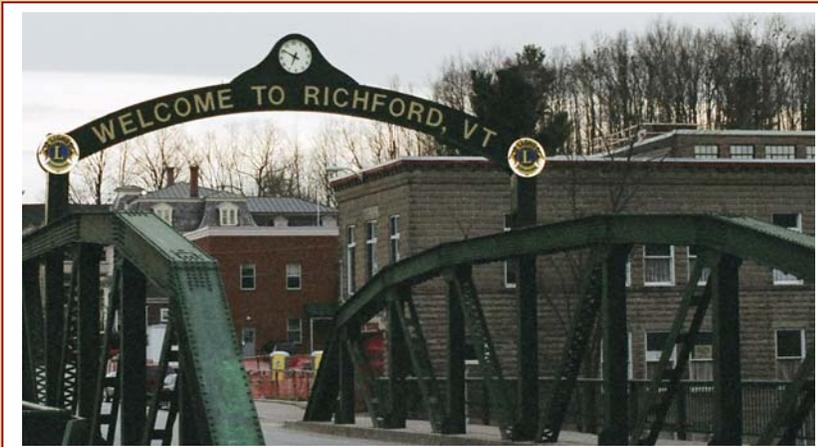
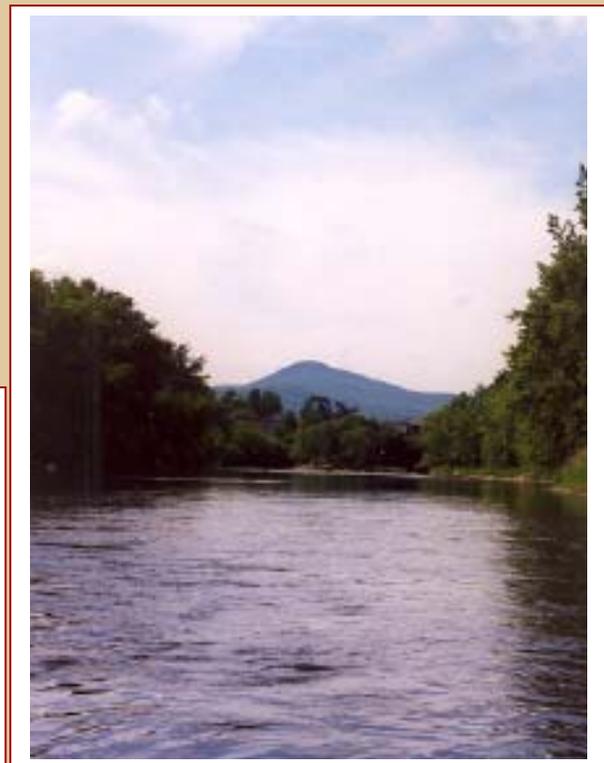


RICHFORD COMMUNITY VISIT

REPORT AND ACTION PLAN



**Vermont Council on Rural Development
July 2007**

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Initial List of Opportunities and Challenges.....	4
Priority Topics	8
Task Force Action Plans.....	11
Resource Team Recommendations.....	17
Town Forum Notes.....	22
Community Visit Participants.....	55
Resource Team Members.....	56

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Introduction

Beautifully situated on the Missisquoi River, framed by fertile farmland and lush Vermont hills, Richford is, in many ways, a place of abundance. Richford is a classic Vermont village with graceful and historic architecture that enjoys modern amenities such as broadband, a superb health care center, and some impressively renovated buildings.

Yet Richford has struggled, like many Vermont towns, with a loss of economic stability, social and family fractures, and isolation. The people of Richford, keenly aware of both their assets and challenges, invited the Vermont Council on Rural Development to return to the town a decade after the first Community Visit was conducted in 1997. That invitation, and residents' participation during this four-month process, is indicative of Richford's most enduring strength – its people.

None of the issues identified during the Community Visit Program in Richford are insurmountable. Yet nothing can be accomplished without the town's commitment to share its skills, spirit, time and financial resources among each and every member of the community. The Program seeks to unify and strengthen a community by placing the responsibility of leadership – and the compassion and commitment that leadership entails – in the hands of community members. VCRD is proud to work with the people of Richford, and applauds their courage and tenacity in working toward a stronger future for their town.

The Task Forces formed during this process will address some of the most significant issues faced by Richford. The **Job Creation and Retention** Task Force will work to expand entrepreneurial and border opportunities, unify existing business associations, and actively promote economic development. The Task Force on **Law Enforcement** will address resident concerns about safety and consider appropriate law enforcement staffing and how to achieve it, while addressing fundamental issues contributing to lawlessness and fear. Finally, the **Image and Communication** Task Force will confront substandard housing, work to improve the downtown and public areas, and actively develop and promote a positive town image, both internally and beyond the borders of Richford.

VCRD expresses its appreciation to **Eric Collins** and other Richford Selectboard members for their support of this process. **Laura Ovitt** is a wealth of knowledge about where to turn to accomplish the many logistics involved in the program and was a great help. The **Richford Steering Committee** is to be commended for their consistent efforts to get the word out to community members. **Connie Burns** and **Al Perry** were deeply involved in the first Visit, and have remained steadfast believers in Richford through this process. Finally, VCRD would like to thank **Mary Mankin**, Chair of the Community Visit to Richford, for acting on her knowledge of community leadership and for stepping up when asked.

Accomplishments in the Community Visit program result from local leadership and community effort, however VCRD is eager to support implementation. There are excellent ideas found throughout this report, and we hope that you will 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** – Participants review, discuss, and refine their initial list of challenges, and ultimately vote on the top issues of concern. Community members sign up to work on a task force that will create strategic action plans 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 11)

Resource Team Members agree to serve in an ongoing capacity as advisors, referral agents, and liaisons for the Richford Task Forces. Members of the Resource Team listen closely to residents' concerns, and carefully consider opportunities for addressing each issue. Their suggestions are found on page 17.

Richford Challenges and Opportunities **Identified in Town Forums on Community Visit Day – April 26, 2007**

VCRD staff and more than 30 Visiting Team members gathered in Richford to hear residents' ideas, concerns and hopes for their town. The team began the day with a walking tour of downtown, through the business district and across the bridge that spans the beautiful Missisquoi River. Some sights were reminiscent of VCRD's first visit a decade ago – housing and businesses in need of repair and rejuvenation. Other stops were a welcome glimpse of the progress, energy and hard work already begun in Richford – the stunning Sweat Comings renovation, exemplary Health Care Center, expanded high school and improved public buildings. Most importantly, many Richford residents took time from their workday and other commitments to attend forums and a community dinner, and to begin to work together in shaping the future of the town. The following issues emerged as initial challenges and opportunities:

Richford Business Association

A Richford business association could be formed to identify common marketing goals and foster communication among business owners, entrepreneurs, artisans and advertising venues. The committee could develop empty storefronts as display space for local crafts and products. A business association could work to develop a stronger relationship with small Canadian businesses along the border to share successful marketing strategies and create partnerships. The association could serve as an information resource to attract and support entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Agricultural Incubator

Richford could build a reputation for agriculture and innovation by developing an agricultural incubator. Incubator sites provide opportunities for young people to transition into agriculture, generate income from farm produce and value-added products from jams to cheese to compost, and create part or full-time employment opportunities. Niche farming is in growing demand; a goat or sheep cooperative would provide multiple products for sale while requiring less optimal land than cows. There are good models to replicate from the Burlington Intervale and Hardwick incubators.

Multigenerational Center

A Richford multigenerational center could serve as a social and educational resource with scheduling to incorporate age specific and multi-age activities. Richford could plan and build a community center that would provide a variety of indoor and outdoor recreational activities, skateboard park, mentorships, and draw in regional class offerings supporting life skills and parenting. The center could improve communication across generations and help strengthen family and social relationships.

Outdoor Recreation Destination

Richford could strategically develop its capacity to serve as a recreation destination. Its proximity to Canada, hiking trails, beautiful vistas and river provide tremendous potential that can be systematically developed and marketed. A Richford Task Force could work to develop recreational green-space and canoe access along the river, perhaps in conjunction

with a bicycle/skate park. It could develop or attract a business to package guided tours and equipment rentals (maybe connected to a sporting goods/bicycle/canoe store), and develop races coupled with food and entertainment, as well as four-wheeler events. Richford is in an excellent location to capitalize on road and mountain bicyclists and should work with tour companies and race organizers to capture this market. Recreation development would serve tourists and Richford residents alike and expand positive perceptions about the town.

Community Resource Coordination and Staffing

Richford has experienced successful community development projects supported by volunteers such as the PTA, the teen center, and mentoring efforts; however, it has been challenging to maintain volunteer efforts over time. A task force could identify community needs, evaluate existing resources, and work toward the creation of a Community Resource Coordinator position. This position would work with schools, churches, social service and other organizations to link individuals with volunteer opportunities, develop activities to promote leadership skills, and improve communication. This person would also serve as a referral resource for Community Development funding and technical assistance needs.

Forest Economy

Richford has strong forest resources. A task force should explore how to profit from the forest economy by expanding opportunities for creative energy projects such as harvesting low-grade wood for biomass and siting a pellet plant to convert wood waste. Richford should also consider the possibility of working to locate a 25 mW biomass (wood to electric) plant in the town. Richford's forest trails and proximity to the Long Trail provide an opportunity to expand, link and promote outdoor trails for hikers, skiers, snowmobilers and bikers.

Education Resources

Richford has an excellent school system that enjoys strong community support. There is an opportunity to encourage basic skills toward employment, provide technical and vocational training, and strengthen life skills for people in transition. An education resource center could provide a central place for classes in adult education, resume writing, renter/landlord responsibilities, finance management, and preschool and parenting classes. The town's Internet access provides the opportunity to build a relationship with universities and colleges to offer online education.

Housing

A housing task force should be formed to address systemic issues that undermine the quality of housing, particularly rental properties. Residents are concerned that existing zoning ordinances are not strictly enforced and sub-standard housing is not properly maintained for health and public safety. A clear vision for the desired mix of housing needs to be developed and clear health and safety standards should be established along with a rental registry and consistent zoning enforcement plan.

Entrepreneurial Business Development

Richford should unite town working groups under a single Richford economic development umbrella with the goal of developing and attracting new businesses and jobs in the community. Richford is fortunate to have amenities necessary for micro and entrepreneurial businesses to develop and thrive; broadband access, empty space, excellent water and sewer,

good schools and recreation potential. A task force should work to proactively attract and support entrepreneurs by partnering with small business agencies, identifying and promoting available technical and financial resources, and marketing the town. The task force should direct its work to build or set up an incubator for innovative small businesses in a downtown empty space or an existing space at the Industrial Park. Empty spaces in town provide key low-rent opportunities for the next generation of Richford businesses. Richford could consider opportunities to recruit a Vista Volunteer or graduate intern (or even part time paid staff) to provide support of economic development activity.

Elderly Housing

A task force on elderly housing could identify properties suitable for conversion to elderly housing and explore opportunities for sites, potential cooperative ownership, and attracting a developer. Richford could improve a “problem building” at the same time it sets up housing to ensure that older residents can stay in their community. The committee could work toward the consolidation and provision of services such as meals, transportation and social activities.

Law Enforcement

Richford residents continue to struggle with limited law enforcement coverage and perceived ongoing challenges of the prevalence of drugs, delinquent behavior, and an atmosphere of lawlessness and fear. While there may be no single or simple solution, to make progress residents will need to be prepared to contribute financially and personally to towards a safer, stronger community. A law enforcement task force should work to identify potential funding sources for additional police presence, work with reparative justice and preventative agencies, and acknowledge and address the impact of substance abuse on the community.

Town Image and Communication, Beautification, Sidewalks

The list of accomplishments since VCRD’s visit in 1996 is long and impressive; there is much to celebrate in the town. Communicating past success and available opportunities is important in motivating tourists, project funders, and residents. A task force could develop a communications network to market Richford’s assets, provide information for visitors, improve internal information sharing, and reach out to newcomers. Strategies could include a newspaper or newsletter, a common ‘Richford Calendar’, a central town kiosk, and a dynamically updated and participatory town website. The task force should work to systematically improve the image of the town through a strong cleanup and beautification effort.

Community Events

Community events can serve to both strengthen local spirit and attract visitors. A task force could develop a thematic event building on Richford’s unique assets – perhaps “Hands Across the Border”. The working group could begin with one large annual event; it could consider developing a community garden, harvest festival or sports tournament and build on this event to invite all Richford residents together.

Youth Activities

Both young people and older residents expressed dissatisfaction with current activities for teens, and concern about increasingly disengaged youth. A committee could form to create

opportunities for youth to include connections with organizations like the Conservation Corps, building a skate park, and winter sledding parties.

Canadian Border Opportunities

Richford's proximity to the border provides unique opportunities. A task force should build on that by attracting businesses such as a customs brokerage, recreational partnerships, and a strong trade corridor.

Town Staffing

A task force should analyze the current town staffing structure and analyze the cost, benefits and implementation steps required to fill a professional position such as Town Manager. A Town Manager could provide technical assistance, oversight and follow up for community initiatives, develop grants for community processes, support long term town government planning, and lead in fashioning platforms for action on town priorities by elected municipal officials and the public.

Transportation

An improved mass transportation system would assist residents seeking to move into the workforce, obtain additional education, or transport family members to appointments. Easier commuting to established work centers in St. Albans and Burlington would make purchasing property in Richford more desirable for new residents.

Richford Priorities

Selected by vote in community meeting May 24, 2007

As is the case with any Vermont community, many of the challenges faced by Richford residents are intertwined, and certainly all are important in considering the town's future. It is a difficult task to decide where to begin, to determine where the strategic starting point will be. VCRD has included in this section not only the final three priorities around which tasks forces have formed, but also the initial six items selected by participants in first round voting. These serve as a placeholder for future work, and express the understanding that issues not selected as top priorities may become part of the existing committees' discussions as they develop their working plans.

Final Three Priorities

Job Creation and Retention

Including Entrepreneurial Business Development, Canadian Border Opportunities and development of the Richford Business Association

Richford should unite various working groups under a single Richford economic development umbrella, the Richford Business Association, with the goal of retaining existing jobs and attracting new businesses and jobs into the community. Richford is fortunate to have amenities necessary for businesses to develop and thrive; broadband access, empty space, excellent water and sewer, good schools and recreation potential. The task force should work to proactively attract and support entrepreneurs and businesses by partnering with small business agencies, identifying and promoting available technical and financial resources, and marketing the town. The task force should direct its work to build or set up an incubator for innovative small businesses, and to develop empty storefronts as display space for local crafts and products. Richford's proximity to Canada should be utilized by seeking to attract businesses such as a customs brokerage, Canadian recreational partnerships and a strong trade corridor. Richford could consider opportunities to recruit a Vista Volunteer or graduate intern (or even part time paid staff) to provide support for economic development activity.

Law Enforcement

Richford residents continue to struggle with the limited law enforcement coverage and perceived ongoing challenges of the prevalence of drugs, delinquent behavior, and an atmosphere of lawlessness and fear. While there may be no single or simple solution, to make progress residents will need to be prepared to contribute financially and personally to towards a safer, stronger community. A law enforcement task force should work to identify potential funding sources for additional police presence, work with reparative justice and preventative agencies, and acknowledge and address the impact of substance abuse on the community.

Image and Communication

Including Town Cleanup and Beautification, Community Events, and Sidewalks

Renovating substandard housing sites, revitalizing vacant storefronts, and creating a clean and attractive town will display community pride, attract businesses and tourists, and lay a foundation of success that will help present Richford as a desirable destination. The task force should work to systematically improve the image of the town through a strong cleanup and beautification effort. The task force should develop a communications network to market Richford's assets,

provide information for visitors, improve internal information sharing, and reach out to newcomers. Communication strategies could include a newspaper or newsletter, a common ‘Richford Calendar’, a central town kiosk, and a dynamically updated and participatory town website.

Community events can serve to both strengthen local spirit and attract visitors. The task force could develop a thematic event building on Richford’s unique assets – perhaps “Hands Across the Border”. The working group could begin with one large annual event; it could consider developing a community garden, harvest festival or sports tournament and build on this event to invite all Richford residents together.

Initial Six Priorities

Housing/Elderly Housing

A housing task force should be formed to address systemic issues that undermine the quality of housing, particularly rental properties. A clear vision for the desired mix of housing, acceptable conditions, and a rental registry ordinance and enforcement plan needs to be developed. The task force should also focus on elderly needs, and could identify properties suitable for conversion to elderly housing and explore opportunities for cooperative ownership and attracting a developer. The committee could work toward consolidation and provision of services such as meals, transportation and social activities.

Multigenerational Center/Youth Activities

A multigenerational center could serve as a social and educational resource with scheduling to incorporate age specific and multi-age activities. Richford could plan and build a community center that would provide a variety of indoor and outdoor recreational activities, skateboard park, mentorships, and classes supporting life skills and parenting. The center could improve communication across generations and help strengthen family and social relationships. Both young people and older residents expressed dissatisfaction with current activities for teens, and concern about increasingly disengaged youth. A committee could work to create opportunities for youth to include connections with organizations like the Conservation Corps, building a skate park, and winter sledding parties.

Community Resource Coordination/Town Staffing

A task force could identify community needs, evaluate existing resources, and work toward the creation of a Community Resource Coordinator position. This position would work with schools, churches, social service and other organizations to link individuals with volunteer opportunities, develop activities to promote leadership skills, and improve communication. This person would also serve as a referral resource for Community Development funding and technical assistance needs.

The task force should analyze the current town staffing structure and determine the cost, benefits and implementation steps required to fill a professional position such as Town Manager. A Town Manager could provide technical assistance, oversight and follow up for community initiatives, develop grants for community processes, support long term town government planning, and lead in fashioning platforms for action on town priorities by elected municipal officials and the public.

See descriptions above for the following priorities, which were selected in the final voting round:

Job Creation and Retention

Law Enforcement

Image and Communication

Resource Day/Task Forces

Developed in response to the three Richford priorities on June 20, 2007

VCRD concluded its Community Visit to Richford with a focused session to develop step-by-step action plans and a list of potential resources to help the task forces begin their work. A small team of resource professionals assisted each committee in the process, as the people of Richford move ahead to assume leadership. Many task force members, eager to begin work, met on June 12th to start mapping out their priorities. A summary from that discussion follows this section of the report.

Job Creation and Retention

Including Entrepreneurial Business Development, Canadian Border Opportunities and development of the Richford Business Association

Action Steps

1. Analyze the benefits and drawbacks of locating a work camp in Richford, such as potential expansion of police protection and jobs, and general impact on the town. If it is beneficial, actively lobby for its placement.
2. Consolidate and coordinate working groups.
3. The Task Force should tour other Vermont towns that have been successful in building downtown and economic development momentum.
4. Build a business association.
5. Build a list of incentives and non-traditional capital for businesses.
6. Communicate with business owners to learn more about Richford's appeal, and to better understand what businesses and their employees need.
7. Advocate for a Town Manager.
8. Work with the Northwest Regional Planning Commission to provide input for the upcoming Rural Community Development Initiative Grant (RCDI).
9. Aggressively work to attract state agencies to locate in Richford.
10. Proactively attract a border patrol facility.

Resources

1. USDA Rural Development, the Regional Planning Commission and VCRD could be collaborative partners in developing an RCDI grant.
2. Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) through the Agency of Commerce could provide planning funds.
3. The Vermont Community Loan Fund could provide capital for small business development.
4. Student interns from the University of Vermont or other colleges are a good source of support.
5. Contact Paul Bruhn of the Preservation Trust who could help provide resources for a tour of towns making progress on downtown issues.

6. Other agencies that may provide resources include the Small Business Development Council (SBDC), Franklin County Industrial Development Corp. (FCIDC) and Vermont Economic Development Association (VEDA).

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Law Enforcement

Action Steps

1. Conduct an analysis of current crime statistics, community needs, and possible policing structures (available from St. Albans State Police and VT League of Cities and Towns). These may include an inter-municipal force, creation of a one-to- five-person police force, a residential officer or other options.
2. Contact Shaun Coleman of Local Emergency Planning (LEPC) for advice on consolidation and coordination of resources.
3. Initiate an education and outreach campaign to the community and the Selectboard to raise awareness of the needs and options.
4. Continue to locate and evaluate resources.
5. Work at the state level to establish a state rural policing grant program.

Resources

1. Track the status of the Community Oriented Policing Program (COPS). The funding has been discontinued by the current administration, but Congress is working to reinstate it.
2. Contact other police departments with similar issues: Tim Bombardier of Barre, Hardwick and Greensboro, and Troy.
3. The Department of Justice has a School Resource Officer grant program.
4. Communicate with the St. Albans Reparative Justice Center.
5. The Vermont Department of Health Caring Communities Program can provide in-school substance abuse information and support.
6. The USDA Rural Development RCDI grant opportunity could address many areas of concern in Richford.
7. Federal funds through the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice offer grants for technology and equipment.
8. The Vermont National Guard has a funding program for at-risk youth.

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Image and Communication

Including Town Cleanup and Beautification, Community Events, and Sidewalks

Action Steps

1. Set higher housing standards locally and enforce them, and work with the state to ensure that public funds only go towards apartments and homes that meet those standards.
2. Build a skateboard park, with youth involvement (See related VISTA position below).
3. Create new welcome and directional signs, and repair or replace existing signs.
4. Enforce zoning bylaws.
5. Create a town kiosk, perhaps at Main Street Mill.
6. Promote Richford's Village Designation and historic resources, and emphasize the benefits to property owners and the larger community.
7. Retain a VISTA volunteer for recreation and youth activities; possibly a shared position with a neighboring community.
8. Undertake street improvements such as sidewalks, street lights and landscaping.

Other Activities

1. Develop a website or newsletter for youth. Bring youth into the task force process.
2. Have a community flower-planting event on Main Street.
3. Identify a "hang-out" space for teens and young people.
4. Add informal career workshops and conversations to the open gym program.
5. Effectively use technology by using FGI.com (For Great Info) as a communication tool and updating the town website.
6. Build up the Boy and Girl Scouts again.
7. Provide tax breaks for attractive, historic homes.
8. Work with landlords toward voluntary improvements and cooperative action.

Resources

1. Vermont Downtown Program
2. Department of Corrections (Work Camp)
3. Franklin County Caring Communities
4. Agency of Human Services.
5. ADAP Prevention Coordinator
6. Watershed Mentoring
7. Northwest Regional Planning Commission
8. VT League of Cities and Towns.
9. Mac's Market
10. Housing Vermont
11. Richford Middle-High School
12. Richford Health Center
13. Lions Club
14. District Transportation Office

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Richford Meeting Summary - June 12, 2007

The Richford Community Visit Task Forces met informally on June 12th to consider some of the challenges ahead, their priorities, and review strategies in advance of working with the second VCRD Visit Team. Some of the issues and parameters of this discussion are listed below.

Law Enforcement

- Mission statement
- Business protection
- Outreach to voters
- Mechanics and funding of a police force

Image and Communication

- Downtown revitalization
- Housing stock
- Improving appearance – special emphasis on Main St, Troy St, Province St, River St
- Signs – including welcome signs
- Housing code – higher standards, enforcement
- Communication – between government and people, between town and outside
- Tax breaks to good looking houses
- Holding landlords accountable
- Changing negative perceptions
- Youth activities
- Town/school relationship
- Better zoning bylaws and uniform enforcement
- Taxation of commercial housing

Job Creation and Retention

- Leadership issues in community and in relation to economic development – Town Manager
- Existing non profits providing leadership
- Business association
- Research other success stories – What did they do?
- Obstacles to employment and attracting business – What are they? How can we overcome them?
- Supporting existing businesses

VCRD Resource Team Recommendations

Resource team members represent a wide array of professionals from across the state, and agree to serve as partners and advisors to Richford 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 and resources. Resource Team members are eager to support the Task Forces as they begin their work. Following are recommendations compiled from the Richford Visiting and Resource Team.

Job Creation and Retention

Richford residents, and their working committees, need to unite behind positive economic development efforts as a key solution to long-term challenges. The community's primary assets are its people—all of whom need a voice, and need to cooperate to systematically advance jobs, economic opportunities and all the benefits that they bring. **VCRD believes that the working committees on economic development in town should pool their efforts in a common process and a common identity.** Then, working together, residents can build economic development momentum.

To succeed, the Task Force will need to be active, with individual members taking on work between meetings to get things done. The group will also need help and assistance. At the workplan development session for this Task Force, **VCRD** and the **Northwest Regional Planning Commission** offered to work with the community to develop a federal grant to help provide support to this and the other Task Force efforts. **USDA Rural Development** is offering a **Rural Community Development Initiative Grant** that could support many of the issues raised in the Community Visit. It could provide some staffing and training in support of the goals of the Task Force. Based on the positive feedback from Richford residents, NWRPC and VCRD will begin work on the grant application. For information contact Catherine Dimitruk, Executive Director of the **Northwest Regional Planning Commission** at 524-5958, cdimitruk@nrpcvt.com, or Bonnie Smoren at VCRD (828-6022).

A **Vista/Americorps** volunteer, or graduate student could also provide logistical support, research successful community models, and provide data gathering and analysis. Contact Erik Mason, Vermont Commission on National and Community Service, at 828-4984 or erik.mason@state.vt.us. Jane Kolodinsky at the **UVM Department of Community Development and Applied Economics** knows of relevant resources. She can be reached at 656-4616.

Richford residents pointed out during the visit that biking, canoeing and kayaking, white water rafting, fishing, four-wheeling, skiing, snowshoeing and other outdoor sports offer a great market for sales and rentals of equipment. The activity in these areas just north of the border provides a ready market for the growth of recreational tourism and its associated businesses in Richford. One of the clear challenges to encourage this form of development is to deliberately build ways to welcome these bicyclists, hikers and kayakers and other outdoor

enthusiasts. Richford should look to expand public facilities, build welcoming signs, expand river access, and links to trails and promotion in Canada.

Beyond tourism, the **Northern Vermont-Quebec Trade Coalition**

(www.edcnv.org/programs/international_trade) would be eager to help the town of Richford analyze its international trade potential and what could be done to enhance its competitiveness as a near-border business location. The NVQTC is in the process of meeting with all major border communities in an effort to educate each town to identify and implement successful strategies for the creation of a competitive trade corridor. The Vermont border is the only US border region that possesses each of the features considered necessary for successful international trade development – infrastructure, people and strategic proximity to major markets, but has yet to realize its full potential.

Contact Bill Zuccareno, Chief International Officer, **Economic Development Council of Vermont**, 524-4546.

The Task Force is interested in visiting other communities that have been successful. One place to start would be by doing a tour north of the border to Magog, North Hatley and other communities, potentially including meeting with their local commerce groups.

Preservation Trust of Vermont has organized tours for other communities to see what has been successful around VT. The Task Force should contact **Paul Bruhn** (658-6647) to explore the possibility of a group road trip to include Brandon, Vergennes, Brattleboro and other towns that have proven successful in downtown revitalization. In particular, Richford should look to communities like **Bellows Falls** that have made substantial improvements in their community through a creative economy approach—attracting artists, building community events, and ultimately drawing new creative commerce and industry. Contact **Robert McBride** at 463-3252, ramp@sover.net.

Single-town economic development organizations can be difficult to sustain. It will be important for the Task Force to coordinate regionally with **Enosburg and Berkshire**, and the **Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation** or **Chamber of Commerce** as well as do its work within the community.

The Department of Children and Families is interested in promoting work participation among **Reach Up** participants and young people moving out of foster care. For information and planning around this effort, contact Pam McCarthy, local field director, at 527-5438. Questions about statewide opportunities through the Department should be directed to Joe Patrissi, Deputy Commissioner for Economic Services, at 241-2000.

SCORE (Service Corps for Retired Executives) is a nonprofit organization that can provide business planning advice at no cost. Their Montpelier office number is 828-4422.

The **Bridges out of Poverty** program addresses employment as well as deeper issues in overcoming poverty. Beth Kuhn of the United Way has more information at 864-7541 or beth@unitedwaycc.org.

The **Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity** (CVOEO) has a small business development program. Jim White in the Burlington office directs that program 800-287-7971. CVOEO has a number of revolving loan funds that small businesses can access capital from, including Job Start (479-0167). Another opportunity for businesses can come from the **Vermont Micro Business Development** which helps low and moderate income Vermonters to start and operate micro businesses. For other business supports, there are a number of revolving loan funds: **Northern Vermont Lending Partners, The Fund, and Community Capital**. Technical assistance is available at no charge from **Northern Vermont Lending Partners** for businesses interested in a loan. www.vtmicrobusiness.org.

Richford should look to successful business incubators such as the **Vermont Food Venture Center** in Fairfax. 849-2000 or brian@edcnv.org. Could a business incubator be developed in town? There are successful multi-tenant business buildings in Swanton, St. Albans, Newport, Cambridge and St. Johnsbury. The Richford Business Park has 9.5 acres that could be used to construct such a business if tenants have been identified. Funding sources for multi-tenant buildings have been derived from **CDBG**, loan guarantees from **USDA Rural Development**, and the **Economic Development Administration**. Contact Connie Stanley Little at the **Economic Development Council of Northern Vermont**, 524-4546

If there are identified small businesses interested in coming to or expanding in Richford that need technical assistance, **USDA Rural Development** can work with the town and Regional Development Corporation to provide technical assistance for Rural Business Economic Grants (RBEG). Sherry Paige can provide details at 828-6034.

Law Enforcement

The Law Enforcement Task Force will have to take the time to research and draft a plan to expand law enforcement in the community that includes partners and defines costs and benefits. While there could be outside resources, finding resources in town will be crucial; so much of the work will be building awareness of the need and expanding public understanding of a plan to respond to those needs. The task force must build the support that will be needed to authorize funding to make change happen.

As part of its plan, the town may need to invest in a law enforcement officer hired specifically for Richford. This would provide a consistent presence and may be no more expensive than contracted services.

Jim Barlow, of the VT League of Cities and Towns, is an expert in what towns around the state do to ensure public safety. He could be a strong adviser to the group as they build a plan (229-9111).

The federally funded **COPS** program (Community Oriented Policing Services) has provided substantial funding for officers and deputies, school resource officers, as well as technology grants for the purchase of equipment such as computers for patrol cars and crime tracking software. The current administration has suspended funding; however, Congressman Peter

Welch is a strong supporter of the program. For more information, contact Tricia Coates, Congressman Welch's office at patricia.coates@mail.house.gov, 802-652-2450.

Various kinds of prevention funds may be available to help create programmatic responses to some of the issues identified in Richford. For example, the **Child and Family Services Council for Prevention Programs** administers the Children's Trust Fund and several other funds. In the past they have helped communities fund important strategies to address pressing issues related to the healthy development of children and youth in a community. Contact Pam McCarthy at 527-5438.

The Vermont Community Foundation has a number of grant opportunities specifically aimed at the wellbeing of children. One of these is the Permanent Fund for the Well-Being of Vermont's Children, run by Executive Director Christine Zachai. The Permanent Fund likes to help a community radically alter particular outcomes related to children by the focused investment of dollars. 388-3355, www.vermontcf.org.

Contact the **City of St. Albans** for information on funding received for their foot/bike patrol program.

If the Town of Richford needs equipment to respond to the war on drugs, it may be eligible for USDA RD Community Facilities Loan and Grant Funds. Equipment may include security cameras for areas of the town; a bond vote would be needed. Contact Sherry Paige at 828-6034.

There are numerous online resources that can provide assistance with Law Enforcement:

- **Public Safety Communications Officials International** (APCO) is the world's largest not-for-profit professional organization dedicated to the enhancement of public safety communications. www.apcointl.org
- **Bureau of Justice Assistance Local Law Enforcement Block Grants** (LLEBG) may be used for procuring equipment, technology, and other material directly related to basic law enforcement functions. www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA
- **National Institute of Justice** (NIJ) is solely dedicated to researching crime control and justice issues. www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij
- **Office of National Drug Control Policy** (CTAC) assists state and local law enforcement agencies in obtaining equipment and training for counter-drug activities. www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov

Image and Communication

One way to start improving the image of Richford would be to get young people involved with town cleanup. They can be a source of energy and ideas and their active participation will keep them invested in the result. Encourage them to write newsletters, develop websites, and brainstorm how to reach out to other young people. Give them latitude to decide what

they would like to do to improve the community, provide a respected advisor to support them, and watch what they can do!

Substandard housing is not healthy for the town or for the people who live in it. Much of the community discussion revolved around influencing landlords to upgrade their housing. Cathy Voyer, Director of Housing and Transportation for the **Agency of Human Services** knows what efforts are going on around the state, and can help identify successful strategies to support progress and enforcement. She can be reached at 241-2220.

Much of the responsibility for property maintenance rests with individual landlords, tenants and homeowners. The task force could take a leading role in campaigning to encourage efforts to clean up properties—and celebrate the success of individuals who take steps forward. The town could consider building tax breaks for improvements that better the appearance of particular properties, tightening up zoning and housing codes, and diligently enforcing existing local codes.

Champlain College may have students able to work on a town website at little or no charge. Once a website is in place, it should be linked to as many other sites as possible.

The **Town of Pownal** has created a “wiki” – a wonderful interactive website as part of their Community Visit Communication and Identity Committee. Contact Peter Hopkins, chair of the Visit, for information and ideas. gopownal@adelphia.net

Richford should work with neighboring communities to share ideas and advice. Burlington’s Interval community gardens and agricultural products provide a good model. Newport has done well with joint activities with Quebec.

Some funding for community events (\$10K - \$20K) can be obtained from the **State Agency of Transportation** and **CDGB** grants.

USDA Rural Development has a number of programs that could assist in improving Richford’s appearance and responding to housing concerns. Contact Sherry Paige 828-6034.

- Funding could be provided for community/visitor centers, a town kiosk, information technology equipment dedicated to producing a town newsletter or website, sidewalks and green space. Structures such as park benches, gazebos and landscaping may also be funded.
- Use of 504 Repair Funds: Very low-income households are eligible for 1% interest rate repair loans.

Richford is encouraged to look at the Housing Preservation Grant Program and the state revolving rehab loan fund programs administered by **Champlain Housing Trust** for this region. The town may benefit from a program providing low cost rehab money to improve the aging housing stock in the community. Pam Cousteau can provide assistance at 527-2361.

The community should call together a working group to revisit the comprehensive housing plan developed in the late '90s. If this has not been updated, this could be restructured as the basis for a home improvement plan.

Town Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held with Richford residents and the VCRD Visiting Team on April 26, 2007.

Although the prioritization work of the 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 priority topics, 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 the issues explored, a repository of ideas and a possible foundation for future projects.

Resource Team A

Roger Allbee, Secretary, VT Dept. of Agriculture

Kevin Dorn, Secretary, VT Agency of Commerce & Community Development

Chuck Lief, Principal, The Hartland Group

Tim Smith, Executive Director, Franklin County Industrial Development Corp.

Connie Stanley Little, Executive Director, Economic Dev. Council of Northern VT

Janice St. Onge, Deputy Director, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

Ethan Ready, Community Liaison, Senator Sanders' Office

Jonathan Wood, Commissioner, VT. Dept. of Forest, Parks & Recreation (facilitator)

Deb Perry, NW Regional Planning Commission, (scribe)

I. Village Downtown

Assets and Challenges

- The town's greatest asset is the reconstruction of the Sweat Comings building. When completed, it will include a grocery store, health center and parking facilities.
- Richford has a good backbone of infrastructure. Having the "T" in the road and the river running through town is an asset.
- Downtown itself is an asset. There is lots of property that's developable or improvable and the basic infrastructure is in place.
- Richford has beautiful outlying areas. Outdoor recreation is an asset for tourism and for locals.
- One participant noted that there is a lot of remarkably well-preserved and affordable housing in the village, and this was the reason he moved to Richford. There is good housing that is much less expensive than in Chittenden County.
- The empty storefronts in Richford provide potential space for future businesses and shops.
- The water and sewer capacity is an asset because there is plenty of capacity for development.

- Railroad service is a strength, and there is daily freight service to and from Montreal and Portland, ME.
- Richford is in close proximity to Canada and Jay Peak.
- The town is close enough to Burlington airport that people who fly to Vermont are able to get to Richford easily. "It's beautifully situated."
- Richford has an excellent school system. This includes two nice buildings, good staff and high quality education. The high school is in the village and the elementary school is on the outskirts.
- One new asset in the community is that both schools have generators in case of crisis.
- There are four churches in the village area, and they are active. Richford has Knights of Columbus and other social groups related to churches.
- Richford is at the end of the Rail Trail. This provides a place for people to get out and walk with the family, take the dog for walk, ride bicycles, etc. The trail connects Richford to St. Albans and is a good recreational asset.
- The health care facilities are wonderful and are based downtown, providing easy access. The pharmacy is firmly established in the community.
- There is a veterinarian in town.
- Richford has an asset in its people. There is a big group of people here for the Community Visit and in general there is good involvement and commitment.
- One participant noted that she loves the small town atmosphere - people are friendly, everyone waves, and knows each other. Neighbors watch out for each other and people feel welcome.
- There is a very good day care center and fitness center, which are co-located.
- Richford Village has high speed Internet and DSL is available throughout the village.
- A fair amount of acreage has not been developed along the riverfront. A park is being planned for eight acres on the river.
- The river has tremendous recreation potential. There could be economic development; for example, the Northern Forest Canoe Trail could bring more people into town.
- Richford has a really nice library in a beautiful building.
- Each year the town has community events like Hometown Follies and a Christmas lighting ceremony. There are many activities for kids, including scouting, sports and a good music department.
- Richford is lucky to have the border patrol, which provides inexpensive protection for the area.
- It is rumored that 500 acres of land is in process of being sold to a millionaire who intends to keep the land open with trails, snowshoeing, etc. If true, this would be a good asset to the community. In general, conserved land provides places for recreation and can be managed for sustainable forestry.
- A challenge is getting the plywood off the windows. There is too much vacant space.
- Richford has an image problem. Homes and other buildings appear depressed and beaten down. Something needs to be done about upgrading the visual perception of the village. People aren't proud of Main Street.
- When the river goes down there is a lot of debris that needs to be cleaned up, including cars, tires, etc.
- Richford needs a hardware store very badly.
- The ball fields are good, but the playground (the park by the river) is atrocious. The area is not covered and fly balls come over from main baseball field. Richford needs to update the playground and cover it.

- One challenge is a lack of small businesses space. The available spaces are too large and there is no space to accommodate micro-businesses that only need 500-700 square feet. Richford needs smaller places for businesses to start and grow from.
- There is a lack of employment options. A lot of retail and manufacturing jobs have been lost and although there have been gains in the service industry, unemployment is still high. Richford needs good-paying jobs.
- Richford's biggest problem is an abundance of people on public assistance and in low cost housing. 24% of Richford's population is on public assistance. "These people have no money to spend in the community." Until Richford cleans up the town no one is going to start a business. The "Bridges Out of Poverty" Program is wonderful. They take the youngest generation and try to give them training to get them off of welfare. They are trying to get a van to take people out of town for training and work.
- It is challenge for Richford to keep older people, who are unable to take care of a house, in the community. There is no place for elderly people to go, with little available in terms of assisted living. It would be good to be able to keep elderly people in the village.
- There are a lot of "bad actors" at play in terms of economic development challenges. People are listless and there is a drug problem in town. There's not much to do and the image of town suffers. These bad actors degrade the image of the town, so that no one will come in to make improvements.
- It is a gamble for people to locate in Richford. A business touring the town would have a negative first impression compared to other towns and probably wouldn't choose Richford.
- There are a lot of run-down, poorly maintained rentals. With subsidized housing, there is no incentive for landlords to clean up because they get same amount of money regardless of the condition of the property.
- Richford's drug problem is severe and critical. More law enforcement is needed to deal with things like vandalism, loitering, ATVs on Main Street, and the huge drug problem.
- People feel that outsiders "smack Richford in the face," saying things like "I would never live in Richford." There is an image problem.
- Richford doesn't have a recreation committee or conservation commission.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Richford is the 5th poorest community in state. We need significant grant dollars – not just a bake sale, but large chunks of money. There is no affluence in the community itself so capital has to come from outside, for example community block grants. The Mill project was very resourceful and raised \$7-8 million in grants and tax credits. It was "creatively financed." Any guidance Richford can get from appropriate parties would be helpful.
- There should be incentives to rehabilitate historic buildings, perhaps through the historic society. There could be rewards for people taking care of properties even if it was just \$50 off of taxes. The opposite should be done to slumlords. The town should fine them, put a lien on their property and take over the property. There should be a committee that governs this and inspects the community.
- Richford needs specific zoning bylaws. There is a housing officer that works within the community and a process is in place, but in a small community it is difficult to apply rules and nobody wants to rat out their neighbor.

- Richford needs professional help. We have all these assets but feel that we have accomplished nothing in the past several years. There is a need for leadership and enforcement and the community isn't doing it.
- Richford has been trying to do this for years. There is a jobs committee, but no factories want to come in. There is no transportation and the town is far from the interstate. There has been work on the drug problem and people have talked to law enforcement.
- The town would benefit from research on other towns in similar economic environments so lessons can be learned from examples.
- Residents have met with Susan Fuller and have "Project 2010," a plan that resulted from the previous community visit, but there good professional assistance was not available to implement that plan.
- It's important to have follow-up. It has to be ongoing. There is no use in having a plan that no one sticks to.
- There are several little organizations and groups in the community. In order to move forward they should consolidate and work together. There are at least 3 groups each doing their own thing, which is part of the reason wheels are spinning. They all need to come together and make a plan under the umbrella of downtown and economic development.
- Richford is Victorian. The downtown could be developed with a common theme and give incentives to businesses. Having mix and match buildings gives the appearance of being poor. If you want people to come into town, it needs to look nice.
- Richford needs elderly housing. The town could buy some housing on River Street. Right now there are 50 applicants for 12 units in the Sweat Comings building. Richford could purchase a "problem" building and turn it into housing for the elderly.
- There are high school students looking for work. The town could get them involved doing things like painting, raking, picking up. Local sports teams, for example, could pick up the fields. Richford needs to engage youth in the community. There is a great principal at the high school that would be open to idea of getting high school students involved.
- The Vermont Youth Conservation Corp is currently in St. Albans and is trying to expand state-wide.
- Affordable home ownership should be developed. There is plenty of low-income housing that is affordable but it is all rental properties. Is there a process to allow a 4 unit building be taken over and turned into condos? People need a way into home ownership in order to get people on the tax roles obligated, and to create jobs by refurbishing properties. This will improve the sense of pride and the town's image.
- A tremendous number of people are on welfare. The town has low cost housing, limited police protection and no public transportation. If people on welfare could get to St. Albans they could get public transportation to Chittenden County.
- The Network bus comes up to Richford but "is worthless"
- Richford could get volunteers to help people learn to write resumes. Retired educators would be a good resource to help people get their GEDs and become able to support themselves.
- The Chairman of the library board notes that the library is a potential place for adults to receive classes and they would like to see library services expanded.
- Another resident noted that these things are in the works. When the health department moves, they will use the space for the department of labor.
- There is a very poor communication network within the community. The rumor mill is full of colorful stories, but in terms of positive accomplishments, nobody knows about

them. All of these programs and niche groups that get together have poor communication back out to community. People aren't aware of what's available to them. Good communication can't just be notice at town hall.

- Mentoring is a positive response to problems – there should be less criticism and judgment and more help.
- Efforts need to be unified. As an example of parallel efforts, a study was done about burning biomass, but they couldn't coordinate with the school to use the waste heat. Instead the school installed their own system.
- There is good access to the river and lots of bicyclists all summer. If access to the riverfront becomes better, people might stay longer and spend money.
- There should be organized bike rides. The town hasn't organized around the bike theme. There could be tours, organized dinners, open houses, etc.
- Richford has the river, but there is no place to put a canoe in. This could be addressed without a large expenditure; it doesn't take a lot of money for canoe access or green space.
- Committees that form should consider what could be done with vacant buildings downtown in terms of recreation. They should survey every piece of property and the waterfront to develop a list of what could be done with parcels. They need an inventory of assets.
- Consider integration of art into the community. For example in some towns, there are rooms for rent to artists, both for their work and living space.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- The new first responder fire and rescue facility is an asset that was not mentioned. It is an especially important asset considering the distance to nearest hospital.
- The town could build on recreation opportunities; the area down by the river holds tremendous potential if there were a trail system and picnic areas.
- There are two resounding themes: a deep sense of pride within community – people feel it's a great place to live - and a feeling that the external image doesn't reflect the pride and great the opportunities that exist.
 - To raise the image and perception, talk positively outside of the town borders, marketing yourself as great place to raise a family, and promote the wonderful recreational opportunities
 - Has anyone asked youth what they need? What would bring them back when they are ready to settle? How can they be engaged and proud?
 - For recreational opportunities, the river is tremendous asset- how do you leverage that asset?
- The quality of life is here, with a sustainable community and everything that would attract a business, but how do you do it? Businesses look for school systems and health care and Richford has those, but something is missing. Perhaps a better connection to Canada is needed.
- It's important to hear people talk about fact that Richford should look at more infrastructure to attract small business. This will be a jumping off point for private investment. The complexity of the Sweat Comings project is great, but there are few opportunities to do things that are so complicated.
- People have talked a lot about home ownership. This will require reaching out and pulling in investors.

- Whatever comes out of the planning process, consider how to bring in professional assistance to help with implementation.
- This community has tremendous resources and assets. In southern VT people would salivate to have affordable housing available. The people are also a great asset, but there is a need for leadership, communication, and coordination. There is a strong sense of pride, but you can only make a first impression once. Having a sense of pride and communicating that sense of pride is important. Good ideas include having a bicycle tour, getting businesses to locate in Richford because with DSL and Internet they can locate anywhere.
- There has been a detailed catalog of assets and challenges, and people have been thoughtful about issues.
- There is overlap between organizations, and when you have overlap and duplication it tends to create friction and slow the movement forward. This could be addressed.
- Regarding the image issue- image goes to spirit and spirit drives a lot of things in a community.
- This is a great small town with phenomenal assets, but the group includes a lot of older folks and the 20 and 30-somethings need to be engaged.
- There is a core group of people who have tried for many years to make things happen and they are starting to get burned out - they need others to step up to the plate.
- A vision is developing of an area focused on outdoor recreation- Jay Peak, Long Trail, Canoe Trail, Rail Trail. This could be an outdoor destination. Richford could start off with mountain bike races or canoe races once a week to generate interest and draw people in.
- High schools often promote how many graduates go off to college, but large percentages don't go off to college. BFA has worked on a career certification and teaching students about careers available in the local economy.
- There is a disconnect. While the town has high unemployment and drug problems, it has great recreation opportunities.
- Focus on cleaning up and creating open space.

II. Agriculture & Forestry

Assets and Challenges in this Area

- The logging industry is an asset to Richford, and there are a lot of loggers. Loggers don't get as much help as the farmers do- farmers are subsidized. There are no subsidies for loggers to purchase skidders or excavators. People don't recognize that loggers provide us with necessities like toilet paper and computer paper. There are a lot of good loggers, who are not clear-cutters. There are opportunities to sell product in Canada and New York.
- Loggers have an asset and no market. Logs are used for firewood, but they could also use limbs to chip and make energy. If all the limbs and waste left in woods were used, Vermont could be powered without out-of-state energy. The problem is that there is no market or a facility. The same is true with dairy farmers and biomass. Right now they spread manure in fields, but they could burn it and create energy instead of polluting the lake. This could be an economical source of power.

- It is an asset to have a lot of low-grade wood for biomass, and that should be utilized. Vermont has already cut the better grade, and low-grade wood has grown up on abandoned farmland.
- One asset is the beautiful, rolling farmland, the scenic beauty of the working landscape
- It takes 100 years to create an inch of topsoil. While biomass is important, leaving leaf litter behind after cutting is important. There are concerns with over-harvesting, which could impact site productivity.
- There is debate over whether or not Richford owns town forestland.
- There is a high percentage of conserved land that will stay in forestry, for example state lands and the Atlas timberlands. This is designated for perpetual forest and agricultural uses.
- There is productive river bottomland for agriculture. There are not a lot of dairy farms, but 1500 head of dairy cattle. There is also a very good vegetable farm- a “truck garden” – which is a commercial vegetable operation and a successful perennial flower facility. There are lots of maple sugaring operations.
- A survey established that with sustainable forest management, there is enough biomass to do a district heating system in the village and to supply Blue Seal with heat and electricity. There is a detailed report by the Biomass Energy Resource Center (BERC)
- A woodchip project is underway to heat the local high school. They are at the bid stage right now.
- Another resident stated that there were two challenges: the technology and the equipment needed for a district heating system wasn’t available at the right scale and the right cost and hadn’t been proven in US, and the second challenge in that everyone downtown is invested in their own heating system. They would have to give up the new heating system at town hall for example. At the Main Street Mill the problem was timing and where to put it.
- The Town needed to have the school using the waste heat in order to make the economics work, but the school is doing their own system and it would be a duplicative effort
- While loggers need to register vehicles, farmers can let 10 year olds drive on the highway and spread manure. DOT goes after log trucks and there is a higher level of scrutiny on the logging industry.
- Regarding workers compensation, the rates in Vermont are three times as high as Massachusetts for the same activity. This affects both agriculture and forestry. New York and Maine have more participation and Vermont is more expensive because it’s small
- There is a need to create opportunities for people to go into agriculture. There are people who would like to have a piece of land, but big farms often buy up farmland.
- In the education session, it was noted that the kids are proud of their school but not necessarily the town. The town needs to create opportunities to keep agriculture here for young people.
- Funding is a big problem. Without funding, residents can’t afford staff or additional research into proposals and plans.
- There is increasing environmental regulatory pressure on farmers
- Current conventional dairy farming requires a lot of land because it requires a lot of cows. There is not enough land in one place to support cows.
- There are no more “mom and pop” operations in agriculture or logging because of competition. Small farms can’t compete with large operations.
- There is no incubator farming space. The challenge is being able to afford the land.

- Insurances are so high for logging; it's hard for young people to get into the business.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- There are opportunities to get into farming with value added products, for example goats and sheep. For a new farmer this is manageable and enough to raise a family on.
- Value added products provide an opportunity.
- Richford could create a cheese trail that attracts tourists. This could be like in Europe where people go around and taste different kinds of cheese (A visiting team member noted that the Vermont Cheese Center has a cheese trail)
- Quebec has wine tour. The Province does marketing and produces maps for tourists. This may need to be done on a regional level, with perhaps 10 farms participating as a small coop. In Sutton there are lots of brochures on agri-tourism.
- Across border there is apple growing, as well as berries and grapes. Richford needs to be more diversified.
- Perhaps Future Farmers of America presents an opportunity.
- There is a teacher at Cold Hollow that could provide technical training
- Farms bring in people from other countries as workers, but they don't hire locals. There are a lot of teenage boys who would love to have a job. How do you connect those who want to work to those who need labor? The Vermont Youth Conservation Corp might provide an opportunity for making this connection.
- The Intervale is cut into smaller farms. Perhaps Richford could use that as a model for creating an incubator for new farmers. This provides a transition for farmers getting out of school. Perhaps it could be combined with a biomass plant.
- Riverside Park could have an acre of community vegetable gardens.
- The Island would be good location for an incubator, but it is privately owned and has 65 acres of corn.
- The industrial park has inexpensive land and has been for sale for long time (10+ years). The park has about nine acres of land cut up. (This land is owned by EDCNV; they would be happy to sell it to somebody to create jobs for Richford).
- The Richford Wood Initiative evolved from the Community Visit 10 years ago after the loss of the last wood manufacturing plant. They wanted value-added wood manufacturing jobs in Richford. The initiative had three objectives: sustainable management of forests, jobs in Richford, and energy.
- Most of the local forest is owned in 100 -300 acre parcels usually as part of farm. The challenge is to get enough of that in one place to access it and harvest it economically. A cooperative of local woodlot owners and a staging area so that could bring logs to a single site. This is an idea that needs capital and the ability to educate local landowners. Rising energy costs might also create interest.
- Instead of importing energy there could be regional or even local wood fired generation all over Vermont. This would put energy on the grid locally instead of transporting.
- Normally a farmer pays \$70,000 to spread manure and \$60,000 on energy each year. A biomass facility would help farmers and loggers, while lowering electric rates. It would attract industry and business.

- Since young people aren't going into forestry and there is increasing demand, the question is, "will there be people to get wood to burn?" The wood is there, but do we have foresters and truckers to do it?
- There is no real model of heating a whole community and producing electricity with biomass. The Fuels for School Program is taking off, Montpelier and Waterbury are looking into it and the Newport hospital is an example. But the challenge to the State and federal government is to set up a model for a small community.
- For the high school biomass system the payback was 3 years, in part because of state subsidies. Otherwise it would have been 15-17 years. These calculations may not capture the cost of wood chips.
- Small dairy farms could convert to organic.
- There is an opportunity to convert from cow dairy to goat dairy. This can be seasonal and allows farmers to take a vacation, which is important to kids today. Goats are browsers not grazers and can feed in the hills where cows can't. All the good bottomland is taken, but goats can use more marginal land.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- One visiting team member serves on VEDA and stated that they have financed four methane digesters on farms. The cost is significant and a lot of that is running three-phase power to the site. Through the community development block grant program, they are putting in a co-gen plant at Beaker's Falls. The facility will be owned by Vermont Electrical Co-op and will be mobile so they can move if plant closes. Gasification technologies might also be constructed in Vermont.
- There is a dwindling population on the farm--it is a difficult life, and requires work year round. There may be opportunities for niche products. Vermont Butter and Cheese is paying a lot for goat milk and are looking for more contracts.
- The Intervale incubator concept is good- it allows farming to be full time or as a supplementary income.
- Biomass and waste generation are already being seen on farms. There are great opportunities to look at scale for smaller operations.
- The fastest growing sector in agriculture is niche operations and value-added products. Incubator sites provide opportunities for young people to transition in. Hardwick is starting incubator sites. Farming isn't easy to get into because of capital costs.
- Buying local is also a great opportunity- the spinach and other food scares motivate buying locally.
- Richford could create a link between a biomass facility and heating a greenhouse.
- The integration between and across sectors, like an incubator and the Intervale model, is useful because there's sufficient scale to replicate the model. The Intervale sells compost and there is more demand than product.
- A Visiting Team member heard frustration from the forest and logging community that they don't have the same resources made available to them as the agricultural community. Perhaps agriculture has more structure and more presence in state: maybe at the state level they need to look at opportunities. Getting younger generations involved is not specific to agriculture and forestry, but is felt across the board in the state.
- Diversification is the future. Find niches that no one else is using. How do we keep low-end wood and how can we add value to it? We have been selling resources to Canada for years, but how to keep it here?

- A Goat co-op would provide multiple products.
- There is an opportunity to work from the recreational angle.
- It might be possible to raise the image of Richford as innovative and forward thinking with creative energy projects.
- The forest provides trail opportunities - the Long Trail stops nearby, and perhaps there's potential to expand on the trail system.
- The conversation showcased that energy is closely related to issues of agriculture and forestry.
- Richford has forest resources- maple sugar, flowers, milk- but the problem seems to be how to profit from these industries. Senator Sanders is interested in trying to find ways to convert biomass to pelletize for fuels. The wood is the raw resource and that could be converted to fuel. It's not feasible for everyone to buy a new furnace, so how do you convert to district heat?
- Dairy and forestry are hampered by costs of fuel, loss of youth, and regulations. The Governor had a summit and statewide work will come to bear as potential opportunities emerge.
- Companies are looking to site pellet plants.

III. Economic Development/Attracting Entrepreneurs

Assets and Challenges in this Area

- Assets include empty buildings that offer affordable space.
- The railroad, the river, and Canada are all assets. The Rail Trail is an asset
- Richford has broadband access, DSL and T1.
- There is a lot of history, including historical buildings and interesting architecture.
- There are recreational opportunities, including the Long Trail and Jay Peak.
- There are good schools and a great health center.
- Richford has a good fire and ambulance service.
- There is excess water and sewer capacity, and in fact additional water usage would help the system.
- There is an industrial park with nine acres available with 3 phase power, T1, water and sewer and is covered by an Act 250 permit.
- Richford has great people.
- There is a mechanically astute potential workforce.
- There is an under-utilized and available work force.
- Lots and lots of bikers come through town.
- Richford has a farmers' market.
- There is some retail trade from Canada, including gasoline and post office trade. Many people come to pick up and mail packages.
- Richford has a lot of truck traffic- Blue Seal Feed and Supply makes up a good portion of the traffic.
- 105 is a major northern corridor for truck traffic.
- It is challenging that there is an impression that Richford is a dead-end town. Businesses and people outside of town have that impression. Richford is the "end of the line."

- People coming from the south to Jay Peak don't come through Richford. Can the town be developed economically without Jay Peak playing primary role?
- The physical infrastructure of the town isn't conducive to luring people in. For example, the bridge over the river is treacherous. It will be repaired, however, it took a long time to raise money to fix bridge. The renovation will look the same, which allows access to state money because of historic preservation.
- The location of the bridge is an economic challenge- it creates a sharp turn and reduces parking because you can't park on the sides of the street. This is an example of historic preservation competing with economic development.
- The distance to adult education is challenging- it is 30 miles to get to St. Albans or Newport to get to a satellite location. It's difficult to access higher education: it is 60 miles to UVM.
- Richford must recognize that businesses have a choice of hundreds of communities all trying to attract entrepreneurs. Richford's downtown area is unattractive and has to be fixed up. The speaker provided an example of a town near San Francisco that was repainted in bright colors and became tourist attraction.
- There is limited cellular service and a need for more towers and more than one carrier.
- Internet accessibility is a challenge, as most people can't afford a T1 line to their house.
- There is a lack of law enforcement. Two years ago three communities tried to pool together resources for police coverage. There is a Sheriff in St. Albans who comes 56 hours/week and charges \$100,000 for that coverage. The challenge is the ability to afford law enforcement.
- It costs more to do anything in Richford compared to Chittenden County. The architects, contractors, and materials come from somewhere else and have to be transported at greater cost. Materials (hardware, lumber) aren't available in Richford.
- Energy costs are high through the Vermont Electric Coop.
- Proximity to Canada is an advantage, but the current national security policy discourages visitors coming down from Canada. If people have to show passports it will further discourage them. It is also becoming more difficult to import and export.
- Border enforcement is inconsistent, with the rules left to the interpretation of the officer on duty. This leads to uncertainty, which discourages people.
- There is just one bank in Richford, Banknorth. It has become friendlier as they have grown and merged. Getting additional banks is a low priority issue.
- There is limited lodging available – only one Bed and Breakfast. Richford also needs more restaurants.
- With regard to recreation and tourism, the challenge is to make it a destination not a pass-through.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Is it possible to preserve the current bridge as a pedestrian bridge, but create another bridge that is more functional?
- Opportunities for recreation such as skateboarding and bike riding should be developed to provide a place for kids to go besides Main Street.
- Recreation is needed for senior citizens.
- The Rail Trail in Virginia had services, for example you could rent a bicycle and they would drive you out and you would bike back. They have the same service for canoes. There is something like this in Montgomery, but not Richford.

- Richford should package itself as a recreation destination and advertise all of the above, including skateboarding for teens, hiking, skiing, biking, and canoeing.
- There needs to be a shift in the attitude, from attracting industry and large businesses to developing incentives for smaller storefront type businesses, perhaps with tax abatement or tax stabilization. Tourism can create jobs and Internet access is readily available in village. Richford's problems can't be cured with one fell swoop of a big business locating here.
- To get a T1 line need you to have enough business. Perhaps a T1 association could be established to get the critical mass for that connection. This could include residential and commercial customers to make the idea more attractive to Verizon.
- From a small business owner point of view, the community needs to support and utilize the grocery store. The community needs to agree to pay more to shop locally and support local entrepreneurs. They need to demonstrate community-wide commitment. It should be easier to sell locally as gas prices increase.
- Another store recently went out of business. A critical mass of stores is needed. Right now you have to go out of town anyway for other merchandise so you end up buying all the products you need elsewhere.
- Richford needs to grow our own entrepreneurs rather than attract them from outside. People need help starting businesses, with a cash reserve or base to help fund low interest loans.
- Capital is needed at the local level. There is a revolving loan committee, but they are all loaned out.
- The town was contributing to a fund, but they don't do this anymore. They could contribute \$25,000 to recapitalize the community loan program.
- There is the potential opportunity to site a state corrections work camp. This would provide 40 new jobs and maybe boost law enforcement.
- Residents could launch a shop local education campaign. Right now business is being lost to Internet shopping.
- There is a town website which could be used to market the local economy. The website could promote businesses and even help with law enforcement. For example, things could be posted and the community could see and share information.
- A Website needs to be administered. It hasn't been updated in 2 years. The town has been working on this and knows that it needs to be interactive and updated.
- A Richford storeowner worked with the local TV channel for promotion. Businesses could pool together and advertise.
- There is an opportunity to form a local business association. There is not one currently. An association could identify common marketing goals and foster communication.
- St. Albans has a maple festival and Enosburg has dairy days. Richford should hold and publicize a thematic event; perhaps "hands across the border."
- There could be river races.
- The lack of post-high school education needs to be addressed. Enosburg has something and St. Albans has a satellite location. Richford should petition UVM for some activity. This might help retain young people longer. The library has entertained the idea of trying to be a campus for the technical college, but they are constrained by space. The high school has wonderful facilities and classes have been taught there. Richford could ask the community college, VTC and UVM to send someone here once a week to conduct classes at the local high school.
- Richford could become a satellite of interactive television.

- Improved (convenient and reliable) public transportation would make the town a more attractive destination.
- A committee could be formed to visit and learn from Canadian communities along border. These communities seem to be able to support small businesses like clothing and craft stores better, for example, Bedford and Sutton.
- There are several very good craftsmen in town and people who raise vegetables and fruit, but it's very difficult to encourage them to come to a farmers' market. A display of local crafts could be featured in one storefront to promote the products and beautify the community.
- A lot of the things people talk about as far as attracting people require addressing the physical structure of the town, but it is also necessary to deal with kids hanging out on the street, throwing stones at pedestrians.
- It is essential to deal with landlords and the image of Richford as a welfare town.
- The issues need to be prioritized because everything is interrelated.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Clearly, there is an image issue. Richford doesn't need one solution; it will take a lot of small ideas to make things better.
 - Richford needs small businesses that will grow and attract others, and local talent needs to be recruited. The people working out of the garage or basement need to be recruited and combine to do storefronts.
 - There is a need for recreation that will draw business owners - a domino effect that will attract more lodging, restaurants, etc.
 - People have taken for granted Main Street Mill. The grocery store and health center will be a huge asset for downtown and will be an attractive community center
 - Residents need to be loyal to local businesses
- The opportunity we didn't hear was the opportunity to partner with organizations and agencies providing resources that are needed, for example Vermont Community Loan Fund is interested in loaning to small businesses. Make sure somebody knows all the opportunities and can link small business owners.
- There is great infrastructure- broadband, affordable housing, etc- which is a good base to build on.
- Townspeople need additional training and education. The borders don't mean much because of high speed Internet. A deal could be made with UVM or a college in NYC- it could be provided from anywhere and Richford should take advantage of that.
- The opportunity and challenge is that the grocery store has to work if there's going to be any ability to attract additional businesses. If residents don't rally around that, other businesses will notice that it is not going well. The community has to indicate that it is going to support local businesses.
- The revolving loan fund money isn't needed, as a lot already exists. Economic Development Council of Northern VT will provide technical assistance at no charge to people who borrow money. People need to be made aware of the resources.
- The lack of law enforcement is troubling. If you want tourists and small businesses they have to feel safe. This is a critical issue.

- In terms of growing businesses within or attracting new ones, Richford needs to have access to capital, technical assistance, an educated workforce, telecommunications, cellular service, etc. These things are a big deal, as is the cultural appeal of the town, arts, and things to do.
- If you are growing business, there needs to be a market. Without a need, businesses won't be viable long-term. It is important to understand the types of businesses you want to attract.
- There is a wealth of resources, especially technical assistance, that are available but which may not be apparent. It is important to understand who does what.
- The community knows what needs to be done; now they need to prioritize. There are three focal points: broadband/internet/cell phone- business leaders will look for that.
- Regarding recreation, continue to work on the Rail Trail, market skiing, snowmobiling, the Long Trail, and the park in downtown.
- There could be an event equivalent to Enosburg Dairy Days to showcase Richford, and create a statewide attraction. This will show people the tides are turning and show off progress.
- Trends are consistent between groups, and there are two objectives: (1) business development: they have assets like water and sewer, act 250 industrial space, and a workforce with mechanical skills, but downtown isn't attractive, and (2) recreation and service: being a destination.
- As a border town, Richford should think about the services it can provide- banking, mail, shops, trade facilitation. They have a major highway they can capitalize on.
- One asset has not been mentioned- there are two good industries, K Tech and Blue Seal Feed. Get close to those and find out what they need to stay here. There are many pressures, but the loss of a major company in a small community is a concern.

Resource Team B

Steve Dale, Commissioner, VT Department of Children and Families

Susan Hayes, Regional Program Director, USDA Rural Development

Cindy LaWare, Secretary, VT Agency of Human Services

Jim Saudade, Deputy Secretary, VT Agency of Commerce

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Hal Cohen, Executive Director, Central VT Community Action Council (facilitator)

Bonnie Waninger, NW Regional Planning Commission (scribe)

I. Family Support

Assets and Challenges

- Richford has its own school system (K-12); we're not busing our students to other communities where we lose control of the kids.
- We have some great facilities – fitness center, day care center, Laundromat – and a strong entrepreneurial spirit.
- Richford is a connected community – there are people who have lived here for 60+ years and the generations of families create a connectedness.
- There are resources for families like the summer camp, Burma, the health center and after school programs like sports and the teen center.
- There is a moderately active to strong faith community.
- Sports teams are an asset for the community.
- School music – a large percentage of students participate in the band and use it as an outlet for their passions.
- Being a border town is an asset. People flow through Richford.
- The Rail Trail is an underutilized asset. It is scenic and it is a draw for people to come here.
- We have many housing groups working with local partners in our community - Habitat for Humanity, Lake Champlain Housing, and Housing Vermont.
- Richford has a beautiful image for visitors and travelers.
- We're all here together, and to some extent everyone benefits from services that are provided because of low-income people.
- There are lots of single, female parents who lack support.
- Some people can't read and write, and so they struggle with learning and understanding.
- Drug addiction and how it affects the family unit and community are challenges. If someone wants to get off drugs, there is no local support to help them.
- We have to break the spiral effect. People end up here for economic reasons because we're the last frontier for affordable housing. But there is no work here. Even if a family has two incomes, they have to drive to work, which is usually a low wage job. This creates a pit. Once they are here, they can't get out of that pit because of the logistical problems.
- The quality of housing is low. Having a mortgage and traveling to work means having no energy to improve or maintain the condition of a house.
- Rental housing is in deplorable and sometimes inhumane condition.
- There is never enough money for food and utilities. More families are asking for help.

- People in the welfare system may be working, but they still don't have enough to pay all the bills.
- The low-income population affects the middle income - once someone transitions out of the low-income program, they no longer qualify for benefits but they still need help. For instance, once both parents work, childcare is needed, and the expense of commuting to work and childcare offsets the gains from wages earned.
- When properties are run down, it lowers the property value for everyone.
- Richford's demographics are heavy with elderly and retired people who are on fixed incomes. The State medium income is \$46,000; Richford's is \$28,000.
- Those who are doing better economically work outside of town, but they are traveling farther to jobs. This puts stress on couples and their children because parents are away from home longer and there is less family contact. Living in Richford means making choices that impact your family.
- Having our own school system is a challenge because kids lack the diversity of meeting new kids.
- Some people don't feel connected to the community. If you feel isolated from your town, community or society, and you don't feel like you fit in, you won't seek help or services.
- Doing things as a family unit, outside of the faith community, is a challenge. The time it takes to drive to and from work makes it difficult to have parents involved in their children's lives.
- People feel stuck here. Some can't cross the border due to criminal records and other issues, and this will become more of an issue with the new need for passports. It is intimidating to be questioned when you cross the border, especially if you lack communication skills. This affects our economy as the Canadian dollar flows up and down.
- There is no adult basic education - no evening courses or training.
- There is no DSL in rural areas, which means we lose the opportunity to work at home.
- Richford has a beautiful image to visitors and travelers, but the locals and other Franklin County and Vermont residents have a different image of us.
- Full time pastors are waning in the region.
- Business survival is being affected by our demographics and income level.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Richford could build a community garden like Enosburg, Swanton, and St. Albans.
- We need to find a grand investor to put a major enterprise here to train and employ people.
- The space at the school could be used for evening college courses and training for adults.
- Access to high-speed Internet hookup is available in the village and near-village areas. This provides many opportunities.
- We need to find out how to break the cycle. How do we move children beyond parental limits?
- Change the system so that people can keep daycare subsidies for a while after they get a job. A transition time is needed to allow people to get on their feet. Daycare also needs to be affordable, so we should help to pay daycare costs by correcting the income eligibility guidelines (they are based on 1998-99 levels).
- The Health Center summer camp should be expanded. (The Health Center provides admin and staffing; town provides funding; school provides funding or programming/resources). Funding sources bow out when programs become successful, but the support needs to continue when a program is successful.

- We should improve law enforcement. Some things shouldn't be allowed to go on like drug abuse, physical abuse, criminal activity, selling drugs, and highway issues such as squealing tires, bicycles and snowmobiles on sidewalks. Local law enforcement is a big challenge.
- We need respectable, low-income housing (\$450 per month) that is built to withstand the wear and tear of the unemployable population, including people with a poor credit history and criminal backgrounds that can't live in Lake Champlain Housing, Housing Vermont, and Habitat for Humanity houses. We also need to balance having low-income people live here with providing enough housing to encourage more people to move here.
- Support needs to be provided for single parents and young parents.
- A family recreational night in the school gym could be offered with physical activity that provides bonding time for families.
- It would be helpful to provide renter education and budgeting (combined with a recreational activity), specifically addressing the skills needed to be a better tenant and manage existing income better. The Health Center could offer space.
- We could provide mental health services, although we need to find a way to encourage people to attend. There is a stigma placed on asking for help in this area.
- People need follow up services after they transition, especially when things don't work out. If people transition and then get into trouble, they don't have anyone to help them address the problem.
- We could reinstate the past program held at the plaza (effective, but funding fell through). It was focused on supporting the family, including parenting education, adult education, and child care in same building. Childcare was the key because mothers were not comfortable leaving their children while participating in the education programs. Providing wrap-around services is critical and in some cases, they may need to be mandated.
- After June, the Health Center will house the VT Department of Employment and Training and other wrap-around services. Can we capitalizing on these services by adding child care?
- Richford needs more housing that is attractive to higher income levels.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- There is a need for decent, safe and affordable housing with services wrapped around it and a need for housing rehabilitation and weatherization services, especially for the elderly population. Is there a senior center? Are there community service organizations such as churches or rotary? What public transportation is available? Assets for housing and economic development are available to assist the community.
- Has Richford explored the Even Start Program (Federal Early Childhood/NWSVU/Family Center program) since childcare is a significant concern? Is the issue eligibility for support or the quantity of childcare? (Community members responded that there is enough childcare available, but people cannot afford it. There is also a lot of "underground child care", but the quality of that care is an issue.) The community might be able to access available pre-K programs.
- Housing is a significant issue as are jobs, especially having to travel to jobs. A challenge is the dichotomy of providing support while not intervening too much into families. If there is a need for more interventions or support, DCF would be willing to discuss it.
- Explore the opportunity for more organized, regular public transit than a once a day run.
- To provide services without being too intrusive means looking at the situation more holistically, such as what caused the family to need food stamps and how can we help address this situation. Eligibility requirements were mentioned frequently with a theme of needing

sliding economic support rather than drop dead for benefits when someone gets a job. The community kept mentioning diminishing the level of State support as people move up the income scale. The need to address mental health and substance abuse was mentioned, but there was no discussion of working with tomorrow's community leaders for prevention in addition to intervention. How do you address the complexity of breaking the cycle with finite resources? Housing with wrap-around support could be teamed with requirements to participate in certain kinds of activities.

- Three of the five issues from 1996 are still issues (police enforcement, jobs, image issues). How would you attract businesses here to create the jobs needed? Please think about the issues you haven't solved yet as a focus for the future.
- I didn't hear the anger and frustration that I expected about the State shoving "these people at our town." Is there deep community support for doing projects or is there an us-versus-them attitude?
- Richford has lots of assets – a downtown with opportunities for development, border town traffic and visitors. These are economic development opportunities waiting to come to fruition. Family support topics were often expressed as an "us-versus-them" issue, with a list of difficulties but few ideas for solving them. Yet, there was a willingness to make it work.

II. Community Recreation and Activities

Assets and Challenges

- There are basketball and tennis courts and the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail.
- Richford 2010 listed five objectives, and two have been started. It's slow, but it's happening!
- The library is an asset.
- Richford has many existing parks.
- Teen dances are held in the Town Hall. They are well attended and have a DJ.
- Teen dances are well attended, but the general community may only hear about the dances the next day. Could attendance be higher with more or different notification? Communication is an issue.
- There is a lot happening now, but there is no central place to communicate things. The newspaper is not enough.
- Raising money is a challenge for both activities that are considered "extras" and for normal government operations.
- We need a skateboard park and youth activities. The closest skate park facility is in Burlington, which is too far to drive. Right now, skateboarders use the high school.
- Richford doesn't have a real community center. The teen center acted as one for a while. There is no senior center although there has been some discussion.
- More outdoor recreation is needed, including a skatepark. There is a river but no canoe access to get to it. We have lots of bicyclists and a rail trail, but no one is stopping here except for convenience items because there is no infrastructure to support bicycle tourism.
- Richford's parks and school playground are outdated. There are parks, but they don't serve those between ages 12-17. Activities to provide include basketball, tennis, racquetball, a skatepark, and a pool.
- The teen center location offered access to Main Street, which created problems that were then blamed on the teen center. Do we need a teen center in the middle of nowhere to trap youth on site so they don't venture out to make trouble?

- There were few adult volunteers to help out. A teen center needs people that care about kids. We always have volunteers to start projects and activities, but we can't maintain the work because volunteers trickle away.
- It is difficult getting more adults interested in volunteering and fund raising to help kids because people work outside the town.
- Community leadership is becoming difficult to find. People are wearing a lot of hats in addition to working regular jobs, and it's hard for them to make additional volunteer commitments.
- There are few opportunities for the 20-30 year old younger adults, like movies. If a new teacher from this age group is hired, what do they do for social activities?
- The last VCRD visit helped us identify problems, but bringing the necessary programs to fruition (follow through and implementation) is difficult. We need assistance in this area.
- There is a lack of continuity. The traditional volunteer pool, including stay at home moms, has dried up. People's time is wrapped up in day-to-day living, so ideas generate interest then diminish over time during implementation. There is a need to clearly identify the goal and to find workers to go after it.
- We may have tapped our volunteers to death. Richford needs a paid person to see projects to completion.
- There is no communication network beyond character assassination and the rumor mill.
- The rules keep changing for bicyclists. They can't ride on the sidewalks one month and must ride on sidewalks the next month.
- One participant asserted that Canadian cyclists don't follow the rules of the road.
- The Lions used to have a tow rope/ski hill for folks to learn on, but the skiers all graduated to the Jay Peak slope.
- Children want something to have fun, where they don't have to travel, that they can do every day, and without getting yelled at.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- A multigenerational center could be developed to blend the need for a teen center, senior center, and community center.
- Can vacant buildings become community or activity centers with use by seniors during the day and teens at night?
- A town recreation development head could help residents to think long-term.
- A directorial board/committee/council could address issues such as physical buildings, operational controls, and planning into the future.
- The town website could be updated to improve communication, and there could be an information kiosk.
- Kids could do fundraisers like a lemonade stand, bottle drives, and dances if they had help from older people a couple times a month.
- To develop new leaders and stretch your own time, personally lobby people you know who don't participate and ask them to help.
- The school community service requirement could be tapped to do community projects (garbage pickup, painting, maintenance of recreation facilities, etc.). Highgate requires road cleanup (Green Up Day) and community service.
- Programs could be run through the library for children and adults, although space is limited and it is difficult to find funding. The library is about to start a movie night (kids on Friday nights and Saturday afternoon).

- Movie night in the park last year went really well with lots of volunteers; parents came with children. There were some complaints of too much noise, but we need to do it again and consistently.
- Conduct a school survey to learn what things young people would like to do and tell the kids what's going on through announcements
- There are lots of great things already going on and we need to make the rumor mill work for positive events and activities. Can we have a town crier or can notes go home from school that announces events?
- There is a projector room, but no projector.
- Could the back streets of Richford be used to hold a day of skating as a temporary place until a full facility is built? Maybe we start a small skateboard park with a few pieces of equipment, and then build on it.
- A once-a-month bus to the Burlington skateboard park, the movie theater, or to other facilities could be organized.
- There could be a mixed-use skateboard park with a bicycle park at the same facility. This could be sited at the old skating rink or Quonset hut. Signs could be put up to inform users of bicycle laws and skateboarding rules.
- The teen center and scouting have fallen away and need to be started again. A skateboard park is a small part of a larger need for youth activities.
- A multigenerational center would be ideal, especially for mentorships. It will help tie the town together if there is proper scheduling and building layout. The facility must be central and within walking distance.
- We need to maximize outdoor resources within the community – the river, our closeness to Jay Peak, the rail trail, golfing, VAST trails, woods for hiking, and the Long Trail.
- We could bring the Circus back to town.
- Richford could do a project similar to Putney where an outdoor group did a junior year project involving building a sled and traversing the length of Vermont.
- We could reenact an event on the Northern Forest Canoe Trail route from Maine to New York.
- There are some existing events that could last longer or be capitalized on. Some activities that bring the whole community out are Hometown Harvest fest, Town Follies, Memorial Day parade, and Fourth of July.
- In winter, February snowmobile racing was a good opportunity for family gathering. We need a sledding area that is appropriate for children.
- A recreation committee could be created, instead of hiring recreation director.
- A fairground or outdoor area could provide a space for hosting events.
- Think about how to pass the torch of volunteerism between generations of parents and the torch of participating in community events between generations.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- It is important to look broadly at community access. Multigenerational is important, including opportunities to mentor, which ties into engaging young people to help them understand the value of participating in the community.
- What small things can Richford do to maximize the nature around it, even if it's not a Cadillac version?

- Richford has tremendous resources that are low hanging fruit. Outdoor recreation opportunities like downhill and cross country skiing, snowmobile trails, and the bicycle trail, are ideal for development and not expensive.
- Richford feels like a much larger town that it really is. Buildings are really attractive and exciting for a town of 2,000. The border crossing offers opportunity. These pieces are a base for creating recreation for the community and for visitors.
- Richford is a destination for outdoor recreation. Getting cyclists to stop is important.
- The multigenerational center sounds good, and USDA Rural Development could help with it. USDA can do much for recreation if it's essential to Richford's economic development.
- People tend not to visit the places nearest to them, and Richford has great resources. An organized approach to connecting the nearby places and opportunities available for children and adults may be needed.
- The lack of volunteers is a nationwide issue; Richford is not alone. It's always critical to think long term. Volunteers have a life cycle, and you need to start replacing them before they burn out.
- Creating a recreation committee and the need for centralized communication were mentioned frequently.
- Think about creating a virtual community center by posting information at locations around town and putting announcements on a website.
- Everything you've mentioned today has been done somewhere else in Vermont. Can individual community groups adopt one idea for implementation and long-term ownership? Richford has achievable ideas, and resources are available to help.

III. Housing

Assets and Challenges

- Richford has some wonderful architecture, including beautiful Victorian homes.
- Homes outside of the village have lots of acreage.
- The town's historical significance is an asset.
- Single-family homes have been converted to multi family units, which have created problem areas.
- There are too many low-cost housing units that are substandard. These landlords charge low rates for welfare clients, and the landlord barely meets State and Town code requirements. This is ruining the town because it attracts public welfare people and traps them here because there is no transportation or jobs.
- Properties are not well maintained.
- A large segment of the population is not contributing to the tax base.
- It is hard to finance elderly-owned condos in Richford.
- There is a misconception about what is being charged for rent for substandard housing. It's not monitored. The state type is monitored by an agency. The private type isn't as well maintained. The landlord gets a profit, and the tenant doesn't pay rent (Section 8).
- There is a misconception about who is renting these very low rent places. Not all people in them are receiving public assistance. Some people work minimum wage jobs and can't afford better housing. How do we support the minimum wage folks?
- There is a difference between the Lake Champlain Housing (LCH) units and privately owned apartments. The rent is less expensive, and the units are safer and better maintained in LCH

housing. However, the minimum wage folks aren't eligible for LCH housing because they make too much money or their credit history is bad.

- There is no safety net for folks who can't even afford the substandard housing. They are not mismanaging their money; they literally do not have enough income.
- How do you hold accountable those landlords who capitalize and become wealthy on substandard housing while the people they are renting to sink further into debt?
- The taxpayers are supporting people who are ruining our quality of life.
- State law requires subsidized housing to be appraised at income values rather than condition values. Appraisals are also based on the value of land, condition, and comparison to like properties.
- The income approach to appraisals is not always supported at the State appeals level.
- Why is it so hard to get housing laws passed? Or is the problem enforcement of existing laws?
- A prohibiting factor for developing higher income housing is the image of the town.
- The number of vacant single-family homes is a problem, and the vacant ones are not always for sale. They are being allowed to deteriorate. This is a waste of housing stock, and it becomes difficult for anyone to buy these houses because they need work to bring them up to code.
- Capital is needed to bring single-family homes to code.
- Elderly often live in a home alone and can't afford to maintain it.
- Mobile homes present an issue. This type of housing needs monitoring and managing.
- Even in Richford housing is becoming too expensive for first time, young homeowners, but it is still more affordable than most of Vermont. Many young homeowners end up in mobile homes.
- Capital is a barrier to bringing housing back to use. An affordable mortgage means the house needs work. Having enough cash and time to do the work puts a drain on someone's energy, time, and available money.
- We need more home-based jobs to keep the income here and the houses up to standard. It is not sustainable to keep driving to Burlington for work.
- People have a romantic view of the wages that were paid by the furniture factory. These workers did not live in Victorian homes, although they did own and maintain their homes.
- Richford has lots of folks who don't want to work.
- How do you fix greed?
- The decent paying jobs are outside the community, and we can't get around this fact.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- There should be a different type of appraisal so there is no incentive to keep housing in bad condition; if owners are taxed properly, they will make the improvements.
- To deal with landlords who have substandard housing, the listers could assess the rental properties to their highest use rather than using the existing condition of the building.
- I would like to see stronger application of Section 8 inspection of houses, and of every building to which a subsidy is applied.
- An incentive could be provided to landlords for improving the value of properties.
- Can we make landlords and homeowner accountable through fines, enforcement, or zoning? The town could clean up a building and bill the building owner for that cost?
- We need new leadership on zoning laws. If zoning laws aren't effective, we should change them.

- We need law enforcement. How do we make that happen?
- Richford needs a town manager, a paid position and a person trained to manage that type of activity.
- There should be stronger housing and health codes and enforcement of them. We could start by reviewing our existing codes and ensure they are enforced.
- The fire marshal needs to continue to accompany inspectors because it helps with enforcement.
- Being able to hold landlord accountable is the most important thing for improving housing stock. Some landlords take advantage and milk the system, and the community doesn't hold them accountable. This issue really pertains to a few landlords, but the town is so small that their properties affect the whole town.
- Home sharing for the elderly could be a solution.
- Some affordable homes are available if owners are willing to put in the sweat equity and time.
- Victorian homes may need to be owned by middle to high-income folks for restoration to occur because they may be the only ones who can afford to maintain them.
- A 14-person van may be operating this summer through a partnership of the human services and labor department. The Bridges Out Of Poverty program provides GED help and a training program, with free bus transport for 3 months. If the participating person gets a job, they have 3 additional months of transportation.
- The Family Center has a trainer who can do a 6-hour training for the Bridges Out Of Poverty program in Richford.
- Owning a car is expensive. Having transportation alternatives or transportation cost support would be helpful.
- Richford could foster cooperative rentals where a cooperative of people build, manage, and maintain units.
- We don't have a poverty problem; we have a problem of generosity. If we were as generous with our wallets and our hearts equal to the problems before us, the problems would go away.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Housing is both the cause and symptom of problems. Is Richford different? Yes and no. Demographics are the same in Richford and Winooski, and both struggle with the same challenges. Some communities institute a rental registry ordinance with inspections. Other communities take out advertisements in the hometowns of deficient landlords to shame them into upgrading houses.
- There is lots of energy around the housing issue. This focus group discussion moved from people as the problem to the system that created a collection of unhealthy circumstances in the community. The energy here will solve the problem because a desire exists. Other communities have models for solving the same challenge. The Bridges program sounds wonderful.
- Substandard housing is a challenge. Is there too much housing? Do you want to be a bedroom community? Do you want to have a vital downtown that supports itself? You need to be clear about what you want to be.
- The group began with conflicting definitions of affordable housing and who might be responsible for it, and it evolved into a discussion of the system that helps create and support the problem. One issue is governance problems that support this system. I haven't heard a compelling vision for the community that is inclusive. Is it a vibrant downtown, economic

development, bedroom community, some combination of these? The community needs to come to terms with a vision.

- Richford's problems are common, and the solutions are common. I heard discussion about the length of time it takes to see change, but change does happen. When you need to see an example, look at the Sweat Cummings property. Housing isn't an issue in and of itself. It is how housing and economic conditions feed off of one another. They will mutually improve together as you work on them. Set specific goals for action so that resources can be targeted to the solutions and steps you need to take.
- The housing problems are ones that you can fix. They aren't overwhelming because they are limited to a few landlords. You need a solid vision to know where you want to go. Richford feels like a much larger town than it is. Think like a bigger town in order to coordinate housing, recreation, and other community issues.

Resource Team C

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Alex Aldrich, Executive Director, VT Arts Council

Marie Houghton, Community Relations Manager, IBM

Andy Pallito, Deputy Commissioner, VT Department of Corrections

Tricia Coates, State Director, Congressman Welch's Office

Ted Brady, Field Representative, Senator Leahy's Office

William Sweeny, Senior Trooper, VT State Police

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

Greta Brunswick, NWRPC (scribe)

I. Education

Assets and Challenges

- The schools have good teachers that are devoted to and take extra time for students.
- Some benefits of a small school are that students are not numbers, but are individuals; there is a sense of belonging; it is not easy to get lost; and most students get to play a sport because no one gets cut from teams.
- There are quite a few clubs. There is a nice after school program (mostly elementary and middle school). There is a successful Scholars Bowl program for elementary students; they won the first round of play offs. At finals in late March, one student placed 4th and another placed 5th, and Richford was the only small school there.
- There has always been a depth of commitment to the school system. The town has pride in what they have accomplished, especially around the renovation of the school. Spirits went up as buildings were redeveloped.
- The Cold Hollow Career Center in Enosburg Falls provides vocational education. They use space at the Library and at the Health Center.
- Adult education programs focus on basic literacy and GED. One woman recently participated in the bridge to college program – she needed some additional reading and writing skills.
- There is a great reading program at the elementary school. There is a recent surge in parents coming to the library with their kids.
- There is a reading program, which requires parents to read with their children at night and complete discussion questions. This program resulted in an initial increase in test scores, but they have since leveled off.
- Some kids that attend Richford High School would rather be somewhere else, but a lot feel great there and safe.
- The school budget is rarely turned down.
- Parent involvement in school is high if they are invited in. The elementary school recently held an open house and there was a huge turn out of parents. At the high school, parental involvement is focused around sports.
- Both sports and academics are celebrated at the high school, especially with the new principle. There is a good movement toward equal attention to these two areas.

- Other opportunities for kids include a teen center and a five-week summer camp program.
- The Cold Hollow Career Center only comes to Richford one day a week for 4 hours. When the Cold Hollow Career Center comes to Richford, students come in and leave as they want, but only 8 people can fit into the health center.
- The reading program does not provide enough individualized instruction. Sometimes programs don't fit individual learning styles and there is a need for alternatives. A one-size fits all approach does not work.
- There are not enough alternatives available for getting a high school diploma.
- It is a challenge to draw tuition students to Richford. There is a need to sell the school, invite people in.
- The town voted down an art program once, which made us realize that budget items have a better chance of passing if they are part of the main budget, not stand alone items.
- The elementary school currently lacks an art program; the high school has an art program.
- Some people think that there is a drug problem at the school and that law enforcement is needed, but one student participant has never noticed a drug problem in the school. People from other communities trash talk Richford and need to know that there is not a drug problem at the school.
- Another participant asserted that there is a drug and alcohol problem with both adults and kids in this town. There are kids that do drugs; it is visible on the street.
- Drugs are a major issue for adults and for kids, but this is a problem in every town. Instead of trying to focus on stopping a drug problem, residents should focus on other positive things that kids can do.
- The Canadian border makes a difference in terms of the drug problem. Drugs, especially marijuana, come over the border from Canada.
- Richford has made progress in the last few years with consistent leadership. High turnover in the school administration has affected quality. The new principle has improved quality, and there is hope that quality educators and administrators will stay.
- There is no continuity with programs in elementary school and in the high school. Writing is not a strong program at the high school, while it is at the elementary school. There needs to be collaboration between the two schools.
- Early childhood programs are shared among 3 supervisory unions. There are pre-schools in all towns, but spaces fill up. There is not universal access to preschool.
- There was a PTA, but it is no longer active. A PTA could do great things.
- There is a tech support specialist and a district tech specialist. Size is a disadvantage in some ways because only so many staff can specialize in technology.
- Current technical education programs are only open to juniors and seniors and have high academic standards; many kids that would benefit are not eligible.
- The school needs distance-learning opportunities. The school has the equipment, but cannot afford the annual subscription fee of \$3,000.
- Kids ride their bikes in the street in a dangerous manner.
- The town needs a curfew for kids at night to help alleviate crime.
- There is a need to expand technical education opportunities to include programs on diversified agriculture and creating value added products. This would help attract young people to farming.
- Public transportation is limited and many needed services are located in St. Albans or Burlington.
- Poverty is an issue at the schools, there are the haves and the have-nots.

- People drive down Main Street and see poverty, but beyond Main Street there are beautiful houses and history.
- Richford students look down on their school and trash talk it.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- It is important to create a green belt around the town to incorporate agriculture and the working landscape as a tourist attraction.
- Canada does provide some opportunities for students, such as taking field trips to the Biodome and other things. If passports are required, it may make such trips impossible.
- Put more emphasis on preschool education. The public library should participate. There is a story hour every week, but parents work. Head start is full. We could be doing some things at the local level with the library and with Success by Six.
- Poverty is a root issue; we need to break the cycle.
- There have been discussions on buying run down residential properties and redeveloping them for more appropriate use.
- There are opportunities for the school to collaborate more with other groups that work on poverty issues such as the Health center and BURMA.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- There is a theme of communication issues. For example, there are gaps between the elementary and high school curriculum.
- Rural transit is lacking.
- There seems to be disconnect with Richford and Enosburg Falls; there are possibilities for an arts connection.
- There is an issue with providing adequate preschool opportunities
- Everything comes down to leadership. Richford has a new principle that is providing good leadership. Maybe new leadership will help fill in the blanks.
- The town could enhance community involvement, including parent involvement in the schools.
- There are opportunities for integrating art into the culture and economy. You should find out how many artists live around here. What types of buildings are important on Main Street so as not to lose the core fabric? I would be excited if I lived here.
- There is a sense of pride about the school and programs and I heard a sense of hope. The school plays a large role in Richford's identity.
- Having been a teacher, the most important ingredient for success is involvement with family. The Town could actively reach out to parents. No amount of resources can overcome lack of family involvement.
- It strikes me that you are not new to this process as you were part of the first community visit. You are able to look at how your community changed over time.
- The community has been dedicated to education. The scale is of a size that teachers can wrap around the students, it is a treasure.
- Parents seem to be involved, but not systematically. Fairfield has built a vocational program with parents who come in to talk.
- Poverty is an issue in the schools. A lot of strengths and challenges in the school have to do with the economy. The best thing for the school is to provide opportunities for families to get out of poverty.

II. Canadian Border Opportunities

Assets and Challenges

- People pass through Richford, either coming from Canada or going into Canada.
- There is potential for business, but I don't know if we take advantage of it.
- Some businesses in town do take advantage of Canadians, such as gas stations and Kaytec.
- Canadians come here because prices are lower.
- The border patrol is a great asset because we essentially have no police protection. The border patrol also provides good federal jobs.
- Canadians buy second homes here. They also use some recreational amenities; Canadians use the golf course frequently.
- Canadians come here to work; some of our doctors and dentists are Canadian.
- Tourists come through town to go to ski resorts in Vermont and Canada.
- Canadians go on bicycle tours through the region and pass through town. They would stop if there were more opportunities, such as restaurants and services.
- Richford School sports teams compete against schools in Canada.
- Richford lost a lot of medical facilities and business when Canada went to socialized medicine.
- After 911, it is more difficult to cross the border. This increased security is both a challenge and a plus, because of the potential for terrorism.
- The town has reciprocal agreements with Canadian municipalities for emergency response.
- The Green Mountain and Covered Bridge Garden Club both have Canadian members.
- Canadians use the Richford library because there is a better English section.
- Many Canadians rent post office boxes in Richford because they are less expensive and mail delivery is quicker.
- One business in town acts as a drop off and pick up point for Fed Ex and UPS.
- Canoers and kayakers draw some traffic through town, but not a lot.
- There is illegal trafficking of drugs and humans across the border.
- The border impacts the availability of drugs, especially marijuana. Drugs come across at unofficial ports of entry.
- The border provides direct contact with organized crime. People that are controlling contraband in Canada are part of organized crime and it travels across the border here in Richford.
- One resident stated that distribution of drugs does not happen in Richford, but the impact is here.
- Richford is isolated; dead center between two interstates and snuggled up against the border.
- A participant noted that there were 21 stores in Richford at one time, and Canada was very quiet. Now it is the opposite. Right across the border, there are small communities that still seem to be able to support little shops.
- As a border town, Richford is in competition with subsidized industries in Canada.
- Richford's gateways are not inviting.

- Act 250 scares Canadian businesses from coming.
- High taxes cause second homeowners to sell property.
- Specifically at the golf club, there is tension between the Canadians and the Americans. Canadians can be haughty and cold to the locals.
- Canadians pass right through Richford on the way to Burlington; they don't stop in Richford because there is nothing here.
- People do not stop here because it looks like a combat zone. You see children pushing their babies on the street at two in the morning. People just want to get out as soon as possible.
- Elderly folks that have lived here all their life are scared to walk downtown at night. Gangs of kids force them out of the way when passing on foot. This affects people wanting to stop in Richford.
- The Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail is not good for road bikes and there are a lot of road biking Canadians. Furthermore, there is some hostility between locals and road bikers.
- There is a lack of quality hotel/motel/bed and breakfast establishments in town. There is only one I would recommend.
- The image of Richford is not good. If Canadians move to Vermont, they will not live in Richford.
- It is tough to find a place to rent in Richford; rental properties are poor in quality
- There are two Richfords – there is the village and there is the town. The town does not have the same run down appearance.
- There is a lack of parking for both locals and visitors.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- There is an opportunity to connect recreations trails, biking/walking/running trails, VAST trails, and ATV trails.
- A blanket Act 250 permit would decrease the burden of the permitting process.
- The town could pursue growth center designation.
- Widening and improving Route 105 or adding another exit to I89 onto 105 could improve access to Richford.
- We need to build a friendly village that bikers want to stop in.
- The town owns land right along river that could be developed (approximately 8 acres).
- Richford could be marketed for its proximity to Quebec and Montreal.
- The town might need bi-lingual signs to attract French-speaking travelers.
- To improve Richford's image, the town could increase police protection, improve leadership from city hall; and enforce zoning standards, particularly for junk. Zoning regulations may not be enforced because the job is part time with inadequate pay.
- The town may need additional staff, such as a Town Manager. The benefits of a town manager would more than offset his/her salary.
- There used to be a neighborhood watch program, but it does not exist anymore. Neighborhood watches cannot actually do anything about the crime.
- Richford needs a grocery store and one is planned for the Sweat Comings building.
- The railroad could be an opportunity, using Island Pond as an example. We could be an off loading point, maybe for a customs brokerage company.
- Many beautiful buildings are vacant.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- There is a will in the community to clean things up. All the law enforcement in the world will not solve the whole problem. Provide incentives for cleaning things up.
- I think you have one leg up on the rest of Vermont because of the Canadian border. People in the State are trying to lead this effort – Connie Stanley Little started up a trade corridor.
- It seems that you are not taking advantage of the border. The things that are happening are just by chance.
- There is a rising tide in town right now with the Sweat Comings project. Other towns wish for that type of development.
- Border towns are in for a shock when the government tightens up border security.
- Other people see things differently than those who live here every day. How do the Canadians who own second homes here see Richford?
- There is opportunity for participation in the Lake Champlain Centennial Ceremony as part of the Lake Champlain Basin.
- A relationship with Jay Peak could be developed.
- There is tremendous opportunity for recreation. Richford could be a destination; people could come here specifically for recreation.
- Today I noticed a lot of truck traffic and I was thinking of the rail idea and the potential to mitigate truck traffic.

III. Law Enforcement

Assets and Challenges

- Drugs are a big problem in town; you can see it in the streets, everything from pot to cocaine to heroin.
- The drug issue is very important. A participant who drives a school bus knew marijuana was being used in front of the school. It was reported and nothing was done. “It is a lawless community.”
- It is important that examples are set. People have an attitude that they can get away with anything. A resident stated that people are going into a certain house for 5 or 7 minutes and then coming out.
- There are two drug dealers on our street. It is a problem when I hear car doors slamming all night and I work long hours. I never see troopers patrolling our streets.
- There is a problem with four wheelers going up and down the streets in the village at high speeds.
- Kids ride their bikes on the street, weaving in and out of traffic playing chicken with the cars. There is no one to tell them to stop. Parents do not stop it. If community members tried to apprehend them, it would cause neighborhood struggles. When people do step in, they are sworn at and the kids know that there are no consequences.
- I drive 4 wheelers, even in town, but I drive respectfully. The problem with 4 wheelers is when young kids don't have family members to teach them how to respect other people's property.

- Currently the town contracts with the Sheriff for 7 days a week on 8-hour shifts, but a ½-hour each day is taken off the shift for travel to the town. The state police come when there are added problems. Border patrol is around a lot of the time, and they help.
- There is a problem with re-offending criminals.
- Everybody from Richford knows there is a need for law enforcement, but when it comes to a vote, it is turned down because no one can afford to pay higher taxes.
- It is not a lack of laws, but a lack of enforcement.
- I recently called the sheriff due to a fight and he showed up 3 hours later.
- Police presence on the street makes a difference.
- The town considered a police force with Montgomery and Enosburg 3 years ago, which was voted down in Montgomery and Enosburg. Richford never voted on it. There was concern that it would be too big of an area to cover.
- The drug problem is not only an issue in Richford; it is an issue all over.
- The number one reason for the drug problem in Richford is that we sit right on the border. It comes from all directions.
- Another participant believes the biggest issue causing the drug problem is parents who do not work and bring their kids up around drugs.
- The courts are not tough enough on drugs; nothing ever happens to users.
- I think the drug problem is the result of a social issue. Drugs seem to be an acceptable and ok thing around many people. It is a generational issue.
- Many 30 year olds on the street mix in with the younger kids and are a bad influence.
- Alcohol is also a problem. Kids pay adults to buy alcohol.
- Richford is not different from Enosburg or St. Albans, except that St. Albans has a police force. I see people dealing drugs and we do not have anyone here to apprehend them.
- Richford is considered one of the poorest communities in Vermont; are there funding sources for communities that cannot afford law enforcement?
- There are crimes that are more serious in Richford as well, such as a murder a few years ago.
- Elderly people are afraid to walk downtown. They are pushed off the sidewalks.
- There is theft in town. Tools were stolen from South Richford Rd., and there was a break in a few weeks ago.
- I think there is an atmosphere of toleration. There is this atmosphere of no enforcement. Someone shot six bee bee gunshots into our house the other night and we have nowhere to report it. It is distressing to know that this person can ride around and not have any consequences. It has made me feel unsafe in my home.
- We need someone close to the community to enforce the law, but who can stand outside and say yes, there has to be consequences.
- It is not the border patrol's job to break up fights and do the general patrolling and prevention that is going on right now.
- The Sheriff thinks that there is adequate law enforcement during the time of coverage with only one officer on patrol.
- There are some prevention programs: Programs such as SAP work on drug and alcohol issues at the high school. There used to be a DARE program at the elementary school for 4th and 5th grade. There is an after school program for grades 4 through 9. There was a teen center for a while; it recently started up again on weekends. There is a summer program for kids run by the Health Center that provides lunch.
- Another participant does not believe programs like SAP and DARE work when drug dealers are waiting at the door.

- It is difficult to get people to show up at meetings concerning law enforcement. People do not participate and then will not vote for more enforcement because it will raise their taxes.
- There is abuse of the welfare system, which creates negative tensions.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- A small town in Maine doubled their Sheriff coverage and it worked, but they had to pay for it. However, their tax bill is now the same as it was in 1986 because increased law enforcement created an environment for growth (business and residential).
- The town could hire an outside auditor to review the town and school budget looking for areas to cut costs in order to use the extra funds for law enforcement.
- Getting rid of the people on welfare and bringing in others who could vote could solve the problem.
- The town has tried a neighborhood watch, without a lot of success.
- Town meetings are divided. The Select board is over there and the other town people over here. In the last couple of months, I have seen a great improvement on opening the government to town people.
- The town needs to commit to what they want.
- We need to take another look at the money in this town. The participant believes there has been a lot of misuse of funds.
- I have heard people say that they do not want law enforcement. They do not want people telling them what to do.
- It is important to treat everyone with respect from all different social strata of the community. The town needs to come together to feel united.
- What can the state do to help provide law enforcement? The state is grappling with the issue.
- Are there grants available? The Community Visit process will identify such opportunities.
- Is it possible for a town to have a curfew?

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Richford is a unique place. It is on the border and has one of the highest poverty rates in the state. Richford is diverse; the community is comprised of every segment of society.
- When we talk about law enforcement we are not just talking about breaking the law, we are talking about kids. It is a police force issue and a community issue.
- There is hostility about what police are doing.
- Do not give up on these kids. Despite having to go home to terrible situations, it just takes one good connection.
- There seems to be a lack of leadership. I encourage you to lead.
- Law enforcement is a tough problem and there is not an easy fix. I am the only trooper you are going to see most of the time and I am spread pretty thin. I do the best I can and am willing to take constructive criticism.
- The community should look in the rear view mirror. Richford was the first community and has made progress in other areas.

- I keep feeling a sense of powerlessness. I would hope that is not the case. I think that there has to be a way to solve this problem. You have come together to work on other issues.
- There is a “frontier mentality”; a citizenry intimidated.
- This is, to some extent, a problem of numbers. I think there is some hope in the limited the number of people causing this problem.
- People often feel powerless because they are not united. The town has to be ready to work with other people and be partners. The town needs to build unity.
- This is not a problem unique to Richford. Each individual needs to step up and lead.

Richford Community Visit Participants

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*Cover photography by
Fred Schmidt*

*Printing by Minuteman Press
Montpelier, Vermont*