

**JOHNSON COMMUNITY VISIT
REPORT AND ACTION PLAN**

**VERMONT COUNCIL ON RURAL
DEVELOPMENT**

JUNE 2004

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For Further Information:

**Paul Costello
Executive Director
Vermont Council on Rural Development
P.O. Box 1384
Montpelier, Vermont 05601
802-828-6024
vcrd@sover.net
www.sover.net/~vcrd**

Introduction

When the VCRD Visiting Team reviewed the challenges faced by the Johnson community they were impressed by three things.

First off, in all the forum discussions at the Community Visit Day, Visitors saw enviable strengths and assets in the community:

- dedicated volunteers and community members,
- a beautiful “classic Vermont” setting with rivers, mountains, and open land,
- a robust downtown with an interesting variety of businesses and preserved heritage,
- strong Town and Village Government working with energetic and competent citizen committees for planning, youth recreation, education, and downtown development,
- tremendous intellectual, artistic, and human resources brought to the community by the presence of Johnson State College and the Vermont Studio Center.

Together, the unique assets of Johnson make for a terrific set of opportunities, and, correspondingly, a special array of challenges—hurdles to overcome to fully realize these opportunities.

The second major impression of the Team, was the complexity of activities, the stresses on volunteers, municipal government, and committees, and the sheer variety of loosely connected (or uncoordinated) activities all leading to a critical need for better and more systematic means of communication in town. One resident talked of the ‘diverse and separate communities’ consisting of the College, the Studio Center, native-born Vermonters, part-time residents, village and town people, and the active volunteers that move so many projects forward. Others assured the Visiting Team that Johnson is united, but stressed the complexity of communications between groups and throughout the entire community. In the end Johnson voted “Communications and Events Coordination” as one of the most critical challenges ahead, and set up a strong committee to address these issues.

Everyone in the community development field these days talks about “human capital”, the people skills and organizational capacity that the residents of a community have to make things happen. The third aspect of Johnson that really struck the Visiting Team is the unique mix of people and skills in this community and the tremendous talent pool available to support community initiatives. From Duncan Hastings, the municipal administrator, to Dean West, the Chair of the Community Visit process, to the chairs and members of the Selectboard, Trustees, Planning Commission, Main Street Project, PTA, Studio Center, JSC, new Johnson Task Forces, and other community groups, Johnson is truly fortunate in the breadth, skill, and capacity of its leadership.

The Community Visit had three major parts:

1. On the **Community Visit Day** on March 30th, Visiting Team members heard testimony from Johnson residents in nine focus group areas that had earlier been identified by the local steering committee. Notes and issues raised in these sessions are detailed in Part V. Based on the testimony received, the Vermont Council on Rural Development identified an initial list of the Major Challenges before the community (Part II).
2. The second stage of the Community Visit occurred at the Johnson **Community Meeting** on April 27th, when VCRD presented the Major Challenges list and facilitated the review and prioritization of these issues by town residents. The resulting list of **Prioritized Challenges** (in Part I) were then the focus for the formation of five Task Forces established to build plans that would address them.
3. In the third phase of the Visit, the **Community Resource Day** on May 18th, the Task Forces met with a second Visiting Team to get organized, build Action Steps, and consider state, federal, non-profit, and private resources that may be available to support their work. The resulting **Task Force Action Steps** are listed in Part IV.

Resource Team Members (listed in Part VI) signed on with a commitment to serve in an on-going way as sounding boards and referral agents for the Johnson Task Forces. Many of these visitors can be partners in the work before the committees, others can be great sources of advice or connection to other resources; *call on them for help.*

Members of the Resource Team listened closely to the issues brought forward by town residents and have made suggestions in support of Johnson's efforts in each challenge area. Their **Recommendations** (Part III) are not prescriptions; community members are in the best position to make decisions about their next steps and strategies. Recognizing existing local efforts and the leadership of the Task Forces, these recommendations are offered, rather, as suggestions for next steps, and as lists of potential resources as the Task Forces make their way forward.

In the end, Johnson has established solid priorities for action, built something of a new umbrella for coordination between community groups and municipal government, and set momentum toward the achievement of a number of short and long-term goals that will lead to a great variety of successes in improving the Johnson's life and prosperity.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development is dedicated to helping Vermont communities develop their capacity to create a prosperous and sustainable future through coordination, collaboration, and the effective use of public and private resources. VCRD is prepared to support the efforts of Johnson as it moves forward and to provide follow up

help to Johnson Task Forces as called upon. VCRD will also serve as an advocate for Johnson projects with appropriate agencies and organizations in Vermont; call on us, and Visiting Team members, when we can be of help.

VCRD deeply appreciates the time and energy of the Visiting Team and Johnson community members alike. It has been inspiring to be part of the effort of the Johnson community to address the challenges before it. The character and will of Johnson residents give us confidence in their ongoing success.

I. Johnson – Priority Challenges*

Identified by Johnson Community Meeting– April 27, 2004

- ❖ **Economic Development:** Many jobs in the Johnson area are low-paying, Johnson incomes are well below county averages, and there are few opportunities for youth employment. Economic opportunity is crucial for the future health and well-being of the Johnson community, and attracting new employers and nurturing entrepreneurial development should be a top priority. **Telecommunications:** Because the lack of ubiquitous broadband access coupled with poor cell service in Johnson could have a negative impact on economic opportunities in the future, telecom access should be a key agenda of Johnson’s economic development efforts. Pro-active planning and pre-site development might lure better cell service. Demand survey and aggregation toward negotiation with providers could help draw telecom deployment. **Tourist Economy:** Johnson is poised by its location, beauty, and natural resources to benefit more broadly from the regional recreation economy; these opportunities are integrally tied to the community’s economic development efforts. Does Johnson want to be a “destination” in VT? Johnson could systematically plan to welcome visitors to the community by attracting a hotel or B&B, expanding and improving river access for canoeists, completing the Pathways Plan, building a downtown information kiosk, and developing a marketing campaign around its assets and recreational resources.
- ❖ **Communications and Events Coordination:** There is little structure for communications throughout the Johnson community for youth activities and recreation, college and community events, and town/village developments. Communications are sometimes fragmented between the numerous groups in town, and there is no single means of communication that works to unite the entire community. The development of a *common calendar of events* could unify current communications from JSC, the Studio Center, Johnson Elementary School, Lamoille Union HS, Town and Village government, and volunteer committees. Such a calendar could be multimedia, employing the web, a public notice board or kiosk downtown, a newsletter, and the college radio station.
- ❖ **Housing:** There is a lack of adequate single, multi-family, and elder housing in town. The loss of single-family homes in the village to meet student housing needs and the expansion of the Studio Center creates pressures that should be addressed through a common planning process. Are there ways for the Village, JSC, and the Studio Center to plan together?
- ❖ **Zoning:** The lack of zoning and by-laws is a long-term challenge to the character of Johnson and its working forest and natural resources. Its absence may slow downtown investment and undermine the housing market. Village zoning should be effected soon and town zoning be planned. Development pressures from Chittenden County (partly spurred by the circumferential highway) will inevitably and increasingly affect Johnson. The more Johnson plans, the more it can condition its future development.
- ❖ **Implementing the Main Street Plan:** The implementation of the Main Street Plan will mark an historic watershed in the renewal of downtown Johnson and may be the best investment to attract new businesses and jobs to the community. Making the investments

and leveraging the needed resources will require broad public adoption of the Main Street Design and hard decisions around priorities in the design, including decisions on the burial of power lines. Johnson residents should unite to support this crucial step in downtown and community development. **Downtown Parking:** A strategic plan to enhance downtown parking and build a Park and Ride lot in Johnson should be developed and implemented. **Downtown Development:** The community should support and expand the role of Johnson Works and pursue a Village Designation in the Downtown Program to unify marketing and development efforts, build momentum, and set a collaborative framework for the progress of the Village center.

- * Participants decided that each significant community effort should develop a brief vision statement to be conjoined to form a unifying vision for Johnson.

II. Johnson – Challenges & Opportunities Identified by Focus Groups – March 30, 2004

- ❖ **Youth Engagement Leadership:** No established system of community service exists for middle or High School youth. A *Johnson Youth Summit*, led in part by Johnson members of student government from Lamoille Union H.S., could bring youth and community together to set priorities, establish Community Service opportunities, and identify ways for all parties to coordinate to support recreation and youth leadership in the community.
- ❖ **Economic Development:** Many jobs in the Johnson area are low-paying, Johnson incomes are well below county averages, and there are few opportunities for youth employment. Economic opportunity is crucial for the future health and well-being of the Johnson community, and attracting new employers and nurturing entrepreneurial development should be a top priority.
- ❖ **Community Vision Issue:** Downtown development, economic development, Town/Village relations, and “marketing Johnson” all require a common vision for the future of the community. Some residents say that there is no common vision for the future; the production of a consensus vision document might involve the public, build bridges, and unify efforts.
- ❖ **Downtown Parking Issue:** A strategic plan to enhance downtown parking and build a Park and Ride lot in Johnson should be developed and implemented.
- ❖ **Community Center Issue:** While there are strong recreational offerings in Johnson, there is no physical town center for recreational events and no central hub to community activities. With no teen center, and no movie theatre, there is no place that young people can hang out or get together for social events or where activities for all ages can take place.
- ❖ **Communications and Events Coordination:** There is little structure for communications throughout the Johnson community for youth activities and recreation, community events, and town/village developments. Communications are sometimes fragmented between the numerous groups in town, and there is no single means of communication that works to unite the entire community. The development of a *common calendar of events* could unify current communications from JSC, the Studio Center, Johnson Elementary School, Lamoille Union HS, Town and Village government, and volunteer committees. Such a calendar could be multimedia, employing the web, a public notice board or kiosk downtown, a newsletter, and the college radio station.
- ❖ **Telecommunications Issue:** The lack of ubiquitous broadband access coupled with poor cell service in Johnson could have a negative impact on economic opportunities in the future. Pro-active planning and pre-site development might lure better cell service. Demand survey and aggregation toward negotiation with providers could help draw telecom deployment.
- ❖ **Tourist Economy Issue:** Johnson is poised by its location, beauty, and natural resources to benefit more broadly from the regional recreation economy. Does Johnson want to be a “destination” in VT? Johnson could systematically plan to welcome visitors to the community by attracting a hotel or B&B, expanding and improving river access for

canoeists, completing the Pathways Plan, building a downtown information kiosk, and developing a marketing campaign around its assets and recreational resources.

- ❖ **Zoning:** The lack of zoning and by-laws is a long-term challenge to the character of Johnson and its working forest and natural resources. Its absence may slow downtown investment and undermine the housing market. Village zoning should be effected soon and town zoning be planned. Development pressures from Chittenden County (partly spurred by the circumferential highway) will inevitably and increasingly affect Johnson. The more Johnson plans, the more it can condition its future development.
- ❖ **Recreation Coordination:** While there are many recreational activities and great resources in Johnson, many residents feel that there is a lack of coordination, publicizing, and sharing information between groups about all the activities available. Some residents see the need for a recreation coordinator; others see it as a need for a single events calendar. One way or another, many would like to ‘break down the silos’ between different groups and activities.
- ❖ **Public Transportation Issue:** The lack of public transportation hinders access to employment, undermines opportunities for young people, and minimizes mobility--from the elderly to residents at the VT Studio Center. Johnson State College has transportation infrastructure but their system isn’t designed to meet the diverse needs of residents. Could transportation demands and services be pooled?
- ❖ **Housing Issue:** There is a lack of adequate single, multi-family, and elder housing in town. The loss of single-family homes in the village to meet student housing needs and the expansion of the Studio Center creates pressures that should be addressed through a common planning process. Are there ways for the Village, JSC, and Studio Center to plan together?
- ❖ **Implementing the Main Street Plan Issue:** The implementation of the Main Street Plan will mark an historic watershed in the renewal of downtown Johnson and may be the best investment to attract new businesses and jobs to the community. Making the investments and leveraging the needed resources will require broad public adoption of the Main Street Design and hard decisions around priorities in the design, including decisions on the burial of power lines. Johnson residents should unite to support this crucial step in downtown and community development.
- ❖ **Educational Engagement Issue:** Johnson has made great strides in lowering the number of young people who leave school without a diploma, but many are concerned that substance abuse, and lack of discipline make this progress fragile. They worry about the potential for loss of students in 9th grade.
- ❖ **Community/College Relations:** While the majority of residents feel that relations and communications between the town and college are positive, all agreed that achieving effective communications is a continuous process. The College is interested in thinking about ways to bring educational and recreation events down to the town. The College service program would like to expand mentoring relationships with Johnson Elementary School. Some recommended a town ombudsman be established as one way to build and expand systemic mutual communications and expand the working relationship between town and gown.

- ❖ **Pathways Issues:** Johnson needs to capitalize on its great strength as a ‘walking village’. There are real safety concerns. The completion of the Pathways Plan developed by the Planning Commission could provide long-term recreational, health and commercial benefits. Many residents believe that the elements of the Pathways Plan need to be prioritized in conjunction with the Main Street Plan, and Johnson should start turning the plan into a reality step by step.
- ❖ **Downtown Development Issue:** The community should support and expand the role of Johnson Works and pursue a Village Designation in the Downtown Program to unify marketing and development efforts, build momentum, and set a collaborative framework for the progress of the Village center.
- ❖ **PTA Issue:** Johnson parents and teachers have built a strong and active PTA organization, but its future is uncertain without the energy that the next wave of parents can bring.

III. VCRD Resource Team Recommendations **In response to the Five Johnson Priority Challenges**

General Resource Information

The **USDA Rural Information Center (RIC)** provides information and referral services to local, tribal, state, and federal government officials; community organizations; rural electric and telephone cooperatives; libraries; businesses; and, citizens working to maintain the vitality of America's rural areas. The RIC provides customized information products to specific inquiries including assistance in economic revitalization issues; local government planning projects; funding sources; technical assistance programs; research studies; and other related issues. The RIC Website contains over 2,500 links to current and reliable information on a wide variety of rural resources and funding sources. The Rural Information Center Assists Local Communities or pdf <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/>

The **Snelling Center for Government** provides excellent resources for leadership training in a variety of settings. The Center has been developing a short curriculum to teach or refresh group management skills that could support the efforts of the Task Force Chairs as they work to move agendas forward and get results. Contact Jan Eastman or Mike Reilly at 859-3090.

The **Vermont Community Foundation** could be a possible source of funding for community projects that connect to the priorities established through the Community Visit process. Contact Ann Jones-Weinstock, Vice President at 388-3355 to discuss projects and the application process.

Economic Development

Economic development is not about just creating jobs but about creating jobs that fit the inventory and character of the community and have the ability to pay quality wages. The initial LEDC / LCPC Economic Study that reported to the County the week before the Johnson Community meeting produced structural guidelines that Johnson should review and consider how they could use some of those same resources in their planning process.

Johnson should support and maintain a strong economic development task force that can identify and target specific industries, clusters or business segments that would integrate with the strengths of the local labor market and capitalize on the natural resource and education base available. The **Lamoille Economic Development Corporation** can be a tremendous ally and resource to the Task Force. LEDC leadership should be invited to participate in ongoing planning and relied on for technical and grant writing assistance as projects are developed. Contact Karen Temple Lynch at 888-5640.

This task force could apply for a USDA Rural Development **Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG)** to fund this area-wide comprehensive development planning activity. These

grants can exceed \$40,000 and could serve as a starting point for a number of economic and downtown development strategies. Contact Rhonda Shippee at 828-6033.

The Economic Development Task Force could identify barriers and obstacles to expansion by current area businesses including an analysis of permanent and business incubator space. Community water, sewer, telecommunications or other business infrastructure needs may be considered in a variety of USDA Rural Development programs. The **Rural Business Enterprise Grant, Rural Business Opportunity Grant, Business and Industry Loan Guarantee, Intermediary Relending Program, Community Facility or Water and Waste Programs** may offer meaningful sources of capital to meet identified needs. For information on any of these programs, contact 828-6010.

Entrepreneurial development (specifically addressing technical assistance needs identified by small and emerging businesses) can be addressed by accessing grant funds through the USDA RD **Rural Business Enterprise Grant** program. Specific market research, accessing new business skills or conducting feasibility studies for market expansion are a few examples of how the program can be used to foster the expansion of small and emerging rural businesses. Sherry Paige of USDA can help consider the feasibility of an application: 828-6034.

Improving **river access** to canoeists could be a key feature of expanding the tourist economy. So long as there is a direct tie to assisting small and emerging businesses this might be furthered through the USDA RD **Rural Business Enterprise Grant** program. The construction of a **downtown Kiosk** (that directly ties to the development and expansion of small and emerging businesses) could be also be considered through the **Rural Business Enterprise Grant** program. Contact Sherry Paige: 828-6034.

The creation of a **recreational trail** on the existing rail line that runs from Burlington to St. Johnsbury could be a four-season tourist attraction. This project may be eligible for Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) thru the VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation: 241-3670.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development has technical and funding resources to support the assessment of town-wide telecom demand and to help Johnson residents aggregate that demand and negotiate for increased **broadband services** with potential providers. Contact Al and Laura Duey for assistance at 476-1266.

Johnson has tremendous current and potential recreation and tourist economy resources and is already a “**tourist destination**” due to the college, the Vermont Studio Center, businesses such as the Woolen Mills, fishing, canoeing, hiking, and other assets. Johnson should continue to develop its tourism assets and infrastructure, but it should also begin to promote itself more aggressively. Johnson should investigate marketing opportunities and seek help from the Lamoille Valley Chamber of Commerce (888-7607) to develop town-oriented marketing materials and build contacts to other agencies, including the VT Department of Tourism and Marketing.

Johnson should continue to support the implementation of the **Lamoille Rail Corridor, “Rails-to-Trails project”** by keeping in contact with Lamoille County Planning Commission transportation planner. The community should be prepared to participate in the formation of an advisory committee that will be led by Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, the lessee of the corridor and the group responsible for the redevelopment project. Johnson should be proactive about making the Village and Town a stop along the route. Good parking, easy access onto the trail with signage, and attractive land use beside the trail are few ways to make people decide that Johnson is where they will stop rather than riding on to the next stop.

Johnson should dedicate municipal staff time (possibly through the new economic development position) to coordinate, schedule and enhance the utilization of existing public recreation resources, as well as develop new opportunities, ie. river for fishing, boating; snowmobile business access to businesses in town, and so forth. Municipal and grant funds should be identified for a part-time position.

Make sure all Johnson businesses are participating in the Agency of Commerce, Department of Economic Development's free online **Business Registry** (www.thinkvermont.com - contact Robin Miller, 828-5240 for Technical Assistance).

Make sure all tourism-related businesses are participating in the Agency of Commerce, Department of Tourism and Marketing's free online **Travel Planner** (www.vacationvermont.com - Business must first register in the Business Registry at www.thinkvermont.com, then register additional data for tourist use. Robin Miller, the NEKTTA or Carol Batchelder in VDTM, 828-3619, can help you add information to the Travel Planner).

Communications and Events Coordination

Johnson State College can/should play a stronger role helping to coordinate and communicate town/college events and opportunities.

Task Forces (especially the Chairs) developed or strengthened in the Community Visit process should stay in close touch with Dean West, the Community Visit Chair. Dean plans to maintain a liaison role with the College and Johnson town and village governments.

The Downtown KIOSK and/or newsletter is a really good idea. Does the town have a local newspaper? Could JSC Communications Dept coordinate, write, underwrite? This could be an outstanding service learning opportunity for college students.

Continue promotion and development of the Johnson Website.

Place an informational kiosk in the center of the Village to serve as a community resource and as a resource to those visiting town. This could include maps of significant landmarks, institutions, and other services and businesses. It could also serve as a location for local businesses to promote themselves. * See economic development for possible Kiosk funding.

Johnson is fortunate to have exciting events an energized leadership group for youth recreational activities. Public events and communications seem desperately in need a coordinator. The Communications Task Force could go to the Lions, Rotary, and or Kiwanis as funding sources toward that end, and Johnson State College may have student volunteers who could provide leadership and energy.

Housing

The Lamoille Housing Partnership (LHP) organization has a new Executive Director, Carol Collins (888-5714). LHP could be a more active player and partner in the region's development and play a critical supporting role providing expertise, technical assistance and development leadership to the Housing Task Force. They could be invited to each meeting to provide technical assistance and advice.

Affordable Housing Creation: The April 28th "housing summit" initiated by VHFA for the greater Morrisville area highlights the need for local government officials to address the permit approval process. Johnson should explore density bonuses and impact fee waivers for private affordable housing developers with realistic restrictions for on-going affordability (say, 5-10 years on rent restrictions, or limitations to equity gained on homeownership projects). The Village and Town could consider the donation of any available municipally-owned land for affordable housing, without restrictions if given to a non-profit, and with short-term "sunset" restrictions if given to a private, for-profit developer. Johnson residents on the Housing Task Force should ask Housing Vermont take a lead role in convening discussions with key stakeholders in town, and key resources for development. Andy Broderick, Housing Vermont: 863-8434.

There appears to be regional support for a **local home ownership center**, offering home buyer education and home ownership counseling. Johnson would benefit from supporting such an initiative.

The Housing Task Force could conduct an **inventory** of existing housing stock in need of rehab and potential land tracks that could be developed for new construction of either single or multi-family housing. Who are the owners of the housing units and land, and what kind of resources can be used to help bridge improvements in housing quality and construction of new units? The inventory also should consider vacant land/buildings owned by the college, state, and municipality that may not be essential to their long-term growth or development plans. This sort of inventory and planning process would be an ideal use of Vermont Community Development Planning funds for a planning grant application—which can be up to \$30,000. Since a re-write of the town plan is scheduled for next year, this is a key time to integrate such a study and use these findings to help local officials develop the new town plan for housing development and improvements. Michelle boomhower at LCPC, 888-4549, may be able to help and advise.

The Town of Johnson should explore and then publicize the Lamoille Housing Partnership's **lead abatement program** (888-5714) (from the Vermont Housing Conservation Board) and the **Homeland Grant** program for single family rehab as two key means for improving local housing stock.

Another starting point for the Task Force to consider would be the idea of convening a local housing summit of key organizations and community members to inventory needs, develop strategies and plan action. Organizations to include would be JSC, the Town and Village, VSC, Johnson Works, Lamoille Regional Planning Commission, Lamoille Housing Partnership, and Housing Vermont. If needed, funding for this kind of activity could come from a CDBG planning grant or Municipal Planning Grant (through the Department of Housing and Community Affairs), 828-3211). There are some real opportunities to work together and do something better than any one organization could do alone.

Zoning

LCPC will be a good source not only for assistance but could bring information from other towns in the area that have been in this process for a longer period of time (such as Morrisville) that could help the Task Force better understand the pro's and con's of the process. LCPC would also be able to provide the best sources for funds and technical assistance. Michelle Boomhower, 888-4549.

Implementing the Main Street Plan

The implementation of the Main Street Plan will mark an historic watershed in the renewal of downtown Johnson and may be the best investment to attract new businesses and jobs to the community. Making the investments and leveraging the needed resources will require broad public adoption of the Main Street Design and hard decisions around priorities in the design, including decisions on the burial of power lines. Johnson residents should unite to support this crucial step in downtown and community development.

The Main Street Task Force should continue to promote this project through the development of a brochure or “marketing” piece promoting the key elements of the project and the benefits the village stands to realize as the project is implemented. Provide advertising opportunities for involvement in the brochure to keep adding to the base of support for the project.

As part of the Main Street development, a strategic plan to enhance downtown parking and build a Park and Ride lot in Johnson should be developed and implemented. A parking study was completed for the village in 1998. Most of the findings and recommendations of this study are still relevant. Updating of parking utilization statistics may be beneficial, as would a review of community support for the implementation of the recommendations. Lamoille County Planning Commission may be able to assist with this. Michele Boomhower, 888-4548.

The Main Street Task Force should support and coordinate with Johnson Works/the Economic Development Task Force and together pursue a **Village Designation in the Downtown Program** to unify marketing and development efforts, build momentum, and set a collaborative framework for the progress of the Village center. The application guidelines covers a lot of the "what and why", can be found at www.historicvermont.org or by calling Joss Besse, Director of the Downtown Program, at 828-5212.

Morristown recently succeeded in obtaining Downtown Designation. Heidi Krantz, Downtown Coordinator for Morristown, could also provide valuable insight into the usefulness of the program and the process of applying for a designation (888-6370). A delegation of Johnson residents might also want to learn how other communities have addressed some of their downtown issues. Morrisville and St Albans are close, but Windsor, Vergennes or Poultney are smaller and have good stories to tell.

More important than the designation itself is the ongoing **organization for downtown development and promotion**. It will be important for the Economic Development Task Force/Johnson Works to collaborate with the Main Street Task Force. The development of organizational capacity is the key here (and probably for other issues too). The time and energy from a publicly-supported **community development coordinator** may be the biggest single step Johnson can take right now to continue building momentum and implement identified projects.

The Department of Housing and Community Affairs (828-3211) has developed a **powerpoint** presentation on techniques for village revitalization. The Main Street Task Force, in conjunction with the Economic Development Task Force/Johnson Works, could invite LEDC to present this powerpoint at a joint meeting.

Johnson could look to either CDBG planning grants or Municipal Planning Grants (DHCA) to support **downtown revitalization**--they should be pretty competitive in either case. CDBG accepts applications every 2-3 months, but the Municipal Planning Grants are only accepted in September (LCPC might be able to help with applications for either program). Call the Agency of Commerce for more information at 828-3211.

IV. JOHNSON TASK FORCE ACTION PLANS

Economic Development Task Force

Chairperson: Walter Pomroy

- ❖ **Economic Development Issue:** Many jobs in the Johnson area are low-paying, Johnson incomes are well below county averages, and there are few opportunities for youth employment. Economic opportunity is crucial for the future health and well-being of the Johnson community, and attracting new employers and nurturing entrepreneurial development should be a top priority. **Telecommunications:** Because the lack of ubiquitous broadband access coupled with poor cell service in Johnson could have a negative impact on economic opportunities in the future, telecom access should be a key agenda of Johnson's economic development efforts. Pro-active planning and pre-site development might lure better cell service. Demand survey and aggregation toward negotiation with providers could help draw telecom deployment. **Tourist Economy:** Johnson is poised by its location, beauty, and natural resources to benefit more broadly from the regional recreation economy; these opportunities are integrally tied to the community's economic development efforts. Does Johnson want to be a "destination" in VT? Johnson could systematically plan to welcome visitors to the community by attracting a hotel or B&B, expanding and improving river access for canoeists, completing the Pathways Plan, building a downtown information kiosk, and developing a marketing campaign around its assets and recreational resources.

Committee Members:

Walter Pomroy (Chair)
Linda Jones
Carley Coolidge
Troy Charette
Diana Osborn
Jim MacDowell
Cindy Nease
Howard Romero
Kirk Jones
Bob Selby
Dawn Kellogg
Eric Osgood
David Goddette

Action Steps:

1. **Revitalization of Johnson Works**
2. **Plan how to develop Rail Trail, Bridge, Tatro, Talc, river access and VAST bridge**
3. **Marketing of Johnson with Action Step 1**

Communications and Events Coordination **Task Force**

Chairperson: **Kathy Black**

- ❖ **Communications and Events Coordination:** There is little structure for communications throughout the Johnson community for youth activities and recreation, college and community events, and town/village developments. Communications are sometimes fragmented between the numerous groups in town, and there is no single means of communication that works to unite the entire community. The development of a *common calendar of events* could unify current communications from JSC, the Studio Center, Johnson Elementary School, Lamoille Union HS, Town and Village government, and volunteer committees. Such a calendar could be multimedia, employing the web, a public notice board or kiosk downtown, a newsletter, and the college radio station.

Committee Members:

Kathy Black (Chair)
Steve Reber
John Kearns
Lois Frey
Brad Smith
Rod Vieux
Lea Kilvadova
Doris Farrington
Veronica Charette

JoAnn Berford
Greg Stefanski
Jeanne Engel
Dave Bergh
Dawn Kellogg
Margo Warden
Diana Osborn
David G. Goddette

Action Steps:

1. **Create Centralized Community Calendar**
2. **Create Town Communications Committee & Information Contacts List**
3. **Create town information kiosk**
4. **Develop media contacts and email list serve**

Resources

1. **College**
2. **Studio Center**
3. **Elementary/Middle/High School**
4. **Town Government**
5. **Rec Committee**
6. **Churches**
7. **Communications Committee**
8. **Library**
9. **Johnson Works**
10. **Town Web Master**
11. **Supermarkets/Banks**
12. **Utilities**
13. **Broadcast/Cable Modem(?)**
14. **Businesses**
15. **State Government**

Housing Task Force

Chairperson: Doug Molde

- ❖ **Housing Issue:** There is a lack of adequate single, multi-family, and elder housing in town. The loss of single-family homes in the village to meet student housing needs and the expansion of the Studio Center creates pressures that should be addressed through a common planning process. Are there ways for the Village, JSC, and the Studio Center to plan together?

Committee Members:

Doug Molde (Chair)
Howard Romero
Locke Fluery
Peter Moynihan
George Pearlman
Cynthia Peterson
Sheila Cross
Marge Delaney
Donna Van Marten
Diana Osborn
Joe Salerno

Action Steps:

1. **Survey condition of housing stock**
2. **Survey general market conditions for all housing types**
-Include JSC
3. **Identify preferred housing mix for a healthy community**
-also address aesthetics

Resources

1. **Lamoille County Planning Commission**
2. **Resources VHCB, VCDP to cover costs of studies**

Zoning Task Force

Chairperson: Bob Schulz

- ❖ **Zoning:** The lack of zoning and by-laws is a long-term challenge to the character of Johnson and its working forest and natural resources. Its absence may slow downtown investment and undermine the housing market. Village zoning should be effected soon and town zoning be planned. Development pressures from Chittenden County (partly spurred by the circumferential highway) will inevitably and increasingly affect Johnson. The more Johnson plans, the more it can condition its future development.

Committee Members:

Robert Schulz (Chair)
Louise von Weise
Jim MacDowell
Bruce Butler
Donna Van Marten
Bob Selby
Carol Schulz

Action Steps:

- 1. Request a date certain from the Village Trustees as to when the zoning will be warned.**
- 2. Recruit additional members to the Zoning Committee.**
- 3. Determine the role of the Zoning Committee and the relationship of the Zoning Committee to the Planning Commission.**
- 4. Use the upcoming Town Plan Process to educate citizens about land use regulations (state and local) and identify various neighborhood geographics and interests related to zoning districts for discussion groups about goals and issues related to zoning.**

Implementing the Main Street Plan Task Force

Chairperson: Greg Stefanski

- ❖ **Implementing the Main Street Plan:** The implementation of the Main Street Plan will mark an historic watershed in the renewal of downtown Johnson and may be the best investment to attract new businesses and jobs to the community. Making the investments and leveraging the needed resources will require broad public adoption of the Main Street Design and hard decisions around priorities in the design, including decisions on the burial of power lines. Johnson residents should unite to support this crucial step in downtown and community development. **Downtown Parking:** A strategic plan to enhance downtown parking and build a Park and Ride lot in Johnson should be developed and implemented. **Downtown Development:** The community should support and expand the role of Johnson Works and pursue a Village Designation in the Downtown Program to unify marketing and development efforts, build momentum, and set a collaborative framework for the progress of the Village center.

Committee Members:

Greg Stefanski (Chair)
Floyd Nease
Carol Schultz
Jon Gregg
Joe Salerno
Susannah Kiss
Stan Eellow
Jack Slagle
Walter Pomroy
Kyley Hill
Jeanie Osgood
Buz Osgood
Annette Vachon
Richard W. Cruss
Donna VanMarten
Louise Von Weise
Kirk Jones

Bob Selby
Dawn Kellogg
Diana Osborn

Action Steps:

1. **Look at Bridges – plan for upgrade**
Vtrans RFP Letter of Intent request by June 4 /App 8/13
2. **Possible Broadband project**
3. **Get better cost estimate for utility burial-connect w/EPRO**
4. **Discuss with Select Board and Trustees to formalize their support**
5. **Letter/press release about Sen. Leahy request & letter of Support**
6. **VCRD presentation on economic impact of Main St. improvements**
7. **Look at Grand Union area and the ¾ designs already created by Landworks**

Resources

1. **Sen. Leahy \$2 million request on both FY 05 & 6 year omnibus Transportation bill**
2. **League of Cities & Towns**
3. **Pat McDonald, Secretary of VTrans**
4. **National Main Street Center**
5. **Vermont Forum on Sprawl**
6. **Orton Family Foundation**
7. **Johnson works (local business group)**

FOCUS GROUP NOTES ON MAJOR ISSUES

Compiled in focus groups of Johnson residents reporting to Community Visitors on March 30, 2004

Focus Group Notes on Major Issues

Compiled in focus groups of Johnson residents reporting to Community Visitors on March 30, 2004

Resource Team A

Paul Costello, Executive Director, Vermont Council on Rural Development
Hal Cohen, Executive Director, Central Vermont Community Action Council
Amy Darley, Human Services Coordinator, U.S. Senator Jeffords Office
Carlen Finn, Executive Director, Vermont Children's Forum
Richard White, President, Community National Bank
Chip Evans, Executive Director, Human Resources Investment Council
Peter Gilbert, Executive Director, Vermont Council on the Humanities

I. Communications – Between Community Groups and with the College Focus Group

Gordy Smith
Grey Stefanski
Carol Shultz
Robert Shultz
Steve Reber
Cindy Nease
Jeanne M. Engel
Peter Moynihan
Brad Smith
Dawn Kellogg
Kathy Black

S. Joseph Salerno
Lois Frey
Katie Orost
Ellen Hill
George Desmaralos
Barbara Murphy
David Bergh
Mary Johnson
Eric Osgood
Louise Von Weise
Jorge Hernandez

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Johnson is a “walking town” where people can meet and greet one another.
- There is a student liaison from the college that links the college and town.
- Student life is present in the town through student association meetings.

- JSC has an arts and events calendar.
- There is a grade school newsletter that keeps folks connected if they have children in the system (“Jaguar Journal”).
- The town has an updated and informational website.
- JSC has a website calendar updated regularly on college events.
- There is an effective Selectboard for the town that is better than it has been in the past.
- A schedule of town meetings is posted in town clerk’s office.
- The annual town meeting draws much participation.
- Duncan Hastings’ arrival as Municipal Administrator has made for good progress in communications between Selectboard and Trustees.
- There are numerous strong groups and organizations. A few of these report to the Selectboard and Trustees. Others do not.
- There’s a shared town/village Planning Commission.
- There was a recent session with a variety of committees reporting to help groups understand what others are up to—this was a positive step, but no regular structure exists to maintain these communications.
- The Vermont Studio Center has a website and is linked to the town’s.
- The annual breakfast at JSC allows an exchange between town and college.
- College representatives take part in town meetings and organizations.
- The Center for Service Learning at JSC promotes college student involvement in town activities, coaching, and community projects.
- There is extensive outreach to town through college athletics programs and camps.
- The Child Development Center at JSC is a great way for young kids to get connected to mentors.

Challenges in this Area

- With the college, Studio Center, school, Laraway School and long time residents, there are a variety of communities in Johnson that represent interesting diversity but have natural challenges in communication.
- There is sometimes fragmented communication between the numerous groups in town—there’s not a single means of communications that works for everyone.
- The communications that do occur between groups are informal, not systematic.
- The college is working to revive its radio station—JSC would like to see the station serve the full community and become a centerpoint for community communications.
- Johnson used to have a newspaper and a community events bulletin board.
- There are so many groups and organizations; it is hard to keep track of what is going on with them all.
- Most agree that communications between the town and college are strong and positive, but some think there’s room for improvement.
- JSC has a mentoring program with 60 mentors through its Center for Service Learning, but unfortunately it works better with schools surrounding Johnson than in Johnson itself. There have been challenges in communications with the school to make this program work better in town.

- There are unmet needs of a cross section of the community that are not getting addressed.
- Transportation to and from outer areas of town and college is difficult.
- The Town Library is more and more active and could be a resource center.
- Johnson could use an information kiosk—one central location for communications.
- Only a small percentage of people from the town actively participate in community discussion and planning.
- Some people face “roadblocks” while trying to communicate with college officials.
- Some individuals do not feel “invited” to participate in community events.
- Many events don’t attract a cross section of the diverse communities—all praised those events that bring people together from different parts of the Johnson community. Some felt that these sub-communities have retreated from one another in recent years.
- The Covered Bridge celebration and Millenium Celebration really united all groups, and the Winter Carnival brought the PTA and Women’s Auxiliary together.
- Some participants remembered the 4th of July Fireworks and successful Fall Foliage Festivals as times when all parts of the community came together.
- The Main Street Committee has an intermittent newsletter—it’s useful but geared completely to the Main Street project.
- Some wondered if there isn’t a redundancy of groups.
- Housing is a huge issue for some: the loss of single family homes in the village to college needs and Studio Center puts pressure on the Village that is not being addressed.
- It’s challenging to engage new people in efforts in the community, and some local offices are uncontested.
- Some say there’s an “old boys/new boys” network—a relatively small group that does everything.
- Some people don’t know how to get involved, some may be content to leave the work to others.
- There’s a new cable access TV station that could help with local communications.
- Some think that it would be useful to have a town ombudsman to the College.
- There are limited events that connect college and town (mostly athletics).
- Achieving effective communication is a continuous process.

Visiting Team Observations

1. There needs to be a place where town members can go with issues with JSC.
2. Vehicles of communication (newsletters, bulletin board, radio station, information kiosk, websites, cable access, and list serves) can serve as a means of coordinating town and college events.
3. More events for the whole town can bring people together from all walks of life.
4. JSC has great resources to be utilized for town and college communication.
5. Johnson has a vital network of community groups that maintain community interaction.

6. The fact that the high school is outside of the town may cause difficulty in coordination high school and college communication.
7. The library is a great resource and should be utilized as a means of communications.

II. Youth Opportunities Focus Group

Jorge Hernandez
Gregory Dixon
Steve Reber
Diana Osborn
Casey Romero
Al Lamos
Sue Lenel
Kathy Black
Judy Beard
Heather Goodell
Linda Molde
Lois Frey

Rod Vieux
John Kearns
Mary Johnson
Katie Orost
Ellen Hill
Sue Carney
Louise Cross
Cathy Kickory
Greg Stefanski
Eddie Gale

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- The school budget has never been defeated.
- There is immense support for youth recreation.
- There is a strong and active P.T.A.
- There is a strong Recreation Committee, which offers numerous opportunities for youth in sports at school and with connection to JSC—especially sports up through 6th grade.
- There's a good ski program at Stowe and a cross-country ski program.
- The elementary school has after school programs for youth.
- Summer programs are offered for elementary and high school students.
- The JSC swimming pool is a resource.
- Classes are offered through the art house, the VT Studio Center, and River Arts.
- The Elementary School art program is donated by the Studio Center.
- There is a Wednesday night teen program at a local church.
- The skate park and bike track are areas for recreation.
- JSC hosts a development and service-learning center with opportunities for mentoring, America Reads, and tutoring for youth.
- JSC also opens activities on campus to the full community.
- Hyde Park Opera House allows young thespians roles in plays
- The Library offers story times and other resources to children and youth.
- Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts are active.
- The PTA produces events—movie night, contra dance, crafts days, dance residency.

- The Cambridge Teen Coalition also puts on activities that are available to Johnson youth.
- The Laraway School offers youth opportunities.
- Smuggler’s Notch has some opportunity for youth employment (seasonal).

Challenges in this Area

- The VT Studio Art Center is not primarily for the town; they bring in outside artists to display work and learn.
- There is a lack of public knowledge about community/youth events.
- A lot of activities at the college are inconsistently publicized so many young people don’t know about them.
- There are very limited job opportunities for youth in and around Johnson.
- Transportation is a continuous problem for youth.
- There are only limited opportunities for “at-risk youth.”
- The High School gets “the short end of the stick” because it is located outside of town.
- Most of the youth opportunities are focused around athletics.
- Maybe there are too many activities—some kids fall through the cracks, and some don’t want to participate in organized activities.
- There is a lack of systematic communication about youth events and opportunities.
- There is not physical meeting/town center for meetings and events—no community center or teen center—no central hub.
- The ‘Youth Risk Behavior Survey’ for the Supervisory Union shows high levels of risky behavior—there’s improvement in the percentage of smokers, but alcohol and marijuana use is high.
- The incidence of childhood poverty in Johnson is very high; the number of children with ‘free or reduced lunch’ eligibility is 57%.
- It is hard for lots of children to attend after-school programming; parents have to pick them up—for some families this is impossible for a variety of reasons.
- The infrastructure for youth activities is lacking; it consists mainly of volunteers.
- Some parents worry that youth don’t have much awareness of the larger world beyond Johnson.
- Alcohol and drug abuse is a concern—these concerns are heightened around driving.
- It would be great if there were a woodworking shop, metal shop or kiln where young people could make things—have the power to be productive.
- The skate park gives some kids leadership—they’ve taken initiative in cleaning and maintaining it.
- Young people want to do things for the town—plant tree, help the elderly—but there is no direct community service avenue or expectation and few opportunities for young people to take leadership.
- Maybe the town should have a youth forum. The high school Student Government could play a leading role in putting this together.

- Maybe events could be developed as alternatives to sports—like science events connected to the college.
- There is no municipal infrastructure for youth; all the committees are made up of volunteers—it’s hard to coordinate activities, get the word out, and recruit new people to help. Many participants would like to see part-time municipal staffing to coordinate and support youth and recreation activities.
- There’s no events calendar to coordinate all that is going on—kids are web savvy, it would be great if there were an on-line calendar.

Visiting Team Observations

1. Youth want to be involved with community event planning.
2. This is a very strong community that cares about their youth.
3. The “at risk” youth are overlooked.
4. Bicycles should be promoted to empower youth to get around. The Pathways Plan will help with this.
5. A youth forum is a good way to bring youth and community members together to discuss issues of youth opportunity.
6. A central hub for youth (community center) is a good place to bring youth together.
7. Communication is key in showing youth resources (arts, drama, recreation, etc.).
8. The web, school, and library get kids connected with community/college events.
9. Use school and library resources to get youth connected.
10. Ask the kids what they want to do or have available for them! It is important to empower the youth to make choices and take leadership.

III. Education Focus Group

Gary Clark
Brad Smith
Pam Jasperson
Steve Reber
Dan Regan
Alice Whiting
Jan Kuhn
Aggie West
Harlan Adams
Eddie Gale
Charles Eyles
Pam Aupperlee

Cindy Nease
Floyd Nease
Kathy Black
John P. Sullivan
Bruce Butler
Kenneth A. Brier Sr.
Cathy Hickory
Roo Slagle
Mark Woodward
Rod Vieux
Kenneth Allen Brier Jr.

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- The school has been newly remodeled in line with the design and heritage of the original building intact—and was kept in town.
- The school budget always passes.
- Lamoille High School was also remodeled and there's a new Middle School.
- There is strong Supervisory Union leadership—though that is now in transition.
- The technical center in the district has numerous resources.
- The child development center at JSC is great.
- The elementary school is successful in working with challenging children.
- The school district is good at integrating multiple levels of education abilities.
- There is a universal preschool program in town.
- There are numerous educational opportunities including JSC, home schools, the Laraway School, the community Catholic school in Morrisville, elementary and high schools.
- Johnson schools have been successful in gaining grant support.
- The Safe School Grant has provided policing and counseling where needed.
- There are clearly spelled out second chances for students in the schools (behavior management and correction).
- The FEED program provides nutrition and health education.
- The P.T.A. is very active and supportive.
- The after school programs are a positive influence.
- Collaboration with Head Start; lowest cost in Lamoille County.

Challenges in this Area

- Costs of education are high for a number of reasons—including the costs of social programs offered as we try to address broad social needs through school programs.
- Transportation to and from school/school events is difficult, with long rides.
- Teachers are forced to oversee behavior problems in the classroom instead of focusing on teaching.
- “At-risk” youth are incorporated in classroom, and while expectations are made clear, sometimes it is difficult to balance the needs of all students.
- Many students are rude and behavior issues are worse than they used to be.
- Violence has increased; there is now a sheriff at the elementary school and police at the high school.
- Childhood poverty is prevalent: 55% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.
- Family stresses affect learning—some of these are connected to poverty, others to working parents with challenging schedules, difficulty providing adequate supervision, and prevalence of media.
- There can be a sense of disempowerment by students.
- There's some frustration over federal mandates and the lack of full funding for special education.

- Educational achievement (test scores) is a concern—especially with the roll out of “No Child Left Behind.”
- Some residents have concerns about drinking or drug deals.
- There is a concern over losing students once they reach 9th grade; many drop out or fail out. While Lamoille’s statistics have gone down dramatically over the last couple of years, there’s concern about keeping students engaged through graduation.
- The schools have identified ways to spot and target kids, eliminated study halls and increased academic expectations.
- Having the high school outside of town causes detachment and makes communications somewhat less direct.
- Parent involvement is increasing and has increased in the last few years mostly because of the great PTA formed about 3 years ago. The group has renewed the community’s involvement in the school—but there are worries about its sustainability—the group needs new parents and parents of younger children to join and keep it vigorous.
- The college is an underutilized resource—and too few activities are in the village.
- Johnson State College is interested in thinking about how to bring educational and recreational events down to town instead of always expecting town’s people to trek up the hill to JSC.
- There’s not enough health and nutritional education—as a society we aren’t doing enough to address obesity.
- Many parents don’t have time to help with homework anymore and some find it hard to find the time to read to their children.
- Handing out literature to parents (i.e. parenting, health, and nutritional tips) can ease some tensions at home.
- The technical center was build and equipped in 1967—with no change or renovation since—this is a challenge for the near future.
- It is so hard to communicate with the full community!
- It is so important to celebrate our successes and to communicate an atmosphere of respecting education—for some children academics are not cool and being rude to teachers is; we have to change that attitude.
- Could students go to college for a day or spend a day shadowing an artist at the Studio Center?
- We worry so much about ‘at risk’ youth we forget that gifted and talented children need attention, too.

Visiting Team Observations

1. There is good collaboration between families and school officials, but more can be done.
2. More mentors in the schools, from the high school and/or JSC, can provide assistance.
3. JSC is a good resource to utilize.
4. Showing youth the opportunities that they do have can empower them to make their own decisions.
5. There are a lot of responses to the educational support system stress, and enormous interest in showing support for parents.
6. The changing times bring changing pressures (i.e. violence) and it is important to unite around strengths as well as solutions to weaknesses.

Resource Team B

Jolinda LaClair, State Director, USDA-Rural Development (Team Facilitator)
Gretchen Saries, Field Representative, US Senator Patrick Leahy
Paul Bruhn, Executive Director, Preservation Trust of Vermont
John Hall, Commissioner, Housing and Community Affairs
Jonathan Wood, Commissioner, Vermont Dept. of Forest, Park & Recreation
Wayne Fawbush, Executive Director, Vermont Sustainable Jobs fund
Brian Keefe, Community Liaison, US Senator James Jeffords
George Robson, Natural Products Specialist, VT Dept. of Economic Dev.
Karen Lynch, Executive Director, Lamoille Economic Development Corp.
Seth Herman, UVM, Center for Rural Studies (Scribe)

I. Economic Development

Jason Ohrum
Diana Osborn
Bob Selby
Stan Lane
Peter Jones
Rhonda Bennett
Rick Rouleau
Laura Lehouillier
Jodi Tallman
Dean West
Laurie Burnham
Alan Beard

Douglas Molde
Lucy Marvin
David Marvin
Jon Gregg
Walter Pomroy
Eileen McKusick
Jim MacDowell
Harland Adams
Frank Dodge

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Some residents feel that Johnson State College and The Vermont Studio Center are great strengths of Johnson.
- The town draws many creative people to it.
- Many residents were glad that Rt. 15 goes through Johnson and brings tourists.
- There are many stores that provide amenities for everyday life.
- There is a bikeway path on the Lamoille River railroad track.
- The community is located close to a major ski area.
- The Lamoille River provides recreation opportunities including canoeing, kayaking, and fishing.
- There are hiking trails in Johnson, including the Long Trail.
- Johnson is beautiful.
- Johnson is a pedestrian community.

- Some residents feel that having the new elementary school located within the Village is a strength for Johnson.
- The schools provide a good education.
- There is relatively inexpensive real estate in Johnson.
- The town is not a tourist town.
- There is a municipal electric plant within the town, which provides low rates to the community.
- The wastewater treatment plant is award-winning.
- There is high quality water from the Lamoille River watershed.
- Johnson has a good supply of publicly owned land.
- The Green Mountain Technology Center is located close by.
- The village is compact.
- There are great cross-country skiing and snowmobile trails.
- There is lots of snowmobiling in Johnson.

Challenges in this Area

- There is tension between the through corridor of Rt. 15 and Main Street Johnson.
- There is a lack of downtown traffic control.
- Some residents feel that a major challenge Johnson faces is the big tractor-trailers that go through town bringing garbage from Burlington.
- Traffic makes the town harder to walk through.
- There is limited cell phone service in Johnson.
- There is a threat of gentrification.
- There is no Internet service outside of the village.
- There is no motel, hotel, or bed and breakfast's in Johnson.
- Jobs in the area provide low pay.
- Because of low paying jobs, there is a danger that Johnson could become a bedroom community.
- The village lacks adequate parking.
- There is no town zoning and a lack of planning in the community.
- Because there is no town zoning, residents feel that capital investments can be at risk.
- There is a need to save historic places.
- The village has become a rental market and this causes the village to become less community orientated.
- Diversity is not prevalent or represented within the village.
- There is no County orientation and little interaction between Johnson and neighboring towns.
- The presence of Johnson State College drives up rental prices.
- Johnson and Johnson State College are not intertwined enough.
- Many residents cited the fact that Johnson State College does not pay taxes to the community as a problem.
- The tax system discourages business.
- Many residents felt that there is a lack of good sites for light industry.

- Not enough money stays within Johnson.
- There is a lack of adequate housing within town.
- There are not enough jobs in Johnson.
- There is no industrial park in Johnson.
- The current water supply cannot provide enough pressure to support commercial buildings.
- Many residents feel that there is a water supply that cannot be tapped into in Johnson.
- There are high property taxes.
- There is a flood plain that hurts business.
- Many residents feel that having a high percentage of mobile homes in Johnson is a problem.
- There is a lack of upscale housing and range of housing, especially in the village.
- There is a need for more jobs that require higher education.
- Some residents feel that there is a need for professional services and health service jobs in Johnson.
- A survey could be conducted to ask residents which things draw them away from Johnson.
- Many residents feel that the town needs to create the amenities that businesses need, such as sprinkler systems, room to turn tractor-trailers around, and 3-phase power.
- There could be a traffic by-pass.
- The implementation of Main Street plans will make the village more appealing to both businesses and the community.
- The town could try to headhunt entrepreneurs.
- Many residents feel that Adelphia must expand outside of the village with high-speed Internet access.
- The electric Co-op could provide a fiber optic line.
- Intellectual capital within the town must be maximized.
- The town should get a real estate agent.
- A stronger water supply should be used, and improvements to the old one should be taken.
- There need to be sub-division bylaws.
- Power lines should be buried and trees should be replanted in the Village.
- A grant writer is needed to find ways for the town to get more money.
- A Chamber of Commerce should be developed.
- The downtown bridges should be fixed.
- A loan fund could be set up that would encourage and help with new buildings.
- The Tatro building has the potential to be used for more industrial space.

Visiting Team Observations

1. Use the possibility of CDBG municipal planning grants to help find a way to get traffic to stop in Johnson.
2. Johnson has many resources that should be better coordinated.
3. The lack of an active downtown association and inadequate zoning is hurting the village.
4. Entrepreneurial opportunities should be expanded.
5. Johnson lies on the spine of the green mountains, which provides many recreational opportunities.
6. More funds are needed for the Main Street design.

7. Johnson State College and the Vermont Studio Center provide Johnson with good economic engines.

II. Zoning

Jason Ohrum
Gary Clark
Bob Selby
Alan Beard
Mark Woodward
Jon Gregg
Louise Von Weise
Meouge Pearlman
Robert Hoag
Steve Engle
Gordy Smith
Peter Moynihan

Laura Lehouillier
Roo Slagle
Frank Dodge
Doug Molde
Lucy Marvin
David Godette
Eric Osgood
Walter Pomroy
Robert Schulz
Carl Schulz
Jack Slagle
Harland Adams

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Village bylaws have been drafted.
- Because there is no zoning within the village, there are no barriers of entry for business.
- There is a large percentage of land that is in Current Use (12,000 acres).
- Small lots do not have limitations; this leaves fewer restrictions for businesses to build there.

Challenges in this Area

- The lack of zoning hurts the village character.
- Many houses are being turned into college apartments or have been taken over by the Studio Center.
- There are no parking limitations.
- There is not enough parking.
- A few residents feel that the lack of zoning hurts business that would like to move into Johnson, because there is no certainty of what type of business could move in next door to them.
- There are unregulated junkyards in Johnson.
- A few residents felt that by not having zoning they were less prepared for the future.
- No zoning causes a lack of insurance that certain land cannot be developed on.
- Zoning favors certain people and hurts others.
- There is misinformation about zoning.
- Zoning is just one tool for land use and planning.

- Tough zoning laws create hardships for people.
- Many residents felt that zoning could hurt village business owners because they often do not live in the village and would not be able to vote on issues regarding zoning within the village.
- Zoning often has a bad reputation.
- The town meeting had 123 residents attend, while the village meeting had only 8.
- A zoning administrator should be hired.
- Funding for a zoning administrator should be sought.
- Zoning needs to address housing.
- The process of zoning needs to have collaborative input by a fair representation of citizens.
- The zoning discussion should continue.

Visiting Team Observations

1. Planning for zoning has been thoughtful as well as sophisticated but public decisions need to be made about the future of village and town land use and economic development.

III. Recreation and Recreation Facilities

John Kearns	Andrew Jaspersahn
Eric Kearns	Kathy Killiam
Gwenn Kearns	Casey Romero
David Bergh	Jugrid Nuse
Margo Warden	Eric Nuse
Jim MacDowell	Amy Schulz
Lois Frey	Lucas Schulz
Troy Charette	Frank Dodge
Grace Adams	Doug McLellan
Laurie Wells	Scott Meyer
Tim Percy	Kim Dunkle
Chip Boutin	Monita Neill
	Martha Leonard
	Jorge Hernandez

Community Strengths

- The Lamoille River winds through the center of Johnson
- The town owns a recreation path, soccer field, and baseball diamonds.
- Johnson State College has a large amount of green space, a shape center, woods, and trails.
- There is a skateboard park and bike park in town.
- There is Lamoille Valley Snowmobile access in Johnson.
- The Long Trial is in Johnson.
- There are Lamoille Union School trails.

- Johnson has received a \$10,000 grant for recreation facilities.
- There are great roads to walk on with nice views.
- The town has acquired many acres of new land.
- The Lamoille River and college ponds can be used for fishing.
- There is a community sports program.
- There is a dedicated group of people working to get more sports for youth.
- Johnson has great hunting and good access points.
- There are many snowmobile trails in Johnson.
- Johnson has trails that allow equestrian use.
- The town has a YOGA program.
- Johnson has the Art House.
- The Vermont Studio Center brings artists and poets to Johnson.
- Johnson has a scouting program for both boys and girls.
- There is an ice rink in town.
- Johnson is also close to the Morrisville ice rink.
- There is an annual Winter Carnival in Johnson.
- Johnson has a summer recreation program.
- Johnson has the “Free Reach After School Enrichment Program”.

Challenges in this Area

- Baseball sign-ups are low.
- There is not enough involvement from kids.
- No one new is stepping up to take over existing programs.
- Many citizens felt that children do not have transportation to sports facilities.
- The elementary school is far from the recreation fields.
- There are no sports offered after school.
- Many citizens felt that there was a lack of coordinating, publicizing, and spreading the word about recreation opportunities.
- Paths that are already established need to be connected to each other.
- There are not enough sidewalks for kids to use.
- Johnson kids need a way to use the Johnson State College facilities.
- There is no common place for citizens to come together and hang out, especially in the wintertime.
- A large number of residents feel that there is a need for a recreation coordinator.
- There is not a youth center in Johnson.
- There is not enough room for the Boy Scout troop to meet.
- There is a section of river in Johnson that has restrictions on fishing.
- Some residents feel that ATV’s are destroying local trails that are often used by snowmobiles. This has caused property owners to stop giving access to their land.
- There is not enough funding in Johnson to support recreation activities.
- There are no snowmobile facilities that invite snowmobilers to come into the village for things such as food and gas. Facilities include a bridge across the Lamoille River.
- The community should work together to solve these problems.

- The old COOP building should be used for a community purpose, such as a youth center, housing for a recreation coordinator, a dance studio, or indoor rock-climbing wall.
- Some residents said they would help establish a youth group.
- Many snowmobile members and firemen agreed that they would help build trails.
- The people of Johnson need to identify their resources.
- The service-learning center at Johnson State College could possibly be used as a helper.
- Some residents felt that the Student Conservation Association, AmeriCorps XVXX and VGCC could be used for help.
- An email network could be created to help link people who have separate missions, so they can together figure out the larger picture.
- The Tatro property of 180 acres could be used for recreation activities.
- There needs to be more public involvement.
- “Break down the silos” and connect all assets.

Visiting Team Observations

1. There is a lack of coordination to support recreation opportunities.
2. A recreation coordinator is needed.
3. Funding resources for recreation exist.
4. Johnson has strong assets.
5. A strong partnership with Johnson State College is important for economic development and recreation.
6. Recreation and economic development are integral for success.

Resource Team C

Chuck Ross, State Director, US Senator Patrick J. Leahy (Team Facilitator-Session 1 & 2)
Fred Schmidt, Executive Director, UVM Center for Rural Studies (Team Facilitator-Session 3)
Joss Besse, Director, Vermont Downtown Program
Michele Boomhower, Executive Director, Lamoille Co. Planning Commission (Session 1 & 2)
Andy Broderick, President, Housing Vermont
Paul Bruhn, Executive Director, Preservation Trust of Vermont (Session 3)
Pat McDonald, Secretary, Vermont Agency of Transportation
Anita Rios Moore, Special Projects Coordinator, USDA-Rural Development
Gus Seelig, Executive Director, Vermont Housing and Conservation
Candy Koenemann, Executive Assistant, Vermont Council on Rural Development (Scribe)

I. Public Transportation Focus Group

Richard Aupperlee
Kenneth A. Brier Sr.
George Clark
Bob Hoag

Dorothy MaloneRising
Yvonne Martin
George Pearlman
Jon Reidel

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- RCT (Rural Community Transportation) services Johnson.
- RCT works with Alpha Transport, another agency in the area, to cover many, but not all, customer needs in Johnson.
- There are several taxi companies who service the area.
- Funding to support RCT was approved by all area communities at Town Meeting this year.
- Emergency services and road crews are excellent.
- Smugglers Notch provides free van service to transport people from Stowe to Morrisville for part of the year.
- Arts, stores, post office and other necessary services are within walking distance.
- The location of the community on Route 15 and Route 100C makes it possible to get to many larger areas within a 40 mile radius.
- Vermont Ride Share might be a resource and RCT does communicate with Ride Share for car pool possibilities.
- The river areas could be developed for recreational transport if certain danger areas could be corrected.

Challenges in this Area

- There is a lack of a major transport agency since Vermont Transit recently stopped service in the area.
- The community needs a transport service that allows for day trips.
- Around 80% Vermont Studio Center visitors do not have cars, so they are limited to where they can go.
- The community needs to be able to access the Link system.
- Taxi service is extremely expensive.
- The airport service in Morrisville is a resource for medical transport, but not commercial air service; Burlington is 40 miles away.
- Johnson State College transport is only available for the JSC students; residents can't access that service.
- Most of those present supported the need for integration of all transit resources to provide for everyone's needs. Many times during the session, residents expressed concern around the diversity of transportation needs of the population within Johnson.
- Lack of transportation hinders access to employment beyond the community.
- Lamoille County Railroad is now defunct but could be developed for use.
- Landfill trucking traffic creates danger, damages road surfaces, shakes structures and is extremely loud.
- Sidewalks are not continuous, and where there are gaps there is a danger to pedestrians that limits walking areas.
- A Pathway Plan is in the works but is not completed yet.
- The community lacks benches and other resting places for those who have mobility challenges.

- Currently, roads and bridges are too narrow for safe biking, but developing the Rail Trail would help this issue.
- All agreed that Route 100C is very narrow with no shoulders and has a 40 footbridge that is difficult for all types of traffic to negotiate safely.
- A suggestion was made that surface water problems could be related to roadway flooding, and thus should be examined.
- Nearly everyone commented on the current conditions of several bridges, some local and some state owned, that are in desperate need of repair. Some are expected to be renovated but are not there yet.
- When bridges do get closed for repair, alternate travel routes will be a great concern.
- Everyone expressed support for developing transport that services the seniors, those with medical needs and disabilities, JSC students and the unemployed seeking work.
- Some residents pointed to a need for a traffic light for pedestrians to help alleviate some of the walking hazards.
- While there are some informal places for commuter parking, many felt there is a need to develop a formal Park and Ride area.
- Residents pointed to addressing safety issues so that the rivers could be developed for safe recreational transport.
- A canoe access could open canoeing as a recreational activity in the area below the falls.
- Johnson could develop signage to indicate dangerous rapids in certain river sections.

Visiting Team Observations

1. There are great possibilities for integrating different transport agencies to provide the services for the community which need to be developed. An inventory of the services and identification of the market that will access the services may show enough people to make coordination worthwhile for the residents, students, Vermont Studio Center participants, and potential employers outside the community.
2. The compact design of the village should motivate efforts to enhance walk-ability and economic development. The needs of the disabled should be considered in this process.
3. The central location of Johnson allows it to serve as a hub to larger cities in the area (within 40 miles), and accessible public transportation needs to be provided.
4. Communication with JSC should be attempted to examine the potential for sharing services.
5. Truck traffic, damage to infrastructure, narrow roads, and dangerous pedestrian conditions need to be pulled together and addressed.

I. Pathways Plan Focus Group

Kenneth A. Brier Sr.
RoseMarie Brier
Kim Dunkley
Linda Jones
Martha Leonard
Willard Leonard
Jim MacDowell

Dorothy Malone-Rising
Yvonne Martin
Cindy Nease
Helen Perkins
Howard Romero
Joseph Salerno
Dean West

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Johnson is a rural village with sidewalks throughout most of the community.
- It is a small core village where residents can get to mostly everything by foot.
- Residents feel connected because so many people walk and stop and chat along the way, which gives a high sense of community.
- The village is close to the Long Trail.
- If the Rail Trail is developed, it will improve accessibility to the Long Trail and recreation fields.
- Limited parking creates a walking benefit to get around the village.
- Elders, residents, JSC and the arts center are clustered in the village, making services available within short walking distances.
- The Pathways project could provide exercise for the disabled if resting spots are included.
- There are a number of good locations and loops for walking and biking if certain accessibility/safety problems are corrected.
- VSC has a 1km cross country ski trail.
- Landowners in VSC area are agreeable to informal use of their land as a pathway.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- The VAST bridge was lost in 1995 and needs to be repaired to allow for access.
- There's a need to address the safety gaps and other problems that keep key areas such as Railroad St., College Hill, Main St., covered bridge on 100C, etc. from being widely used by pedestrians.
- A boat access would optimize the recreational resource of the rivers.
- Some VSC students live in the village, but if sidewalks connected all the way to JSC, other students might access village service more.
- The lack of continuous sidewalks is dangerous when snowbanks make it necessary to walk in the street.
- Continuous sidewalks and walking loops might get sedentary people out walking more.
- It will be important to educate residents who don't walk regularly about location of walking loops and paths.
- People need to determine the present status of the Pathway Plan and what is needed to implement it.
- Johnson needs to explore "downtown designation".
- The town needs to obtain assurances from landowners that property is available for snowmobile and hiking trails.
- It will be important to make certain that the aged and disabled can negotiate walking surfaces safely.
- Pathways implementation should interface with highway, speed control, and road width planning.

- Developing businesses on the western side of Johnson lack connected pathways to the village.
- Numerous improvement plans are being developed, but funding needs to be found to make them happen.
- A Community and Economic Development Coordinator position is proposed, but that needs funding too.
- The community as a whole has not approved any plans, so the public needs to be informed and brought to consensus.
- The Main Street Bridge project must be completed first and is currently in limbo.

Visiting Team Observations

1. There are many good ideas for solving pathway issues, but active participation and agreement is needed before going forward. Then funding must be obtained to implement.
2. In making its case for the priority of its infrastructure needs, Johnson could illustrate to AOT the importance of the road and bridge work improvements and renovations by explaining how infrastructure, safety and economic elements need to be treated as a package in order to sustain Johnson.
3. Johnson could approach other communities for insight on how they have addressed similar issues.
4. VSC needs to be involved in areas where coordination would mutually benefit both parties.
5. It seems important to continue to pursue funding the Coordinator position as this person can be essential to streamlining efforts.
6. Lamoille County legislative representatives are in key Appropriation Committee roles and might be informed and involved in these efforts.
7. Proper zoning is necessary to access some funding sources.

II. Main Street Project and Transportation through Downtown Focus Group

*Richard Aupperlee
 Alan Bear
 Lisa Buell
 Carol Collins
 Carley Coolidge
 Jeff Corey
 Woody Dionne
 Sandy Ellow
 Stan Ellow
 Jon Gregg
 Bob Hoag
 Duncan Hastings
 Mary Johnson*

*Linda Jones
 Dawn Kellogg
 Lea Kilvdyova
 Al Lamos
 Laura Lehouillier
 David Marvin
 Lucy Marvin
 Peter Moynihan
 Jason Ohrum
 Diana Osborn
 Eric Osgood
 George Pearlman
 Helen Perkins*

Walter Pomroy
Joseph Salerno
Bob Selby

Jack Slagle
Louise Van Weise
Dean West

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- A group of Johnson residents started the Main Street Plan in 2001 which has primarily been funded through grant money. The citizen group developed a goal to make the (state owned Route 15) mile stretch of road a cohesive unit by extending sidewalks, planting trees, do things to unify it visually, slow/calm traffic, bury utility lines, make the village more attractive, and make it safe for pedestrians. AOT and an engineering firm conferred on recommendations.
- The Plan itself is an important asset.
- The new municipal offices are within walking distance and many present expressed the idea that the village itself is very walk-able in terms of accessing businesses and services.
- The village buildings are classic in structure and preserve the architectural heritage of Johnson's past.
- A local resident plants flowers in the village and uses seasonal decorations during the holidays.
- The road maintenance crew is especially good.
- There are a variety of eateries in the village.
- The residents are wonderful people offering great diversity with differing points of view.
- Pedestrian travel provides great opportunities for sharing opinions and conversation.
- The community enjoys a nice farmer's market.
- The utility rates are low and the water is good.
- Johnson is located about 40 miles from "everywhere".
- The VSC facility offers residents access to its library, gym and theater.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- Most of the group agreed that parking is a big issue. This was expressed numerous times during the session.
- Many people recognized that the lack of funding is holding up necessary bridge and sidewalk construction.
- A four-way traffic light at Route 15 and Pearl Street is needed for peak commuting times between 7-9 AM and 4-5 PM.
- Parking on Main Street obstructs the view of motorists trying to turn onto Route 15.
- Since Route 15 is state owned, there is little that Johnson can do by itself to address traffic flow and traffic control measures.
- Truck traffic needs to be slowed down for safety reasons.

- The LDC Parking Study identified that the enforcement of time limits allowed parking is more of an issue than actual number of parking spaces. Few people know the results of this study, and community members should be educated about the results.
- According to the study, cars traveling through Johnson often go 10 miles per hour over the speed limit.
- The group mainly agreed that all day use of parking spots was an issue, but some stated there is a need to “seed” the parking areas to show the presence of an open business.
- Annual (usually in September) maintenance of crosswalk painting is the responsibility of AOT, but residents indicated that the crosswalk markings are highly worn and the maintenance schedule isn’t always adhered to by the State. The Town has even offered to paint the crosswalks.
- Route 15 is a state owned road over which Johnson has no jurisdiction and Johnson cannot afford the take over all the maintenance expenses.
- There is no consensus about what to do, and a balancing between all interests needs to occur.
- One resident repeatedly expressed concern about the Plan and the extreme (+/- \$3.4 million) cost to implement all phases.
- Problems with solid waste trucks traveling through the area need to be addressed.
- One resident expressed concern about the impact of a right of way that would deny access to his property. He was told it was a mistake on the Plan. However, implementation of the Plan may require limiting access to other properties if necessary to improve parking and traffic issues.
- Funding was raised time and time again as a huge obstacle in moving forward with any of the identified improvements. (Bridge, road and sidewalk repairs, Plan implementation, sewer/water.)
- The utilities are in the AOT right of way and if Johnson moves anything, Johnson is financially responsible.
- If bridges are closed for repairs, alternate traffic routes and their impact will be a concern.
- It may be necessary to acquire land to provide more parking areas.
- There is currently a municipal parking lot but there are spatial obstacles to using it. This lot has also evolved into an unofficial “park and ride” lot.
- The community has not developed a shared vision for the downtown or its development.
- Some claim that residents will not support raising taxes to fund the project. The 835 utility customers cannot support the costs of burying the power lines. Look at alternatives.
- Johnson could come up with a plan to fund the varying upgrades that need to be done to the utilities and piggy back them to state money. Other groups such as Verizon are involved with the lines and must be also be considered in the planning process. There is also the potential of flooding impacts on underground lines to worry about.
- Without the project, Main St. businesses are moving out to the edge of town and sprawl is a concern.
- Johnson needs to explore a “downtown designation”.
- One resident expressed concern about the motivation of the residents who are promoting the plan and wants the community to receive communication that explains why the plan is necessary.

Visiting Team Observations

1. Parking is a huge issue for the community.
2. Funding is not established for the plan, bridge repairs and other identified projects.

3. All elements of traffic flow and control need to be addressed including the landfill traffic, interim routes while bridge repairs are going on, and general concerns.
4. Addressing sprawl concerns is critically important to preserving Johnson's heritage.
5. Johnson could work toward a "downtown designation".
6. There are many goals on the table but not a consensus on how to reach them. This needs to happen first.
7. For Johnson's downtown to thrive, it's important to focus on the pedestrian community.

Johnson Community Visit

Resource Team

Joss Besse, Director
Vermont Downtown Program-VT Dept of Housing &
Community Affairs
National Life Bldg., Drawer B
Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-5212 802-828-3206 (fax)
Email – joss.besse@state.vt.us

Michelle Boomhower, Executive Director
Lamoille County Planning Commission
PO Box 1009
Morrisville, VT 05661
802-888-4548 802-888-6938 (fax)
Email – mboomhower.lcpc@pshift.com

Andy Broderick, President
Housing Vermont
123 St. Paul Street
Burlington, VT 05401
802-863-8434 802-660-9034 (fax)
Email – andy@hvt.org

Paul Bruhn, Executive Director
Preservation Trust of Vermont
104 Church st. #21
Burlington, VT 05401
802-658-6647 802-658-0576 (fax)
Email – paul@ptvermont.org

Hal Cohen, Executive Director
Central Vermont Community Action Council
195 U.S. Route 302 - Berlin
Barre, VT 05641
802-479-1053 802-479-5353 (fax)
Email - hcohen@cvcac.org

Paul Costello, Executive Director
Vermont Council on Rural Development
PO Box 1384
Montpelier, VT 05601-1384
802-828-6024 802-828-6014 (fax)
Email – vcrd@sover.net

Amy Darley, Human Services Coordinator
U.S. Senator Jeffords Office
453 Stonecutters Way
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-223-5273 802-223-0416 (fax)
Email – amy_darley@jeffords.senate.gov

Bethany Eisel
UVM Center for Rural Studies
207 Morrill Hall
Burlington, VT 05405
802-656-3021
Email – beisel@uvm.edu

Allen (Chip) Evans, Executive Director
Human Resources Investment Council
5 Green Mt. Drive PO Box 488
Montpelier, VT 05601-0488
802-828-4156 802-828-4022 (fax)
Email - cevans@hric.state.vt.us

Wayne Fawbush, Executive Director
Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
61 Elm St.
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-828-5320 802-223-2336
Email – wayne@vsjf.org

Carlen Finn, Executive Director
VT Children's Forum
PO Box 261
Montpelier, VT 05601
802-229-6377 802-229-4929 (fax)
Email – carlenf@childrensforum.org

Peter A. Gilbert, Executive Director
Vermont Humanities Council
200 Park St.
Morrisville, VT 05661
802-888-3183 802-888-1236 (fax)
Email – pgilbert@vermonthumanities.org

John Hall, Commissioner
Housing and Community Affairs
National Life Building, Drawer 20
802-828-5216 802-828-2928 (fax)
Email – john.s.hall@state.vt.us

Seth Herman
UVM Center for Rural Studies
207 Morrill Hall
Burlington, VT 05405
802-656-3021
Email – sherman@uvm.edu

Brian Keefe, Community Liaison
U.S. Senator James Jeffords
2 South Main St.
Rutland, VT 05702
802-747-3362 802-747-4413 (fax)
Email – brian_keefe@jeffords.senate.gov

Candy Koenemann, Executive Assistant
Vermont Council on Rural Development
PO Box 1384
Montpelier, VT 05601-1384
802-828-6022 802-828-6014 (fax)
Email – vcrd2@sover.net

Jolinda LaClair, State Director
USDA - Rural Development
89 Main St. 3rd floor City Center
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-828-6066 802-828-6018 (fax)
Email – jolinda.laclair@vt.usda.gov

Karen Temple Lynch
Lamoille Economic Development Corp.
PO Box 455
Morrisville, VT 05661
802-888-5640
Email – karen@lamoilleeconomy.org

Patricia A. McDonald, Secretary
VT Agency of Transportation
Drawer 33 National Life Bldg.
Montpelier, VT 05633
802-828-2657 802-828-3522 (fax)
Email – patricia.mcdonald@state.vt.us

Anita Rios Moore, Special Programs Coordinator
USDA-Rural Development
89 Main St. 3rd floor City Center
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-828-6006 802-828-6018 (fax)
Email – anita.moore@vt.usda.gov

George Robson, Natural Products Spec.
VT Dept of Economic Development
National Life Bldg, Drawer 20
Montpelier, VT 05620-0501
802-828-5241
Email – grobson@dca.state.vt.us

Chuck Ross, State Director
US Senator Patrick J. Leahy
199 Main St. Courthouse Plaza
Burlington, VT 05401
802-863-2525 802-658-1009 (fax)
Email – Chuck_Ross@Leahy.Senate.gov

Fred Schmidt, Director
Center for Rural Studies
207 Morrill Hall UVM
Burlington, VT 05405
802-656-8404 802-656-0776 (fax)
Email - fschmidt@zoo.uvm.edu

Gus Seelig, Executive Director
Vermont Housing and Conservation
149 State St.
Montpelier, VT 05602-3301
802-828-3250 802-828-3203 (fax)
Email – gseelig@vhcb.state.vt.us

Richard White, President
Community National Bank
PO Box 259
Derby, VT 05829
802-334-7915 Ext 1044 802-334-3484 (fax)
Email – white@communitynationalbank.com

Jonathan Wood, Commissioner
VT Dept of Forests, Parks and Recreation
103 So. Main St. 9 South
Waterbury, VT 05671-0601
802-241-3670 802-244-1481 (fax)
Email – jonathanwood@anr.state.vt.us

Johnson Resource Day Team

Michelle Boomhower, Executive Director
Lamoille County Planning Commission
PO Box 1009
Morrisville, VT 05661
802-888-4549 802-888-6938 (fax)
Email – mboomhower.lcpc@pshift.com

Andy Broderick, President
Housing Vermont
123 St. Paul Street
Burlington, VT 05401
802-863-8435 802-660-9034 (fax)
Email – andy@hvt.org

Curt Carter, Economic Development Director
VT Dept of Economic Development
National Life Bldg, Drawer 20
Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-5233 802-828-3258 (fax)
Email – curt@thinkvermont.com

Paul Costello, Executive Director
Vermont Council on Rural Development
PO Box 1384
Montpelier, VT 05601-1384
802-828-6024 802-828-6014 (fax)
Email – vcrd@sover.net

Ken Horseman, Communications Director
VT Dept of Economic Development
National Life Bldg, Drawer 20
Montpelier, VT 05620
802-828-5236 802-828-3258 (fax)
Email – ken@thinkvermont.com

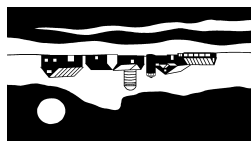
Candy Koenemann, Executive Assistant
Vermont Council on Rural Development
PO Box 1384
Montpelier, VT 05601-1384
802-828-6023 802-828-6014 (fax)
Email – vcrd2@sover.net

Chuck Leif
The Hartland Group
14 Summit Street
Burlington, VT 05401
802-655-6991 802-660-8018 (fax)
Email – chuck@hartlandgroup.biz

Mike Miller, Planner
Lamoille County Planning Commission
PO Box 1009
Morrisville, VT 05661
802-888-4550 802-888-6938 (fax)
Email – mmiller.lcpc@pshift.com

Nancy Owens, Developer
Housing Vermont
123 St. Paul Street
Burlington, VT 05401
802-863-8435 802-660-9034 (fax)
Email – nancy@hvt.org

Gretchen Saries, Field Representative
U.S. Senator Leahy's Office
87 State St. PO Box 933
Montpelier, VT 05601
802-229-569 802-229-1915 (fax)
Gretchen_Saries@Leahy.senate.



The Vermont Council on Rural Development