Visit this includes everyone who puts him or her self on the line to make the community a better place to live and work. The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) and its Visiting Team were deeply impressed by the passionate commitment and careful thought of Pownal residents determined to use the opportunity of the Community Visit process to unite in common action to address fundamental priorities ahead.

One thing is certain in Pownal: change is on the doorstep. Residents have stepped up to meet that change. The forums and town meetings offered throughout the Visit saw the largest turnout in the history of the program as participants explored hard questions before their town.

Pownal has so much to celebrate: farm and forestland, beautiful landscapes, and a hardworking population deeply connected to their home. Like many other Vermont towns, Pownal also faces hard economic realities as employment opportunities shift away from local businesses and the community struggles to provide affordable and safe housing for its diverse population.

Pownal's diversity and its distance from markets and industrial centers are both strengths and challenges: How can Pownal achieve its best destiny—that in tune with the values and goals of residents? How can Pownal expand the local economy in ways that fit with its history, tradition and 'sense of place'? How can the redevelopment of the racetrack be integrated into the community in a positive way? How can Pownal's geography encompassing three village areas become an asset that unifies, rather than divides? How can the town balance the natural environment so valued by residents with the need for economic opportunity? How can Pownal improve housing opportunities to ensure that safe, affordable and decent housing is available for all of its residents?

The four priority issues selected by Pownal residents through the Community Visit process respond to many of these questions and set starting strategies for residents to work together. The new Pownal Task Force on **Mobile Home Park Improvement and Affordable Housing** will tackle one of the toughest issues in Vermont today, and resources offered by the VCRD Visiting Team provide the possibility for substantial improvement. **Community Identity and Communications** are foundational issues; this Task Force can build strategies that will impact Pownal's internal and regional image and build interaction and unity among the town's diverse population. The Task Force charged to build an **Economic Development** plan can connect the racetrack redevelopment and other industrial and commercial opportunities to help to set the basis for the future prosperity of the community. Pownal's tremendous natural beauty and excellent location with access to open land, water, forests, country roads and hiking trails

provide an exceptional but undeveloped opportunity for the new Task Force to expand and promote **Outdoor Recreation** for both residents and visitors.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development respects the initiative shown by Pownal residents in their newly formed Task Forces and acknowledges the hard work that lies ahead. The Community Visit begins and ends with local leadership, and VCRD appreciates the support it has received throughout this process from Nelson Brownell and other members of the Selectboard and from the Pownal Planning Commission. Representative Bill Botzow has been a steadfast supporter of Pownal and of the Council, and first brought the community to VCRD's attention for a possible Visit. We are deeply grateful for his partnership. Thanks are due also to Jim Winchester for his help obtaining the American Legion Hall and putting together the wonderful community dinner, and to members of the Pownal Steering Committee for their able assistance with long-distance logistics. Finally, VCRD would like to thank Peter Hopkins who has agreed to serve as Chairperson of the Community Visit, and who will work to coordinate Task Force projects and plans over the coming year.

Accomplishments in the Community Visit program result from local leadership and community effort, however VCRD is eager to support implementation. We suggest that you carefully review the Recommendation section of this report for concrete resources and ideas, and that you call upon members of the Visiting Team (listed at the end of this report) and VCRD staff for help.

The Community Visit Program

The Vermont Council on Rural Development Community Visit Program is a structured process that enables a community to identify and prioritize goals, fosters local leadership, and serves as a catalyst for the development and realization of concrete, achievable action plans. The program consists of three phases:

1. **Community Visit Day** - Open to all community members, participants meet in focus groups throughout the day, and provide testimony to Visiting Team Members with expertise in the areas of concern. The meetings result in an initial list of challenges and opportunities. (page 4)
2. **Community Meeting** – At this stage of the process participants review, discuss, and refine their initial list of challenges, and ultimately vote on the top four issues of concern. Community members sign up to work on a task force that will create a strategic action plan for the selected topics. (page 8)
3. **Community Resource Day** – Task Force members meet with a new Resource Team to design action steps, and identify state, federal, non-profit, and private resources that will allow them to advance toward solutions. (page 10)

Resource Team Members agree to serve in an ongoing capacity as advisors, referral agents, and liaisons for the Pownal Task Forces. Members of the Resource Team listened closely to resident's concerns, and carefully considered opportunities for addressing each issue. Their suggestions are found on page 20

Community Visit Day

VCRD staff and more than 30 Visiting Team Members rolled into Pownal on April 3, 2006 by chartered bus – a first for the organization. This group transportation allowed visitors the opportunity to take a guided tour of the town, to see firsthand the renowned landscape, built environment, and unique geography of a place that contains three village areas in one community. The tour provided a clearer understanding of the assets and issues in this town hugging the southwesterly corner of Vermont, and a deeper appreciation of the people who live here. More than 200 participants attended forums throughout the afternoon and evening, contributing to a pool of ideas from which recurring themes, actionable concerns, and important issues emerged. One Visiting Team member observed that, “The people of Pownal appreciate who they are, and recognize the need to support one another. That alone is an incredible asset.” Following is the initial list of challenges and opportunities produced on Community Visit Day.

Pownal Challenges and Opportunities Identified in Town Forums; April 3, 2006

Community Center: Pownal’s three village areas create unique places with geographic variety, and a diverse community with a good mix of people offering different abilities, interests, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The separation, however, can contribute to a lack of common identity, difficulty with communication, and a division of resources. A Community Center could unify, for example, senior services from three centers to one. Pownal could plan and build a community center to provide a center-point for a variety of community activities, support a unified sense of place, and improve communication between all areas of town. This could be done in conjunction with the redevelopment of the racetrack or at another central site.

Advancing Pownal as a Gateway Marketplace: As the southwest gateway to Vermont, Pownal has the opportunity to market itself as a cornerstone of Vermont food and crafts. Pownal has rich agricultural opportunities, including good soil, and productive vegetable and dairy farms. A farmer’s market would encourage people to buy local products, while drawing people from surrounding communities. Encouraging local artists and musicians to participate would provide additional opportunities and advertise Pownal as a town on the move.

Community Festivals Community events can build momentum within a town, and promote a positive image to surrounding areas. Pownal residents should build an events plan to promote community spirit and to market Pownal as a town on the move. Consider outdoor movies, hayrides, holiday festivals, softball tournaments and Community Theater. Pownal could start small with one or two events this summer that could later be built upon, while exploring renovation of the Tannery site, a site at the redeveloped racetrack, or other options for larger, more permanent events.

Pownal Beautification: Abandoned homes, trash, junk cars and other eyesores at both ends of town can contribute to a poor self-image and misrepresent Pownal’s many assets to outsiders. Pownal should build a beautification committee to organize a town cleanup day, plan and implement new signage at entrances to the town, offer free trash days at the transfer station, build a derelict mobile home ordinance, and strengthen zoning and enforcement. Pownal can also capitalize on the “Peaceful Valley” image by applying for a scenic by-way designation and take advantage of the town’s unique assets by putting together a blueprint of scenic and agricultural highlights. There are many resources available to help with scenic by-way and tourism projects;

Pownal is a key gateway to Vermont, and should take pride in its natural resources and built environment.

Pownal Communications: Pownal residents express frustration at the lack of internal and external communications. People believe that area newspapers offer limited and sometimes biased coverage, and they lack information about town events and issues. Many residents feel that having three geographically distinct communities contributes to the weak communications. Pownal should develop a systematic communications strategy to boost positive community identity (in and out of town) and improve communications across community groups. A committee of residents could consider and implement possibilities around building a town newspaper or newsletter, developing the town website (with leadership from the town's youth in design and production), setting up a bulletin board or kiosk, producing a town directory, issuing local press releases, and systematically reaching out to newcomers to the community.

Outdoor Recreation: Pownal has tremendous natural beauty, and an excellent location with access to open lands, waters, public and private forests and both the Long Trail and the Appalachian Trail. A group could form to expand access and promote the use of Pownal's undeveloped resources. Abandoned roads and trails, for example, could be developed into biking trails, and participation in a developing bike path from Florida to Maine should be explored. Pownal could increase signage and promote hiking, biking and other trail use as an economic draw. The Hoosic River has the potential for recreational use for fishing, canoeing, and swimming. Progress has been made with cleanup, but a dedicated group of residents could advance it. A river walk and bike path to Williams College could also be developed. Students from Williams, Southern Vermont, and Bennington College may be excellent resources to tap for development, design ideas, and implementation.

Youth Engagement: Like many other Vermont towns, Pownal residents expressed a concern about a diminished and disengaged youth population. A group could form to build opportunities, activities, and recreation for youth. Young people could be invited to lead, for example, in developing town communications, such as a website and town newspaper. A survey of young people could be taken to determine areas of interest. Pownal residents have expressed a strong desire to build a recreation center, perhaps at the Tannery site or racetrack. 4H and Scouting provide leadership and service opportunities for youth, and family activities such as ATV or snowmobile trails could be explored.

Mobile Home Park Improvements: While some mobile home parks in Pownal are exemplary and fulfill a genuine housing need, some present health and safety concerns and inhumane living conditions. Absentee landlords, abandoned homes, inadequate sewer and drinking water, fire hazards, cost, and social stigma were expressed as key problems. A group of Pownal residents could form to address substandard living conditions and engage in proactive efforts to improve existing sites. This group could work with residents to explore cooperative ownership, and financial assistance and credit counseling available through existing organizations. Such a committee could line up work with residents, the local and regional planning commissions, selectboard, local developers, State of Vermont and others to remove derelict homes, improve sanitation and safety, review and promote enforcement of codes and legal protections, and make park improvements.

Planning and Zoning: A large development such as the one at the track will have an effect not only on the site but on Pownal as a whole, surrounding areas, and the entire region. Pownal needs to capture what is positive, and be proactive to protect what it values in the area outside

the development. Some residents believe that current zoning laws and the lack of enforcement lead to chronic abuse and eyesores throughout town. Residents express a need for updated and enforceable zoning laws.

Affordable Housing: All of Vermont is suffering from an acute shortage of affordable housing, particularly for the elderly, starter homes, and worker homes. An inventory of available housing sites should be taken. A task force of Pownal residents could scope out opportunities such as higher density, clustered housing, and modular rather than mobile homes, and then build ties to state, non-profit, and private resources to plan for the development of new affordable housing.

Economic Development: Residents worry that Pownal has lost industries and has no clear plan to build or attract the jobs of the future. An economic development committee could work with the regional development corporation to build a plan to develop and/or attract businesses, support small businesses and agricultural enterprises, encourage local purchasing, and support commerce. An education and training component is important.

Public Safety Services: Some Pownal residents worry that there is inadequate or poorly coordinated police protection and potentially duplicative fire services. Currently, fire service is dispatched from Berkshire County. Many residents expressed the need for a centralized dispatch service located in Bennington. Although communication has improved between the Pownal fire and rescue units and both do excellent work, many residents question the effectiveness and efficiency of having two departments and four fire buildings for a population of 3500 people.

Telecom Access: Improved communications, better State Police coverage, and expanded job opportunities all depend on adequate and affordable access to cellular phone service and affordable broadband access. Fiber optics at the racetrack could make the site an emerging technology hub and attract and incubate small and innovative technology businesses. The town could conduct a survey of broadband needs and negotiate with broadband service providers to develop a plan for ubiquitous service. Residents could explore WiFi opportunities.

Redevelopment of the Race Track: The development project at the racetrack could be a wonderful opportunity for the town—especially if the developer and the townspeople communicate positively and effectively. Some development ideas that the town might support and encourage include: a music venue, convention center, recreation center, VT food and artisan space, horse barns, ‘open commons’ or town green, antique center, sports or athletic training center, river walks, water park, affordable housing, and mixed use for residential, commercial and retail space. There is concern for the natural environment, and a strong desire to use the space as a unifier for the community. A Pownal task force could be developed to help the community rally around the development, support the project through regulatory hurdles, and work to ensure that the project serves the whole town by unifying and advancing the community.

Welcome and Information Center: A Pownal Welcome Center on Route 7 could provide a place for information and advertise town businesses and assets. A team of Pownal residents could work toward such a center—either as a Vermont state project or as a community project ranging in size from a kiosk to a major rest area or an element of a Pownal community center.

Community Identity: Pownal has a rich history, beautiful landscapes, and a diverse population. However, many people are concerned about a negative image, unsightly or abandoned homes, and neglected property. A Pownal task force could take an inventory of Pownal's human and material assets and gather input from all parts of Pownal to provide a consolidated picture of the community's resources, then unite these assets in a 'brand' and marketing strategy to build a positive image of Pownal in the regional media. This group could then set strategies to build on assets to make the community more attractive for the future.

Pownal Governance:

Although the Selectboard is working hard and doing a good job, most members have daytime jobs or other obligations, and it is difficult to accomplish everything. A town manager should be hired to oversee daily operations of the town. The creation of new town offices would add to the efficiency of Pownal's governing structure. A top priority of town leaders should be devising a better way to collect delinquent taxes.

Community Meeting

Red and blue stickers dotted the walls of the Pownal Elementary School one Tuesday evening in May, as participants carefully considered where to place their votes. The Community Meeting is the center-point of the democratic decision-making that takes place through the Community Visit, where residents select four priority areas that will become the focus of year-long work teams. This is a forum where ideas flow freely, arguments are offered, perspectives shared, and people have the opportunity to champion their beliefs and then vote their priorities. More than 100 residents attended the Community Meeting in Pownal, and everyone had an equal voice. The four priority issues selected by the people of Pownal are:

Pownal Priorities

Selected by Community Meeting – May 2, 2006

1. Mobile Home Park Improvement/Affordable Housing

While some mobile home parks in Pownal are exemplary and fulfill a genuine housing need, some present health and safety concerns and inhumane living conditions. Absentee landlords, abandoned homes, inadequate sewer and drinking water, fire hazards, cost, and social stigma were expressed as key problems. A group of Pownal residents could form to address substandard living conditions and engage in proactive efforts to improve existing sites. This group could work with residents to explore cooperative ownership, and financial assistance and credit counseling available through existing organizations. Such a committee could line up work with residents, the local and regional planning commissions, selectboard, local developers, State of Vermont and others to remove derelict homes, improve sanitation and safety, review and promote enforcement of codes and legal protections, and make park improvements.

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and improve communications across community groups. A committee of residents could consider and implement possibilities around building a town newspaper or newsletter, developing the town website (with leadership from the town's youth in design and production), setting up a bulletin board or kiosk, producing a town directory, issuing local press releases, and systematically reaching out to newcomers to the community.

3. Economic Development

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4. Outdoor Recreation

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Task Forces

Developed in response to the four Woodstock priorities on May 2, 2006

Pownal Task forces are comprised of community members and an appointed chairperson. At the first meeting on May 31, committee members worked closely with a facilitator and small resource teams to develop step-by-step action plans, and to devise 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 process, and begin the exciting work of turning ideas into action.

Mobile Home Park Improvement/Affordable Housing

Chairperson: Pam Bolus – 823-7218 pvbvt@sover.net

- ❖ **Mobile Home Park Improvement/Affordable Housing:** While some mobile home parks in Pownal are exemplary and fulfill a genuine housing need, some present health and safety concerns and inhumane living conditions. Absentee landlords, abandoned homes, inadequate sewer and drinking water, fire hazards, cost, and social stigma were expressed as key problems. A group of Pownal residents could form to address substandard living conditions and engage in proactive efforts to improve existing sites. This group could work with residents to explore cooperative ownership, and financial assistance and credit counseling available through existing organizations. Such a committee could line up work with residents, the local and regional planning commissions, selectboard, local developers, State of Vermont and others to remove derelict homes, improve sanitation and safety, review and promote enforcement of codes and legal protections, and make park improvements.

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Action Steps:

1. Form a housing group, including a representative from each mobile home park.
2. Design a survey.
3. Conduct a survey of mobile home park tenants and owners.
4. Compile and analyze regulatory enforcement and assessment strategies.
5. Inventory affordable housing sites.
6. Take an inventory of mobile home sites and existing conditions.
7. Explore opportunities for transfer of ownership of mobile homes.
8. Identify and build an affordable housing project.

Resources:

1. Ed Bove at RAHC
2. VHFA
3. Housing Vermont
4. Community Development Block Grants
5. USDA Rural Development
6. UVM Students
7. Regional Planning Commission
8. Experienced survey developers

Next Meeting: June 21, 2006 at 6:30pm

Community Identity/ Communications

Chairperson: Jim Boutin – 823-7213 jboutin@adelphia.net

- ❖ **Community Identity/Communications:** Pownal has a rich history, beautiful landscapes, and a diverse population. However, many people are concerned about a negative image, unsightly or abandoned homes, and neglected property. A Pownal task force could take an inventory of Pownal’s human and material assets and gather input from all parts of Pownal to provide a consolidated picture of the community’s resources, then unite these assets in a ‘brand’ and marketing strategy to build a positive image of Pownal in the regional media. This group could then set strategies to build on assets to make the community more attractive for the future.

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Peter Spencer	823-5360	

Action Steps:

1. When considering Pownal's identity and communication strategies, be sure to think about internal/external identity and internal/external communications.
2. Develop an inventory of Pownal assets. Be sure to include Pownal's natural resources.
3. Meet with diverse groups and ask them for input. Potential groups include:
 - o teachers
 - o students
 - o American Legion members
 - o church groups and church leaders
 - o the 3 other Community Visit communities
4. Include in this inventory a list of people – the human resources assets of Pownal.
5. Build a Pownal Service Directory from the inventory including Pownal businesses and artists.
6. Create a "Welcome to Pownal" package that would include this directory and Pownal products.
7. Ask one person in each of the other task forces to send minutes from their meetings to this group. This committee will unify information, then write and send press releases.
8. Identify what Pownal needs on a website, and send out an RFP to get one set up.
9. Develop a newsletter and/or newspaper for Pownal.
10. Develop a community news section or a 'Pownal Page' for newspapers. Build a relationship with reporters from the Bennington Banner and the North Adams transcript.

11. Two volunteers have stepped forward to produce press releases: Ray Rodrigues and Rebecca Zimba.
12. Build a vision statement for Pownal.
13. Name this whole project.
14. Look into improving signage.

Resources:

1. Obtain a copy of the Poultney Vision Statement that developed from their Community Visit. Invite someone from Poultney to one of the meeting to share that town's experience.
2. The Bennington County Regional Commission is willing to partner with Pownal to help build a website.
3. Invite Bill Botzow, Jim Winchester and Karen Burrington to share their perspectives on communications with the committee.
4. Look into a Municipal Planning Grant through the Agency of Commerce to support the planning of this committee, and to support elements of the work of other committees.
5. Ask real estate agencies to contribute to the cost of printing for the Service Directory.
6. This work is critically important to the future; the committee may need to ask the municipality for support for some elements of its work.
7. Invite the selectboard to have a member on each committee.

Next Meeting: June 7, 2006 at 6:00pm at the American Legion.

Economic Development

Chairperson: Clint Hutchins 823-7220 vtclint@adelphia.net

- ❖ **Economic Development:** Residents worry that Pownal has lost industries and has no clear plan to build or attract the jobs of the future. An economic development committee could work with the regional development corporation to build a plan to develop and/or attract businesses, support small businesses and agricultural enterprises, encourage local purchasing, and support commerce. An education and training component is important.

Committee Members:

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The Economic Development Committee determined that their goals include:

- An increase in the median wage.
- An increased number of individuals earning a good wage.
- Recognition of the need to serve local people.
- Develop the ability to attract others to the area.

To achieve these goals the committee identified the following action steps:

Action Steps:

1. Identify community job creation assets.
2. Identify the kinds of businesses the community wants to retain.
3. Identify infrastructure needs including:
 - communications
 - power
 - employee qualifications
 - housing
 - customer access
4. Create an economic development plan with BCIC. The plan should enhance Pownal's identity by including a branding strategy.
5. Assess the status of the current economy in Pownal.
6. Identify the pool of businesses that Pownal could attract.
7. Determine the role of tourism in the economy.
8. Support the development of workforce housing.
9. Support the development of vacation housing.
10. Design a plan to attract young people.
11. Involve youth and area college students in the economic development process.
12. Publicize and promote local jobs.
13. Identify the best job opportunities for Pownal.
14. Improve Internet access.
15. Designate job creation locations.
16. Explore the role of local agricultural production and consumption by working with the Bennington County Agricultural Committee. Provide support and encouragement for young farmers.
17. Create a partnership program for students to intern with local businesses.
18. Provide skills and work force ethics training for students not planning to attend college.
19. Explore opportunities for local renewable energy.

20. Research fiber optic lines in Pownal.
21. Work with the racetrack investors to develop ongoing and positive relationship with the committee.

Resources:

1. Financial support could come from existing State and BCIC investments in the Racetrack.
2. BCRC
3. Area colleges
4. Various meeting spaces in town including:
 - o firehouses
 - o American Legion
 - o school
5. UDSA Rural Development
6. Vermont NOFA/AG network.
7. State of Vermont/Department of Economic Development
8. BCIC could provide human resources.
9. SBDC
10. Private development capital.
11. BCIC will provide an existing survey tool.
12. A publicity person is needed to publicize efforts, including developing a website presence.
13. Community-based development through building construction.
14. Sponsor a “Community Day” meeting with active developers.
15. Create a wish list by gathering input from local people and businesses.

Outdoor Recreation

Chairperson: TBD–

Contact Peter Hopkins 823-5405 peterhopkins@adelphia.net

- ❖ **Outdoor Recreation:** Pownal has tremendous natural beauty, and an excellent location with access to open lands, waters, public and private forests and both the Long Trail and the Appalachian Trail. A group could form to expand access and promote the use of Pownal's undeveloped resources. Abandoned roads and trails, for example, could be developed into biking trails, and participation in a developing bike path from Florida to Maine should be explored. Pownal could increase signage and promote hiking, biking and other trail use as an economic draw. The Hoosic River has the potential for recreational use for fishing, canoeing, and swimming. Progress has been made with cleanup, but a dedicated group of residents could advance it. A river walk and bike path to Williams College could also be developed. Students from Williams, Southern Vermont, and Bennington College may be excellent resources to tap for development, design ideas, and implementation.

Committee Members:

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<u>Cody Gardner</u>	<u>823-5313</u>	<u></u>
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<u>Dave Cook</u>	<u>823-5203</u>	<u>69 Cardinal Blvd AG MHP</u>
<u>Janet Gordon Cook</u>	<u>823-5203</u>	<u>69 Cardinal Blvd AG MHP</u>
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<u>Jim Sullivan</u>	<u></u>	<u></u>
<u>Philip Bornier</u>	<u></u>	<u></u>

Action Steps:

1. Improve youth activities and facilities. Assess the tannery building's potential, and research its use as a skate park.
2. Combine/coordinate efforts of the three existing recreation committees.
3. Conduct a trails inventory and generate a map.
4. Improve the image of the Hoosic River, and improve river use and access.
5. Work with other towns to determine the potential for an ATV Network.
6. The Recreation Committee has funds for a kick-off musical performance. They will support a future music concert by contacting the Vermont Arts Council for possible funding.
7. Research the possibility of re-establishing Barber Pond as a swimming beach.
8. Promote the trailheads for the Appalachian and Long Trails and the Taconic Ridge Trail.

Resources:

1. The committee could collaborate with existing groups in Bennington around ATV trail development and promotion.
2. Land and water conservation grant funds may be available.
3. A skate park for youth is under consideration, although liability issues should be explored with the League of Cities and Towns.
4. Encourage greater youth participation by using the school as a meeting place, and working with the Physical Education teacher to promote projects.
5. The National Forest Foundation provides grant money for organization building and may have seed money for the committee.
6. Investigate the VT Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation for trail grants. The Selectboard should communicate with other towns regarding trail development.
7. The Watershed Association and National Forest Service fisheries can help with strategies and organizational support for Hoosic River improvement.
8. Explore opportunities to purchase Barber Pond. Work with the Vermont Land Trust.

Next Meeting: Monday, June 12, 2006 - 6:00pm at the Town Hall.

Pownal Community Visit Resource Team

Resource Team members represent a wide array of professionals from across the state, and agree to serve as partners and advisors to the Pownal Task Forces. Their recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community's unique assets and needs. It is hoped that community members will turn frequently to these pages for concrete ideas, resources, and support. Resource Team members are eager to support the Task Forces as they begin their work. Following are recommendations compiled from the Pownal Visiting and Resource Teams.

General Recommendations

Town plans, zoning, bylaws, and their enforcement, all fit together and impact the landscape of a community. The town plan would be a good place to start to determine where housing, industry, commercial development, agriculture, and recreation are all to be located. That information would be useful for Task Forces to review. For example, if the community identity committee wants to ensure that roadways are scenic, but the roads are all zoned commercial, then what they want may not happen. Seeing the plan may also inform the mobile home improvement and affordable housing discussions.

The staff of the Green Mountain National Forest is willing to conduct a grant-writing workshop, and to work with a grant writing team as they begin to pursue funding for any of the projects defined by the Community Visit. Contact Kathleen Diehl, Partnership and Conservation Education Coordinator, at (802) 747-6709 kdiehl@fs.fed.us.

The Vermont Community Foundation could be a good place for Task Forces to find some funding resources to start their efforts. They can be reached at 388-3355.

Non-profit and community groups in Pownal can contact the Vermont Humanities Council for programs that can engage people in town in new ways – their small grants program supports community initiatives of certain kinds, including a one-book statewide community reading program, public talks, reading and discussion series, and more. Programs targeted at literacy audiences include literacy-training programs for childcare providers and young parents, and weeklong day camps for middle school children during the summer. Contact Peter Gilbert at (802) 262-2626.

Mobil Home Park Improvement/Affordable Housing

The Task Force should consider opportunities for cooperative purchasing and management of parks, the condemnation and removal of derelict mobile homes, full enforcement of permitting and public safety codes, possible redevelopment of certain parks, as well as the development of other forms of affordable housing in town. The Recommendations are enumerated below to support these processes.

There needs to be very tough enforcement of code violations to get the mobile home park landlords in line. The situation with several of those park owners has been going from bad to

worse for years. In order to turn around quality of life issues in general, it is essential to require landlords to raise the quality of life in the parks. This will require political will by Selectboard, Planning Commission and Zoning Administrator.

VT Housing Finance Agency is an excellent resource and is willing to work extensively on the "Mobile Home Park Improvement / Affordable Housing" priority, with both human and financial resources. While a good adaptive re-use of the racetrack is necessary and may include a housing component, it seems very appropriate that some existing conditions in town be addressed without delay. Affordable housing often needs to be addressed on a number of fronts, but VHFA would particularly like to work on improving the living situation for people in the existing sub-standard mobile home parks. VHFA can assist in many other areas too, including new rental housing and new for-sale starter homes. The Housing Task should prioritize the existing parks for action, and assess the best solution for each. This group will need to hire technical expertise, whether it be developers, engineers, or tenant organizers. VHFA can provide suggestions for such consultants as well as pre-development dollars to pay for their work. VHFA can also suggest other sources of pre-development funding. Contact Joe Erdelyi, VHFA Director of Development (802) 652-3432, JErdelyi@vhfa.org

Housing Vermont is the leading affordable housing developer in the state. They are in position to lead in the development of affordable housing as a component of moving ahead on these issues. Housing Vermont works with local partners to develop and manage units throughout the state and could participate in planning and development activities that complement work on mobile home park improvements. Contact Andy Broderick, their director, at 863-8424.

USDA Rural Development is another valuable resource for housing needs.

- Housing Preservation Grants may be obtained from USDA, for repairing existing housing in Pownal. Call Heidi Setien at (802) 828-6021.
- Contact the Cooperative Development Institute (413) 665-1271 regarding technical assistance for forming a Mobile Home Park Cooperatives.
- USDA, Rural Development and Neighborworks could provide home buyer education classes in the area. Contact Ludy Biddle, Executive Director at (802) 438-2303, lbiddle@vermontel.net.
- Contact Lynn Booth of NH Community Loan Fund about the Manufactured Housing Program at (603) 224-6669.
- Contact Jon-Michael Muise, Rural Development Manager for rehabilitation loans and grant funds for repairs. USDA Rural Development Housing Preservation Grant funds could also be targeted to Pownal once community needs are identified. (802) 257-7878 x106, jon.muise@vt.usda.gov.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) from the VT Agency of Commerce (828-3211) may be key resources once major projects are planned.

Contact Peter Rhoades (603) 224-6669 at the **New Hampshire Community Loan Fund** for help from the Technical Assistance for Manufactured Housing Cooperative Program.

The **Vermont Housing & Conservation Board** (VHCB) funds the acquisition, rehabilitation and construction of affordable housing by nonprofit housing organizations. Affordable housing projects eligible for funding include rental housing, rental and ownership co-ops, mobile home parks, single family homes, shared elderly housing, single room occupancy and group homes. Contact them at (802) 828-3250.

An active tenants group could be formed with the idea of starting a **Neighborhood Watch** program in the parks to expand the pride and safety of parks. For assistance contact Major Jim Baker of the Vermont State Police at (802) 244-8775 jbaker@dps.state.vt.us.

Pownal's Task Force should seek collaboration with **Williams College** in its planning process. Pownal residents should talk to representatives from other towns that support colleges and find out what types of assistance and resources have been sought and secured. Williams College has a great stake in its employees that live in Pownal. They may not realize the many ways (i.e. Employer Assisted Housing Programs) they can help Pownal while also addressing their own work force issues.

The Housing Task Force should organize resources to facilitate tenant buy-out of mobile home parks where possible. by working with **Opportunities Credit Union** (802) 865-3404, and perhaps the **Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council** (775-0879), it might be possible for the tenants of some parks to achieve ownership. This has been done for more than 70 parks in New Hampshire and a few in Vermont. Tenant buyouts can be financed with a mix of alternative funding sources. (This may also be an activity that could be assisted by Williams College through employee assisted homeownership program.)

Dorothy Liftig of **CVOEO** (660-3455 x105) is eager to work with the Mobile Home and Affordable Housing Committee. She is ready to drive to Pownal and work with the committee to get things done.

Contact **UVM's** Dan Baker for information about the destruction and removal of derelict trailers. They have had some success in Alburgh. Daniel.baker@uvm.edu. The committee should conduct an inventory, not just of available housing sites, but the number and location of mobile homes that need to be crushed and removed to plan for bringing in the help to do that, while reducing the removal cost.

The **Vermont Center for Geographic Information** (<http://www.vegi.org>) may be able to assist with mapping available parcels using GIS technology. This could be a graduate student project.

Conduct a survey of seniors to find out if there is interest in a senior housing facility. This could free up homes for family use, and address a need among the community's elderly residents. Once capacity is determined, find out what state and federal financing is available.

Be prepared: if you do deal with unsightly or abandoned homes and neglected property, you may have increased desire to build second homes or other types of development in some of the vistas you treasure. Make sure that your zoning and land use plans are up to date and that the beauty you seek to restore is not, ironically, diminished in another way in the process.

Community Identity/Communications

The charge for this Task Force is broad and complex. It will be crucial to get practical in short order. Set a timeline to build a list of Pownal Community Assets and ask community residents and organizations (including the three other Community Visit towns to send you their recommendations of bulleted points to be included in a one-page overview of Pownal's Identity and Vision. Then the Task Force should take feedback on this document and possibly work to have it adopted as a town vision at town meeting. The committee should then look at ways that the town can unify its communications and market all the good assets it has documented.

Contact **Jonas Rosenthal**, Town Manager of Poultney to invite someone from that Community Visit process to share his or her experience. Call 802-287-9751.

The Task Force should expand the existing Pownal website to include active updates—put everyone in town on the same calendar! Assistance may be available from **Marlboro College Technology Center** graduate students. Call 1-888-258-5665.

A great resource for technology and software is **Tech Soup** - www.techsoup.org. There are a variety of database programs that integrate with email newsletters and are simple and low-cost or free.

Contact **The Bennington Banner** to see if they will run a Pownal page in the paper, similar to the current Bennington page.

Consider whether a leadership program or college class could help Pownal residents develop an inventory and branding campaign. For example, the **State of Vermont's Public Manager's Program** requires that groups take on projects such as this, and **Chittenden County's "Leadership Champlain"** program has engaged diverse teams of business and nonprofit leaders in this type of project. Explore www.vermontpersonnel.org/employee/training_pubman.php for more information on this type of training.

Get the school involved. A school newspaper funded by the community will be a learning experience and will give children ownership and an understanding of the town's activities. Be sure it goes to senior citizens and non-school age families, too. Work collaboratively with the school to learn how to share information about community activities. Students could potentially also be leaders in the development of a Pownal page in the Banner.

Invite area journalists (TV, print, radio) to speak to this group of residents to share their thoughts about what is news, and how to get the message to the media. Journalists like to talk about their craft, and this would create a forum where residents could discuss their concerns about news coverage of the area in a structured, facilitated setting. Build relationships proactively, so journalists know whom to call when there is a story or question.

There are some specific strategies that will make your media efforts and press releases more effective.

- Send out an advisory at least a week before an event, letting the media know what is going to happen.
- Send out a press release after the event, packaging it just like a news story: headline, dateline, catchy lead, quotes, background information and a web address for more information. Your communications person's contact information should be on the release.
- Know the medium's deadlines: morning papers vary, but late afternoon or early evening is standard.
- Unless your story is HOT, you are competing with stories that are time-sensitive. Monday is a good day to launch a press release; Friday is not generally as good.

Whatever form it takes, a town newsletter is a really good idea. The Task Force should work with the **Communications Department** at nearby colleges for help with coordination, writing, and printing. This could be an outstanding service learning opportunity for college students.

Select a focal point in each village where notices can be posted and consider the construction of a conveniently located Kiosk or welcome/information center. If one is planned that directly ties to the development and expansion of small and emerging businesses, it could be funded through the Rural Business Enterprise Grant program at **USDA**; Contact Sherry Paige: 828-6034.

Other ideas to improve the image of Pownal:

- Residents could coordinate CPR (clean, paint and repair) projects. Also planting flowers with a local garden club in strategic areas can help foster a positive image with little cost.
- Plant a community garden, preferably near a senior center or where seniors congregate. Involve the local 4-H club or Girls and Boy Scouts or FFA. Always be sure to ask the kids what they'd like to see. Then be sure they are part of the workforce to make it happen. That will help to involve their families as well.
- Revive the Peaceful Pownal Valley concept as a marketing tool.
- Have a Pownal Pride Day or some other celebration that brings everyone together. Celebrate the heritage of the community after a major "green up" campaign. Get everyone involved and offer a free weekend at the transfer station the week before. Town leaders could go to neglected areas of the community and invite owners to take part in, or even sponsor part of, the festivities. Find out what the town can do to help property owners comply with existing ordinances.
- Have a job-shadow day in town by the sixth graders and the town officers and businesses. Take pictures and do a big press event to highlight how Pownal is encouraging their youth to be active citizens.
- Establish a Welcoming Committee for newcomers. Be sure there is someone who has only been in town for 2 years or less on the committee. That person will know what questions to have answers for!
- Build new signs to welcome people to Pownal at the Bennington town limit sign and the Massachusetts border. Ask local farmers and florists to provide plants near the signs, and thank them publicly with photos and press.

Economic Development

The Pownal Economic Development Task Force can support existing businesses, attract new businesses and provide help to entrepreneurs of all sorts who are trying to grow new businesses in the region. The recommendations below suggest some of the directions that the Task Force could take in moving forward.

Pownal should consider organizing to establish a **Local Development Corporation**. Local Development Corporations, or LDCs, are organizations that undertake and complete community development projects including economic development, housing and community facilities. While the **Bennington County Regional Development Corporation** can continue to be an important resource for Pownal, a locally established development corporation can be concentrated on Pownal alone. There are numerous LDCs in Vermont and some have been incredibly productive. The best example is **Randolph Area Community Development Corp**. Contact Jeremy Ingpen at (802) 728-4305 or his predecessor, Jeff Staudinger at 763-2506. Also, apply for a **USDA RD** Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG) to help plan for and undertake this activity. For more information about how to get started, call Jim Saudade, Deputy Commissioner of Housing and Community Development at 828-3211.

The Economic Development Committee should inventory current businesses, including farming and recreational opportunities and 'creative economy' workers (arts, artisan and small creative entrepreneurial businesses).

Contact the **Small Business Development Center (SBDC)** about holding entrepreneurial classes in the region. (802) 442-8975

Research employment trends and ensure that there is a match between employee skills and training, and employer needs. A good resource is **Vermont's Peace and Justice Center**, which has published a series of reports on jobs, wages, and economic development known as the Job Gap Studies, available at <http://www.vtlivablewage.org/jobgapstudy.html>.

The **Vermont Microbusiness Development Program** provides support and training to low-and moderate- income Vermonters to start and operate micro-businesses. <http://www.vtmicrobusiness.org/index.html>.

A **USDA Rural Development Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG)** program can be applied for by either the community or the Regional Development Corporation. (Peter Odierna, BCIC (802) 442-8975 peter@bcic.org). The RBEG program cannot fund broad economic planning, but can fund planning around a specific project or need. For example a current grant is funding a feasibility study for a downtown grocery market in the Village of Essex Junction.

Pownal could start a Farmers' Market. Call **NOFA VT** at (802) 434-4122 for assistance.

Highlight and support local businesses by conducting interviews with owners to publish in the paper and by purchasing advertising space in the larger papers to promote one business per month. Don't forget local farmers.

Adequate Internet access and broadband service can be an integral part of Economic Development. **The Vermont Council on Rural Development** has technical and funding resources to support the assessment of town-wide telecom demand and to help Pownal residents aggregate that demand and negotiate for increased broadband services with potential providers. Contact **Al and Laura Duey** for assistance at (802) 476-1266.

There is a sense that everyone is always waiting for the big solution, where eyes are often focused on some reuse of the racetrack. Concentrate on the doable, and on those things over which you can have real influence. Work on building upon successes and look at similarly situated communities in the state and consider how they have brought vibrancy to their communities.

Develop a plan that is incremental and at a scale you can do and control. Look to the opportunities your residents can bring by virtue of their unique circumstances.

Outdoor Recreation

The Visiting Team was impressed by the wonderful opportunities for hiking, hunting, swimming, snowmobiling, skiing and other outdoor recreation in Pownal but recognized that Pownal's assets are undeveloped and almost unknown outside of the community. These resources can be expanded and promoted to benefit the health and well-being of the entire community, to draw visitors, and even to attract businesses run by people who want to enjoy all

that Pownal offers. The Outdoor Recreation Task Force should set priorities for trail building, mapping and signage and then work one step at a time to improve opportunities—there are bound to be exciting results!

A strong potential partner for river repair is the local **Watershed Association**. Members of the Association were at the VCRD meetings in Pownal, and are interested in helping. Non-profit organization may be able to obtain grants to help with community clean ups, volunteer monitoring programs, and other like efforts.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service works with farmers and landowners to do stream bank erosion work. Contact Bill Forbes at NRCS (802) 775-8034 for information.

VT Conservation Youth Corp may be able to help build, clear, and clean up trails and access points. Call (802) 434-3969.

Creating signage is an important component of developing abandoned roads and trails into bike and hiking paths.

The committee should work with cartography students at a nearby school, or from **Dartmouth College** where geography majors design, create and print trail maps.

The Vermont Recreation Trails Grants Program of the **Agency of Natural Resources** may have funding. Matching grants are offered for maintenance of existing trails and the construction of new trails on state, municipal and private lands where a recreational need for such construction is shown. They can also help prepare and print of trail maps and more. Contact Sherry Smecker, grants administrator at 241-3690; she can also advise you on additional resources.

Funding for outdoor recreation and trails is available through the State of Vermont **Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation**. For details, explore their site at <http://www.vtfpr.org/recgrant/trgrant.cfm> and <http://www.vtfpr.org/reclwcf/index.cfm>.

Coordinate with the **Green Mountain Club** and consider establishing a special section for Pownal which might develop some “esprit de corps” around Pownal’s unique natural areas. <http://www.greenmountainclub/index.php>.

The VT Agency of Transportation (VTrans) administers a Bicycle/Pedestrian program that provides advice and connections to grant resources. Amy Bell is the coordinator: 828-0457.

The **Bikes Belong Coalition** (BBC) assists local organizations in developing bicycle facility projects with grants of up to \$10,000. Bikes Belong Coalition, 1368 Beacon St. Suite 102, Brookline, MA 02446-2800, (617)734-2800 tim@bikesbelong.org.

The **National Park Service** Rivers & Trails Program helps plan and implement local trail, greenway and river protection projects. Contact Jennifer Waite, VT Projects Director, NPS Rivers and Trails, PO Box 178, Woodstock, VT 05091, 802-457-3368, Jennifer_waite@nps.gov.

Improving river access to canoeists could be a key feature of expanding the tourist economy. So long as there is a direct tie to assisting small and emerging businesses this might be furthered through the **USDA RD** Rural Business Enterprise Grant program.

Town Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held with Pownal residents and the VCRD Visiting Team on April 3, 2006.

Although the prioritization work of Community Visit Program requires a town to decide what is most important as its next steps forward, nothing is lost in the process from the long list of concerns and ideas expressed in early community focus sessions. Some areas of concern, although not chosen directly as a priority topic, are closely related to Task Force work, and will be incorporated into eventual work plans. Many excellent and diverse thoughts surfaced during the initial Community Visit conversations, and that dialogue has been preserved here to serve as a reminder of issues explored, a repository of ideas, and a possible foundation for future projects.

Resource Team A

Alex Aldrich, Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council

Larry Mandell, President, Woodbury College

Helen Jordan, Director, VCRD Creative Communities Program

Peter Gilbert, Executive Director, Vermont Humanities Council

Jon 'Max' Muise, Rural Development Specialist, USDA Rural Development

Brian Keefe, Community Liaison, Senator Jeffords' Office (Facilitator)

Hunter Johansson, University of Vermont (Scribe)

I. Pownal Communications

Challenges in This Area

- There is no local newspaper. The Bennington Banner rarely covers Pownal, and sometimes the press is negative.
- There is a Pownal website containing town and historical information that is run by a community member. It is a private site, and the Historical Society pays the fees.
- There is no broadband service in town.
- There are three newspapers that provide some Pownal coverage (Bennington Banner, North Adams Transcript, and the Penny Saver) however, none 'officially' report on Pownal.
- There is little radio service, with reception available only in certain spots.
- Is there a school newsletter?
- The school sign is not visible.
- The main form of communication is the Annual Report, which goes out only to landowners, not renters.
- Some businesses have adequate signage, such the general store, liquor store, American Legion, Fire Station and CAT TV.
- Cell phone service is spotty.
- People that work during the day are uninformed about town events.
- There is a separation between the three communities in Pownal, and the different sectors don't communicate.
- There are two post offices and three zip codes.

- Pownal has three different senior centers.
- Pownal has four volunteer fire departments and one rescue squad.
- Town officers, including the Town Clerk, Select and Zoning Boards are the focal point of communications. The Town staff has email addresses and generally is well informed about the town.
- Some say Pownal residents have little or no sense of community, or sense of place.
- There is one phone company with no guarantee of service.
- Pownal is spread out; therefore, it is difficult to communicate.
- The town agenda does not cover the Planning Board.
- The Methodist, Baptist and Lutheran churches do not collaborate or have a newspaper.
- Residents leave the community to shop, and that creates a disconnect.
- The library is small, and does not provide a good meeting place because residents have to pay rent and clean up.
- There is not enough communication between various commissions.
- There is little enthusiasm for community events.
- There is no county fair in Bennington.

Opportunities: What Should be Done?

- Electronic communication should be better utilized.
- Meeting agendas, minutes, and VCRD recommendations could be posted on a website.
- Partnerships with the school should be explored.
- Planning Commission meetings should have coverage.
- Expand cable access and CAT TV.
- Utilize the Communications Departments at area high schools and colleges.
- The High School could put one page in the Banner and one page a week in the Transcript.
- Make sure positive developments are in the paper in a timely manner.
- The editor of the Transcript is a good resource.
- The Rose Garden Social Event is an opportunity for communication.
- A central gathering spot for the entire community is needed.
- Pownal should create an introductory brochure to introduce newcomers to the community.
- There is an opportunity for communication through the fire department and post office.
- Bill Botzow's newsletter is excellent, and he has hardcopies in the library.
- A Town Fair, Car Show, the Transfer Station, and the monthly breakfast at the American Legion are all opportunities for people to gather and talk.
- The Library and Historical Society are places to discuss the interests of the community.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Communication within the town is difficult for a number of reasons including geography.
- People believe they receive disproportionately negative and/or inadequate coverage in the press.
- The town could create an 'Owner's Manual' of Pownal containing a history and logistical information.
- People like to be asked personally in order to become involved.

- Asset mapping would provide a clear picture of Pownal's resources, both human and otherwise.
- Use the monthly breakfast at the Legion for communication.
- Realtors can play an outreach role in welcoming people to town.
- It would be a great idea to have a local correspondent for the Banner, someone who really knows the town.
- Good communication is derived from a sense of connectedness and community. It is important to communicate your love of Pownal.
- A central community spot is an idea that keeps surfacing.
- With the closure of the racetrack, Pownal has become a town in transition. It is important to find something to base a sense of community around. Keep the discussions going.
- A community is successful when it has people to champion its assets. Pownal has many beautiful features that can be communicated.
- A town website, newsletter, and bulletin board can be helpful.

II. Pownal Community Identity

Challenges in This Area

- People make fun of Pownal, and think residents are hicks.
- Residents have a good self-image, but our image is not good outside of town.
- The eyesores along Route 7 need to be cleaned up. The trash and abandoned home perpetuate Pownal's poor image.
- Junk cars need to be removed.
- Zoning is not enforced.
- Economic development is needed to help improve the town's image.
- There is no village center like other towns have. Having three distinct sections of town has led to separate identities within the community.
- There is a lack of signage.
- Taxes are high here.
- Students from Pownal are not respected at the high school in Bennington. They have no sense of place.
- The townspeople need to overcome a negative mindset and project a positive image.
- There is a lack of communication between the Select Board and the Planning Commission.
- Although Pownal is generally a safe place, crime is increasing and there is a need for more law enforcement.
- The number of mobile homes is increasing, and that contributes to the poor image.
- We don't know how to buy local, especially from farmers. A farmer's market might help in promoting local products.
- Elected officials and outsiders expect too much from townspeople.

Opportunities: What Should be Done?

- Pownal has wonderful natural resources, including beautiful valleys, a river that is becoming cleaner, as well as a rich history.

- We are in a good location – close to major attractions and the Berkshires.
- Pownal is affordable.
- The school, American Legion, artists and farmers are important parts of our identity.
- Creation of a downtown district would help.
- There is a need for better communication between communities.
- Positive reporting about the town could be done through a newsletter or website.
- Redevelopment of the racetrack will improve the southern gateway.
- We have eight trailer parks. They could be consolidated, and the sites could be redeveloped.
- The trailer parks could become cooperatively owned.
- A Pownal Welcome Center would provide a place for information and to advertise benefits of the town.
- The town needs a reporter or PR person to get the positive word out.
- The trailers along Route 7 are an eyesore and need to be removed.
- Pownal needs to unite to clean up the garbage.
- Community events are an opportunity to build on local assets.
- What are the people in the trailer parks thinking? Hikes in rent or other enforcement would improve the parks.
- The community should inventory the assets it wants to protect, such as roads, lakes and parks.
- Recreation areas such as Barbers Pond could be developed with the cooperation of private owners, and a willingness to clean and maintain areas.
- Bill Botzow's website is positive communication.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- The town is clearly concerned with the issue of aesthetics and the challenge of junk cars, abandoned trailers, and trash.
- Farmland is an asset you may want to protect.
- Improved signage could be a real asset in marketing what you have. People need to decide what action to take.
- Make sure developers know what the town values, and clearly express the needs and desires of the community.
- Help your neighbors. This is what community rebuilding is all about.
- Artists in the community can help to express and communicate your passion about this community and its many positive attributes. As you remove the problems, don't forget about the beauty that is here.
- Create and use a website.
- A town public relations person can help. You have a great story to tell.
- The issue of low-income housing is one that has to be addressed.

Resource Team B

Rex Burke, Executive Director, Bennington County Planning Commission
Kathleen Diehl, Partnership Coordinator, Green Mountain National Forest
Noelle MacKay, Executive Director, Vermont Forum on Sprawl
Steve Kerr, Secretary, Vermont Agency of Agriculture
Jenny Nelson, Policy Advisor, Congressman Sanders' Office
Chuck Ross, State Director, Senator Patrick Leahy's Office
Hal Cohen, Executive Director, Central VT Community Action Council (Facilitator)
Nancy Ciampa-Cefalo, Woodbury College (Scribe)

I. Growth Plan and Municipal Facilities

Challenges in This Area

- Current zoning laws contribute to eyesores on Route 346.
- State laws restrict certain kinds of fund raising to no more than 3 times each year per facility.
- Growth pressures add to the amount and kinds of municipal services required.
- Transportation is a challenge, especially for the elderly.
- There is no industry – no places to work.
- Zoning laws are not enforced, leading to chronic abusers.
- Some residents see the need for new by-laws with enforceability.
- It can be hard to keep what we like. We want to grow, but at a slower pace.
- There are not enough jobs for the young people. If all the young people leave town there won't be any more original Vermonters.
- There is not enough affordable housing other than trailer parks.
- Residents need a place for people to meet. With three separate villages, people don't patronize the same stores.
- Being priced out is a problem.
- The infrastructure is inadequate – no police department, no small businesses, restaurants or banks.
- The Internet is slow.
- We have no animal shelter, or pet control.
- Small businesses need support.
- Both ends of town are unsightly, and lead to the impression that all we have are used car dealers and trailers.
- We need improved communication so that people know what is going on in town.
- There is no place to sell local goods like vegetable and dairy products.
- There is a low turnout for voting, because there is only one place for all three areas to vote.

Opportunities: What are your Assets? What Should be Done?

- We are the borderline of two states (NY, MA) and a good gateway with natural beauty.
- Williams College and Bennington College are near by.
- We have relatively low property taxes.
- Pownal is a diverse community, with a nice mix of people with different abilities, interests, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- We have access to rural lands for snowmobiling and recreational activities.
- There is a good elementary school and daycare center.
- The Hoosic River has the best trout fishing; even better than the Battenkill, although you can't eat the fish.
- There are more agricultural products than other areas- vegetables and dairy.
- The railroad is an asset.
- Deer hunting is good.
- The farmland along the Hoosic River has the best land and soil in the state.
- Pownal's 3 small villages create unique places with a variety of geography, architecture, population, dirt roads, and pathways.
- Routes 143 and 147 provide views that are known in the state as "Little Switzerland."
- Pownal is pictured on a UN report cover. "Peaceful Valley" is a famous postcard.
- We have the best volunteer fire department in the state.
- There is a stable population with lots of history in the area. People stay here and are vested.
- We could improve the visual appeal of the town by cleaning up both ends.
- The zoning laws need to be enforced.
- Change people's mindset and clean up the litter.
- Tap into people already here and encourage them to have some input at school board meetings. We need more participation.
- Talk and share in order to be involved in the decision-making.
- More free days at the Transfer Station would help with the trash problem.
- Encourage increased local spending in order to grow the tax base.
- Let the Select Board know what we want in order to be a better community.
- Increased communication would help people know what is going on in town.
- Sunday breakfasts held once a month at the Legion could help with community information.
- Encourage more involvement with the young people.
- A parcel of land the town purchased could be developed for town facilities.
- Increase agriculture. There is an untapped opportunity for growth with our great soil.
- A place to sell local vegetable and dairy products would be a great opportunity.
- Have a common bulletin board and create a common center.
- Put together a town directory.
- Initiate a town website in order to share the history of Pownal.
- Have a larger meeting place for Select Board meetings.
- There is only one place to vote leading to low voter turnout. Adding more locations may increase participation
- Create a local newspaper.
- Build a new septic system.
- We need community support for programs such as soccer, softball, and 4H.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- There is a desire to pull the three villages together somehow.
- The townspeople want to change but not a whole lot.
- Does the town agree that the town plan reflects the kind of growth you want? What will that growth look like?
- We see a lot of pride in Pownal, there is a lot of history.
- There is a need for a Community Center, either virtual or physical.
- A town directory or a resource list is a good idea, a good place to start.
- A farmer's market would be a great draw to bring people in.
- Do a Clean-up Day or Town Day.
- This is a beautiful place to live and people appreciate who they are.
- People understand the local resources as assets.
- There are three villages, each struggling with their identity.
- Communication was a common theme and there are many good ideas, such as a website, bulletin board, and newspaper.
- A good infrastructure is necessary to encourage businesses in this area.
- There is some desire to integrate a town center.
- People recognize a focus inward towards communication and the need to support one another. Just knowing that is an incredible asset.
- It is important to start working on tools to develop resources in town – develop a capital improvement program, lay out priorities, cost them out. Real information is needed to make it work.
- Improve eye appeal by increasing regulatory approaches, for example through police functions.
- Capitalize on the “Peaceful Valley” image by applying for a scenic byway designation.
- Create a nucleus with a town center, town offices, school, Community Center, post office, and community bulletin board.
- Have a planning fund for village plan upgrading.
- Develop an economic development plan to aggressively attract small businesses.
- Focus on one project to get started.
- Get the community youth involved with website –that's what they know. Give them the opportunity to help.
- Have the youth work on a local newspaper.
- Other communities have similar struggles.
- There are a lot of people here who care and who recognize the area's assets.
- Utilize the Legion more for its space and availability.
- Put together a Blueprint. Highlight scenic and agricultural benefits, and then decide what is needed for businesses and services.

II. Recreation

Community Participants:

Challenges in This Area

- There is no place for teens especially on Friday and Saturday nights.
- We need to keep kids busy – otherwise they can get into trouble.
- The Infrastructure has been lost. There are no longer any community dances, 4H or other functions.
- We need to have things available to draw the young people; activities they will enjoy.
- Transportation is a challenge because the town is so spread out. With three areas, how do we get kids to the activities?
- For some, it is closer to go to Bennington.
- There is nowhere to swim. We can't use Barber's Pond. The pond is owned by the State, but the property is privately held.
- The Pond is a great area for picnicking. There is public access but with limited space for parking. It is a rough area. Artists used to come and draw.
- The Hoosic River has PCB contamination in the silt. Swimming and fishing are allowed, but access must be over the silt.
- We need a recreation center.

Opportunities: What are your Assets? What Should be Done?

- Use the Little League Field.
- There is town forestland, including 100 acres on the other side of the Hoosic River.
- The parcel of land the Town purchased near the old inn, next to the church is an opportunity.
- Abandoned railroad tracks could be used for bike trails.
- Access to the Hoosic River provides opportunities for canoeing and fishing.
- There are two summer recreation programs – pre-K through middle school.
- There is Long Trail access.
- Natural conservation land is a resource.
- The school has a gym and tennis court.
- Rock face and rock climbing exist near the old quarry on Route 346.
- The Select Board is working on identifying abandoned roads and trails under a state mandate. We don't want to lose these, as they may connect to other towns or areas.
- The Pownal Recreation Implementation Committee has plans to develop the tannery land, including the old damn, tannery site and the area around the sewer treatment plant.
- We are a major access to western NY.
- The town's 800 acres has logging trails, watershed, hiking trails. It is a pristine area.
- Strobridge Recreation complex is an asset.
- Bennington 4-Wheeling Club and Pownal Hunt Club support local activities.
- Pownal has two baseball fields and the racetrack.
- The two tennis courts are a potential park site.
- The warehouse at the old tannery site could be a recreation center. It is 300 feet long, has a flat cement floor, sound roof, and sturdy construction.
- The firehouse is utilized by community members for Bingo.

- The Legion Hall is an asset.
- We have a wonderful fair every summer. The best fireworks display!
- Pownal should build a Recreation Center with a pool.
- Or build a bowling alley.
- Provide movies at an outside community event where people could sit on the lawn.
- Construct a skateboard park; it would be a big draw for the kids.
- Horse trails could be developed from maple sugaring and logging trails.
- Designate areas for horses through a Woodlands Management Plan.
- Provide a shuttle bus between the three villages.
- Build a large playground with horseshoe pits and a BMX track.
- We need to resume community festivals like the community Christmas tree, Pumpkin Patch, etc. We used to have raft races and holiday activities.
- Have a community zoo.
- Have a softball league with tournaments.
- Have designated bike paths; tourists would come to this beautiful valley. It is just as beautiful as Stowe.
- Utilize the old unused railroad track beds (This could be hazardous due to active tracks close by).
- Provide bike trails by the river all the way to Williamstown. Williams College students are doing research on a regional bike path.
- The abandoned roads and trails could be used for bike trails.
- Promote hiking at Petersburg Pass and Taconic Pass.
- Develop cross-country skiing.
- We could use a track and field track. There is a school team but no track.
- What about ATV opportunities? It is a great family activity, although there are safety issues to work out.
- The North Adams Watershed Association, along with the Natural Forest Services are working to have ATV access.
- Get back to the simpler things. Hayrides, record hops, sugar on snow. It does not cost much. We could enlist other organizations to assist with food and charge admission.
- Take a poll of the school kids to learn what they would like.
- Revitalize 4H. Pownal does have 4H shooting sports; maybe it needs to expand.
- Create a Community Theater at the old tannery site. It could be a lovely spot with a brick wall and floor – maybe an open-air amphitheater.
- Re-establish the Boy Scouts. There is a contact in Manchester, VT who can assist.
- Have a Pownal Community section in the Bennington Banner.
- With all the dairy barns, utilize the barns for dances and community functions.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- There are so many assets here! Taconic and Long Trails, town forests, abandoned roads and trails, baseball fields and the gym, as well as the Hoosic River.
- The rock face and all the trails can be used for mountain biking. The old tannery building and grounds can provide the opportunity for a Recreational Center with a good location around the river. Bennington College and Williams College are close by to tap into for resources to help with the design.
- A youth survey is a good idea find out what young people are interested in, including 4H, scouts, sports, volunteerism, and help with fundraising.

- There is a need to have a shared central site for people to associate with.
- Make volunteerism work.
- There are great leadership opportunities in 4H and Scouts.
- The community could find early success with the opportunities available with the Tannery site.
- Start something this summer – just one or two events. Plan small successes to build on.
- Lots of information is needed to lure businesses.
- The Watershed Association and environmental educators can assist with grants and organizing programs.
- The new sewer system and racetrack development will provide great opportunities. It is important to consider what the community wants to look like.
- Simple is best. Focus on a few important things to celebrate and make sure everyone knows about them.
- A newspaper is a great idea for kids to get involved in. They could write their own. Energize the youth groups to use Microsoft Publisher.
- Outdoor movies would be great.
- Have a dialogue on what it means to be a healthy community and how to work towards that goal.
- Barns that are made available for community use may get grants for restoration.

Resource Team C

Katherine Long, Director of Public Policy, VT Association of Nonprofit Organizations

Major Jim Baker, Field Force Commander, Vermont State Police

Bob Paquin, Legislative Assistant, Senator Leahy's Office

Sgt. Mike Manning, Vermont State Police

Bill Roberts, Economic Development Specialist, VT Dept. of Economic Development

Jolinda LaClair, State Director, USDA Rural Development (Facilitator)

Corey Beach, University of Vermont (Scribe)

I. Infrastructure

Challenges in This Area

- We lost our power perhaps five times over the past year, and each time it was out for a long time.
- Internet service and connections are not great.
- Lack of reliable broadband service makes it difficult to run a business out of the house.
- The cost of installation for Internet services is an issue.
- The cost of cable service has gone through the roof.
- Up on the mountain, we have very poor school bus service. During mud season, the buses don't come anywhere near us. This is a hardship, because we have to transport the kids to various spots around town.
- UPS does not guarantee delivery year round to some places on the mountain.
- A lot of roads in town are private roads. Can the town take over a private road?
- Speeding and DUI are the major challenges, rather than problems with the roads.
- The roads are great, but there are frequent accidents which block access for long periods of time.
- We have the busiest railroad corridor in the state of Vermont. Right now, we are having trouble getting the cable system to cross the track. We may need to pay the railroad company for some rights.
- We voted on the sewer project many times, and we need to finish that. It is a major challenge to the town.
- I live on Carpenter Hill. There are many of us that are never going to be put on the system, many people who will never benefit from it. We need a fairer way to pay for it.
- It is difficult to meter sewer use.
- Would it be fair to base cost on the number of people in the house? Would that penalize the people with the least amount of disposable income?
- Some people are forced to connect to the sewer system, even if their septic systems are fine. A certain number of houses are required to make the project affordable.
- The sewer project is costing way too much money. We still have the operation and maintenance costs to consider.
- There was never an income study to see what would be affordable for the sewer system.
- We are not going to process our own waste sewage. We are going to truck everything to Bennington, and now we are at their mercy for treatment and trucking.

- The entire infrastructure is paid for by property taxes, and some people think that is not a fair system.
- The trailer parks need to be brought under control. They are overpopulated, and there is a big pollution problem. The rest of the town suffers because of them.
- There is a bridge in North Pownal that has been a temporary bridge for far too long. When is the permanent bridge coming?
- There is a small cemetery in North Pownal that needs work to be done – surveying, clearing, and plot management. A surveyor is needed.
- Pownal has the most polluted river in the state of Vermont. The fish can't be eaten; the water is all different colors.

Opportunities: What Should be Done?

- College students could help out with the cemetery to plot out lots, etc. There may be high school technical programs nearby that could help as well.
- A survey could be taken to determine the number of people who would like broadband. The results could be presented to different companies.
- Adelphia has a contract to expand broadband to a number of houses, however due to the sale to Comcast, there are some issues with that.
- The town could explore WiFi. Many towns in Vermont are doing this and it may be helpful in Pownal, given the geography of the town.
- The current cell tower plan is to only cover Route 7, however there is a need for a tower every five miles.
- It is important not to lock ourselves into one technology. We need to set ourselves up for a competitive and ever changing environment.
- The town could purchase a truck for pumping.
- If the town did its own processing, it wouldn't need a truck. A small interest loan could be obtained to install a press at the plant instead of trucking waste to Bennington.
- The sludge could be used for fertilizer.
- An income survey is needed to develop a fair fee structure.
- A plan is needed to clean up the Hoosic River. The first step is to get sewage treatment in place.
- Small Watershed Associations could help with the river cleanup.
- Rails to Trails is currently working in Massachusetts. It could continue through Pownal.
- Pownal is the home to the entrance of the Long Trail and the Appalachian Trail. Pownal's name should be on the Long Trail sign.
- Snowmobile and VAST trails could be developed. Snowmobiling is a good family activity and fits with the character of the town.
- Route 7 was at one time a beautiful road. There is a need for corridor beautification, and opening up viewing spots.
- There is a bike path underway from Florida to Maine. Pownal should become part of that project.
- Pownal is on the Massachusetts border, and would benefit from a Welcome Center.
- The appearance of the road coming into Pownal from the North needs to be improved.
- Gateway communities are eligible for signage, and themed loops for different communities are advisable.
- We need a definite plan for the racetrack
- The Town Plan needs to be updated.
- A state mandate is needed to control the number of homes in mobile home parks.

- When someone has a residence that is valued at \$8,000, like a mobile home, very little is paid for municipal services. We need a base rate for those services.
- In New York, the park owner is responsible for collecting taxes from the residents. That way, the park owner is held accountable for collecting and paying the taxes.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- The State Police devote 80% of their time at the mobile home parks. This impacts everyone, because there is less time to spend on speeding and DUIs.
- Technology is changing fast. State police will be installing computers in cars, so that officers can spend more time in a town, and less time at the barracks filing reports. However, Pownal needs to have its technology infrastructure updated in order to take advantage of that.
- The wastewater issue needs to be revisited, and there is nothing wrong with that. Sometimes there is the assumption that towns have already worked out their internal issues, but now we need to put one foot in front of the other and complete this project.
- There are many resources available to help with scenic by-ways and tourism projects.
- The town has tremendous assets, and awesome natural beauty. There are opportunities available through nonprofit associations.
- No matter what infrastructure you are talking about, the people are spread out, making services a challenge to provide. It would help to have some central attraction or event that will make people stop in town.

II. Public Safety and Volunteer Services

Community Participants:

Challenges in This Area

- Effective use of 911 services is a challenge because many roads in Bennington and Pownal have the same name. This has caused some delays in response.
- Pownal is one of the least compliant towns for the E-911 service.
- Both Bennington and Pownal have 442 and 447 telephone exchanges and this has caused some delays in response, as the calls need to be transferred to the correct town.
- There is a need for a more centralized dispatch service. Currently fire service is dispatched from Berkshire County.
- Calls for rescue services have increased, perhaps due to the high elderly population.
- Safe use of the roads is an issue due to excess speed, driving under the influence, and ATV use on roads not approved for that purpose.
- Jackson Road is a challenge because it is very narrow and difficult to drive on with milk trucks using the street.
- Coordination between fire departments is fairly good, but there is room for improvement. Currently there are two Fire Chiefs and four firehouses.
- Sometimes the police do not arrive for half an hour or more after there has been an accident. This may be due to geography of the town, and the location and staffing of the State Police.
- Pownal has a town constable, however, it is an unpaid position.

- Barber's Pond Road is very dangerous in the winter. The road has not been blacktopped in over 11 years, and it is not sanded. Some residents feel the need for a warning sign on this road.
- There are hardly any sidewalks in Pownal, requiring shared use of the road with walkers, joggers, and bikers.
- A greater public awareness and courtesy is needed around the issue of multi-use roads.
- The trailer parks are a mess. Children have been injured; they run through the sewers, run on the railroad tracks and people ride motorcycles there without helmets.
- The problems are not just with the two major landlords, however a lot of progress has been made on the smoke detector issue.
- Labor and Industry has been called and many problems have improved. It seems, unfortunately, that steps are taken only when something horrible happens, like an accident or fire.
- The town of Pownal has no building inspector.
- There is a shortage of volunteers in town.
- People don't want to go outside of their homes at night.
- The widespread geography of Pownal makes policing difficult.

Opportunities: What Should be Done?

- The level of firefighting has improved greatly – better vehicles, better training, and better response. This is something to celebrate.
- There has been a huge improvement in the past fifteen years, including the ability to work with the State Police. Fire investigators are really trying to keep people informed and involved.
- We need to be sure we communicate effectively among different rescue units before a problem arises.
- A recent evacuation drill at the elementary school worked well.
- Homeland security funds were used to purchase two-way radios for town vehicles, which enable us to communicate with the State Police. We have the equipment needed to improve our communication, however, we don't know when it is appropriate to use it. We need a protocol.
- We need to encourage volunteerism in the following ways:
 - Volunteering may be intimidating to newcomers. People need to feel welcome.
 - We need to increase networking in town, perhaps by asking people for their opinions and ideas.
 - Personal phone calls could be made to everyone in town.
 - Community awareness needs to increase so people realize there is a shortage of volunteers.
 - We need a Community Center that would provide a place to post messages and recruit volunteers.
- We could offer a pay incentive to recruit fire and rescue volunteers.
- Currently, a great deal of training is required to become a member of the rescue squad. Perhaps we could break certification training into smaller pieces.
- We could look into apprenticeships.
- A new statewide 911 system should be in place soon.

- We need the ability to dispatch from a central location, preferably Bennington County. Orleans and Essex counties are working on this. Hopefully those trials will provide a blueprint.
- Better communication between rescue service and law enforcement is needed.
- Implementing a community-policing program is an option. We have had problems with that idea before, as people did not want to get involved.
- Bringing Labor and Industry into the town made landlords increase safety standards in the trailer parks. This should continue.
- We need to make all people feel as if they are part of the community. If people feel wanted and proud of where they live, things will improve.
- An inventory of roads with an assessment of their safety issues would be helpful.
- A Selectboard meeting needs to be held to address the state of Pownal roads.
- Respect for one another, and education of safety issues needs to increase.
- We need to find a way to make everyone feel responsible for his or her neighbor.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- One of the themes underlying this discussion is getting the community involved. Youth need to be engaged more, perhaps by trying to get them to volunteer for the fire department.
- There is a real challenge in bringing the three village centers together. People may feel as if there are cliques in town. Direct phone calls could help get more people involved.
- Bennington is expecting a lot of job growth over the next ten years, and Pownal may benefit from that.
- With three different town centers, the main challenge is how to distribute limited resources. You cannot create a safer community by policing your way out of it. The State Police are only as good as the feedback they receive. Pownal needs to look at creating community groups, which will help everyone out.
- Some collaboration and consensus is needed. Currently four separate fire service buildings are being maintained and staffed to serve a population of 3500.

Resource Team D

Jim Saudade, Deputy Commissioner, VT Dept. of Housing and Community Affairs

Peter Odierna, Executive Director, Bennington County Industrial Corp.

Joe Erdelyi, Director of Development, Vermont Housing Finance Agency

Elizabeth Eddy, Expansion Manager, Opportunities Credit Union

James Candido, Special Projects, VT. Dept. of Economic Development

Paul Costello, Executive Director, Vermont Council on Rural Development (facilitator)

Mary Mankin, University of Vermont, (scribe)

I. Redevelopment of the Race Track

Challenges in This Area

- In the past, hundreds of people from Pownal, including children, worked at the track. There were all kinds of opportunities. The racetrack brought prosperity to the town. Housing needs, school population, and infrastructure needs all grew. The racetrack brought a wave of people, but as the racetrack fell on hard times, the economy collapsed under the town.
- People would like to see something happen again, like dog racing or other activities. People worked for many years to help bring something back.
- The recent history is one of frustrated hopes.
- Whenever someone tried to do something, they would get shut down.
- The state is not supportive because it is against gambling, although it supports the lottery and Power Ball.
- The big drawback to success at the track is the lack of a big road nearby.
- Pownal needs something that won't be a burden on the state and won't be toxic. We need a viable business that we can live near.
- It is hard to talk about direction when we don't have a clear understanding of the development plans. We hear so many different rumors, for example about housing development. Will it be something horrible for the community or something respectable?
- We need something that will reflect our values.
- Hearing so many different rumors makes people not trust the new owners.
- Sewage has been a challenge in the past. The new system will help.
- The key concern is how much growth and where it occurs.
- We need to have a job base. How many jobs will go to Pownal, and how many to Massachusetts and New York?
- Pownal has no apparent center. It is hard to get a sense of identity.
- Noise and traffic near the track are a concern.
- We need something that will pay for a mortgage, lights, and insurance. It needs to keep money flowing.
- We need affordable housing here in Pownal.
- We don't need a casino here. That is the wrong way to go.
- There needs to be ongoing contact with the owners and the opportunity to share ideas.
- We lack a large meeting space for businesses, wedding, and other events.
- After the last concert at the track, I was cleaning toilet paper out of my yard for weeks.

- We need a place where old-timers can meet newcomers and welcome them into the community.
- There is a need to balance grand scale ideas with intimate spaces where people can get to know each other.
- We don't want a huge highway and lights shining all night long.
- As an independent business owner, I worry about box stores like Home Depot moving in. That will hurt businesses that are here trying to support the community.
- I would like to live in the new development, but I don't want to live next to a box store.
- Will the development be an example of new urban master planning?
- Minimum wage service jobs are not what we are looking for.
- People perceive developers as people with deep pockets who come in and buy everything up.

Opportunities: What Should be Done?

- There are new owners and new opportunities. The new owners have a good modest attitude.
- We don't hear just rumors. The owners gave a community presentation that reflected thoughtfulness, and they were open to feedback.
- People are ready to move forward, but believe that new development must bring employment, money and tax revenue.
- There is an opportunity to do something positive for the state as a whole and not just for Pownal. The town is a gateway, and the racetrack now is a deteriorating artifact that adds nothing.
- Put a gambling casino there, and have horses running around the track.
- There are fiber optics that run through the property. There is an infrastructure there for business or high tech jobs that could lead to solid employment opportunities. This could be an emerging technology hub.
- I would like to see the track become a place for identity, for people to gather together.
- The music concert brought a lot of money into town. Maybe it could be a scaled down convention center with meeting spaces for corporations, plus a concert area for extra revenue.
- It would be a great facility for a car show.
- We could use it for affordable housing for Pownal.
- One of the many positive things about Pownal is the residents' ability to look at this and say, "Let's find a way to make this work."
- The horse barns could be used for permanent artisan space.
- In Lebanon, they had an antique center and people came from miles around.
- The structure lends itself to a sports center, athletic training facility or competition center. It could hold national competitions.
- It could be a year round Water Park three stories high – a family thing with no gambling.
- It could be the largest meeting area in Vermont. It could hold a swimming pool.

- The property was recently re-zoned to village mixed use. That provides for relatively dense mixed use including retail, commercial, municipal, and housing. It is an attempt to make the area a fun and diverse place to live, work, and play.
- We need to make sure we don't lose the ideas we come up with today. We need to show up and keep showing up like we are now.
- There is an opportunity for the racetrack to become a center that could connect people in the community.
- Even a small community recreation center would be good – especially for the trailer park kids. Many parents would support a recreation center.
- There could be a river walk with a trail and educational nature center.
- Concentrate housing in a small area and contain services instead of spreading them all over town. This would keep the rest of Pownal green.
- This could be a focal point for farmers, craftspeople, and artists with a permanent farmer's market for hay, vegetables, cheese, and apples.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- We have heard a lot of good uses, many of which could co-exist and be developed incrementally rather than all at once.
- A place is needed for functions and for the community to gather.
- There is a need for productivity in terms of jobs and taxes for the town.
- People have been very open minded, concerned about the town, and willing to listen.
- There is a great concern for the natural environment.
- This is a transformational development, not only for Pownal, but for southwestern Vermont. This will have an impact on the entire region.
- Now is the time to be clear about what you want and what you don't want.
- Be sure to look at the website, www.progesspartnersvt.com to keep abreast of ideas for the track.
- There is a sense of a ripple effect from this kind of development. Capture what is positive about this effect.
- Be aware of Route 7 development and feeder roads.
- Use what is happening in Burke as an example.
- Even though there are some concerns and a sense of nervousness, history shows that several things have been tried, and the community wants to see success.
- How do you rally around a development that can be a good thing for the community?
- Everyone here – the developer and the townspeople – are talking the same language. This is a great opportunity to seize.

II. Affordable Housing and Living

Challenges in This Area

- It is a concern that young people can't afford to buy a home or live in the community.
- The trailer parks used to be much better. We need to do something about absentee landlords. I haven't seen my landlord in two years.
- There are no certificates of occupancy requirements for mobile homes.

- There are mobile homes with people living in them that should be condemned.
- Trailer park associations can't keep parks going because landlords threaten them.
- We have abandoned trailers in the parks and every abandoned trailer represents a site for a good affordable home.
- Some of the parks are well run, but Green Mountain Park and Alta are substandard with nonresident owners. Problems there are self-perpetuating.
- The parks can be a problem from the town's perspective. There is a difference between a well run locally owned park and the others which the town can't take pride in.
- Some homes are condemnable, but they are not condemned because of the sheer number of people who live in them. Where would you put those people?
- People are living in deplorable conditions.
- People are hesitant to come forward about the conditions because they can't afford to live anywhere else, and they don't want to give up what they have.
- There is a stigma to living in a mobile home. People don't want to expose themselves as living in substandard housing. There is a feeling of inferiority.
- A family had their septic tank explode under their trailer because the landlord put their home on top of a septic tank. Now they have nowhere to go.
- There have been fires in some parks. Whole families have died because of fires and blocked doors.
- Landlords need to be held accountable. We have contacted lawyers and withheld rent, but nothing changes.
- Why doesn't the Department of Labor inspect the parks?
- Becoming a Cooperative is expensive. The Green Mountain Park owner wanted \$348,000 for the park. Where is a trailer park association going to come up with that kind of money?
- We really need affordable housing for the people who live here.
- Developers are not interested in affordable housing.
- How do you define 'affordable housing?' Someone making \$25,000 per year can't afford a \$175,000 house.
- I am a builder and just got slammed on taxes for a house on a small amount of land because of water.
- People would like to buy a home in Pownal, but prices and taxes are high. Prices here are rising because of prices in other places
- People come into the community who can afford large pieces of land for a summerhouse or second house at \$600,000. They are sold for a million, and then taxes go out of sight.
- There is no housing for the elderly. People go to Bennington or North Adams.
- People are not aware of what housing programs and financing are available.
- We need a direction.

Opportunities: What Should be Done?

- There is an interagency council consisting of the Department of Health, the Agency of Natural Resources, the Department of Public Safety, and the Attorney General. The only one who can force the owner of a mobile home park to do anything is the Attorney General.
- Ownership is the best way to have power over property. Cooperatives should be kept in the discussion. There are ways to finance them.
- There are some parts of the state where there is affordable housing that is really nice.

- With so many abandoned mobile homes, we should build with less density and nicer homes, so that half as many people are living there.
- We need a government plan to put in modular housing in place of mobile homes. This would build value instead of depreciation.
- We need ordinances to promote community management.
- Affordable homes could be built with non-profit partners.
- Mobile homes serve an important role.
- A clustered living concept should be explored. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. In Nantucket, the town bought some land and people pay according to their income.
- It may not be fruitful to talk to the town about affordable housing because of the current financial situation with the sewer and bonds.
- We need an inventory of places that could be suitable for housing. A group of people could get together and work with the planning commission and local developers.
- Realtors are a source of information.
- At the end of this process, we will be able to look at towns that have tackled this problem and have been successful?
- We can't count on the racetrack to solve local people's problems.
- There are financial institutions that are working with people. People who have no credit history are able to use alternative evidence to prove credit worthiness.
- More employees of William College live in Pownal than in any other neighboring town. Maybe the college administration would be amenable to assisting with affordable housing projects, especially for the support staff that live here.
- People can get help through grants and Section 8.
- People need a source of information to help them understand what financial options are available.
- This is such a hard problem that seems to have been solved elsewhere.
- We need to start right here. Maybe we could form a committee to make recommendations to the Select Board. People shouldn't wait until they get around to it.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Many of your problems are shared around the state. There is a shortage of housing of all kinds – starter homes, worker homes, and homes for the elderly.
- There are substantial problems in the mobile home parks that are in serious need of assistance.
- There is financing available.
- Credit counseling would be helpful.
- There are code enforcement issues, and the need for ways to deal with acute problems and property transfers.
- A lot of people care about these problems and came here to help.
- There is such a need for decent affordable rental housing and for affordable starter homes.
- A solution to enforcement with absentee landlords is needed.
- There is not just one solution. The problems need to be dealt with in multiple ways.
- The lack of housing for middle and low-income people is something the legislature is acutely aware of.
- It is great that you are identifying the problems and talking about them.
- It is alarming that there are floods and fires and people dying of carbon monoxide poisoning.

- There is consensus that there is a lack of control over absentee landlords.
- Opportunity Credit Union does work with mobile homes, and is also an advocate for people trying to buy their own parks.
- It is surprising that with the problems here in Pownal, no one has drawn on help from the state to work on these issues.
- Someone asked, “How do we start?” The towns that make progress are the ones that get started, line up together, and attack the first step. Drag in the regional housing developer and get the Regional Planning Commission working for you.
- Consider what is within your power.
- Work around the mobile home parks to make improvements.
- You can’t control prices, but what is within your power?

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