

1999-2000 Bradford Community Visit

Executive Summary

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD), one of 36 State Rural Development Councils nationwide, was established in 1992 with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Governor's Office. VCRD is structured as a nonprofit corporation with a broadly based board of 20 Directors representing five partner groups (federal, state, local, private, and non-profit). In 1996 VCRD learned about a community development tool called a "Community Visit." This model provides a way to listen to rural communities and gain understandings of rural community issues at the ground level. A Community Visit brings together a broad mix of community people, and a "Resource Team" made up of VCRD Directors and state and federal leaders. The Community Visit allows important issues and challenges to surface informally, from a local perspective. The Community Visit model has been used extensively by the State Rural Development Councils in New Hampshire and Texas. Over the past three years, VCRD has used the Community Visit in four other Vermont communities (Richford, Rockingham, Middletown Springs, and Brandon) and the results have been very positive and productive.

The Town of Bradford was chosen because VCRD wanted to work in an upper valley community, and Bradford had a strong network of community level associations, and an extremely cooperative Selectboard and Village Trustees. The Selectboard and Village Trustees held a joint meeting last summer, and it was decided that a Community Visit might be beneficial to help Bradford chart its future and gain perspectives from residents within the community, who normally are not heard. The Community Visit process was coordinated, and the focus groups were selected by a Steering Committee that was appointed by the Selectboard and Trustees. There were four main stages to the Bradford Community Visit:

1. On the morning of December 1, 1999, the VCRD Resource Team met at the Bradford Fire Station and split into three separate teams. During the day, each team attended three different **focus groups** where a broad mix of over 75 community people discussed an array of topics from business and agriculture, to municipal services and health care. That evening, the Bradford Selectboard and VCRD co-sponsored a community dinner at the Bradford Fire Station. The day was sunny, cold and very productive.
2. Next, VCRD condensed the Resources Team's notes from the various focus groups, and created **a list of common issues and challenges**. The list reflected the major issues and challenges, as identified by the community people who attended the focus groups.
3. The next step was to call a **public meeting** on January 12, 2000 (in Town Meeting style), so that a broadly-based group of Bradford citizens could

- prioritize the list of major issues and challenges. Over 50 people attended this public meeting and the list, of 16 major issues, was whittled down using a modified group voting process. First the list was reduced to ten major issues; then the group agreed on the **top five priority issues**. After the voting was complete, people were asked to sign-up for committees that would deal with each specific issue.
4. The prioritized list of issues and challenges was then distributed to VCRD's Resource Team to solicit their input, recommendations, ideas for funding sources, and specific contact people. These recommendations are included in Section 2 of this **Community Visit Final Report**. This report is meant to serve as a working document to help the various issue committees organize their respective strategic work plans and address the issues.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development is very pleased with the Bradford Community Visit process. VCRD is especially appreciative to the Resource Team members for freely sharing their time and creative ideas. Many thanks also go to the community citizens who participated in the various focus groups and at the public meeting. A special thanks goes to the Bradford Selectboard, Village Trustees, and Peter Richards, who served as the Selectboard / Trustee's liaison to the Community Visit process. The Bradford town officials believed in the process from the beginning and supported it throughout, which made all the difference. The Vermont Council on Rural Development wishes the Town of Bradford all the best in its continuing efforts to create a prosperous and sustainable future.

Top Ten Issues

1. **Town / Village Merger Issue** - Continue to explore the need to merge into one community to realize the financial benefits from combining services. Many folks still believe that what happens in the village happens in the town as well. More public information / education is needed if this matter is ever put up for vote again.
2. **Village Revitalization and Image Issue** - Promote Bradford's strengths (geographic location, caring community, historical buildings/architectural assets, good school system, golf course, etc.) to help keep ³bedroom commuters² and citizens from seeking goods and services elsewhere. Develop a strategy to improve physical attractiveness in the Village, capitalize on views and historic structures.
3. **Community Center Issue** - Continue efforts to create a Community Center in Bradford. Explore how a Community Center project could be used for multiple purposes. The Senior Center needs more space for community meals and other activities, and teens and other groups also need access to community space.

4. **Rental Housing Issue** - Improve quality of rental housing especially units that are currently sub-standard, improve landlord / tenant relations and educate tenants about their rights and available housing programs.
 5. **Agricultural Issue** - Need less regulations to reduce burden on small farms. Need to create financial incentives for farmers to keep their land in agricultural uses. Need to improve opportunities for agricultural related courses at the high school level.
 6. **Municipal Water and Sewer Issue** - Explore how these services are being provided and who pays. Explore benefits of sewer line extensions to other areas of town and to the industrial park. What is existing plant capacity, need to plan for future needs.
 7. **Employment/Business Development Issue** - Clean up the pollution concern at the industrial park and recruit businesses to move into the area as well as other locations in Bradford.
 8. **Healthcare Issue** - Need to recruit and retain doctors and dentists on a long-term basis in Bradford.
 9. **Youth Activities Issue** - Need to provide activities for pre-teen children after school and during the summer months.
 10. **Senior Housing Issue** - Need to provide expanded housing opportunities for elderly housing.
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Resource Team List

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