

**POULTNEY
COMMUNITY VISIT
REPORT AND ACTION PLAN**



**Vermont Council on Rural Development
December 2002**

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Introduction

Fred Schmidt, the Director of the Center for Rural Studies at UVM says, “when you know one Vermont community, you...know *one* Vermont community.” To the Visiting Team working with the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD), the Poultney Community Visit was full of surprises—it is truly a unique town, with exceptional and enviable strengths and opportunities.

The first thing one notes is the beautiful layout of the town and the wonderful character of the land surrounding it. The most impressive thing one learns over time is the capacity of the community: the strength and diversity of community leadership; the general sophistication about community development; and the dedication of community members to build on success and make Poultney stronger and better.

Like any rural community in Vermont, Poultney has challenges connected to its size, resources, organization and communications. Many of these issues are detailed in this report. For the Community Visit Team, however, each challenge seemed to be met by a deep set of skills and a number of practical means to move forward.

The Community Visit had three major parts:

1. On the **Community Visit Day** on September 26th, Visiting Team members heard testimony from Poultney 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 Poultney **Community Meeting** on November 6th, 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 December 2nd, 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 Poultney 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 Poultney'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.

We need to thank each of the Community Visitors, the Poultney Community Visit Chair, Tim Kononan, the Poultney Rotary Club who hosted the Community Dinner on September 26th, the Poultney Steering Committee who led the way, and especially Jonas Rosenthal, Poultney Town Manager, for taking the lead with local organization and logistics.

Finally, we deeply appreciate Peter Huntoon's donation of the beautiful image of Poultney for the cover of this report. The painting resonates with defining events in the history of Poultney. To us, the painting also represents a key element in Poultney's vision: looking from the High School to the downtown (and business community), and on to the College is a scene of real Vermont beauty. Perhaps it also symbolizes the ties and partnerships between these elements of Poultney, and how essential their partnership will be for Poultney youth, and indeed for the future success and prosperity of the entire community.

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.

To us at VCRD, the Poultney visit was a great success. Residents came out. Leaders emerged and committed themselves to the work ahead. VCRD has found that a critically important key to the long-term success of Task Forces is a strong chairperson structure. We've also learned that efforts need to be united and coordinated by a single Community Visit Chairperson who meets with the Task Force chairs and helps keep the process moving forward as whole. In the end a strong structure emerged in Poultney for ongoing communications and coordination. Through the Community Visit process, Poultney has stepped forward in community involvement, organization, and momentum. This first success gives solid ground for optimism about the future work of the Poultney Task Forces.

It has been an honor and pleasure for VCRD and our partners to participate in these discussions with Poultney residents.

I. Poultney – Priority Challenges

Identified By Residents at Community Meeting – November 6, 2002

- ❖ **Youth Activities/Recreation/Community Center:** High School-aged youth lack creative outlets and activities. This gap in recreation resources could be addressed with support of the tremendous untapped resource of outdoor recreation and arts students and curriculum at Green Mountain College. Community members are concerned over a disconnection between youth, adults and elders and the lack of opportunities for youth in community service, community leadership, and joint activities with adults, elders, and school children. In addition, Poultney youth have no place to go; there is no one place that serves as a center for community activities for youth, teens, and adults. The community lacks public facilities, parks, skating rinks, a skate park, or appropriate places for youth to hang out. A community center could provide recreational activities, arts and drama, and outlets for community service to all ages.
- ❖ **Education:**

Academic Performance/Educational Perception: It is critically important for Poultney schools to raise test scores from Reading, Writing and Math Evaluations in 2nd Grade to SAT scores for high school students anticipating college attendance. Because of negative perceptions about educational results and discipline, taxpayers, including many elders on fixed incomes, have difficulty making the sacrifices required to improve the schools. The community as a whole needs to see and participate in developing forward momentum for the schools. Then, by celebrating and publicizing that momentum, the community may build upon it.

Poultney School Facilities/High School Plan: Poultney School buildings need to be upgraded. The Elementary School needs a new roof; science labs should be modernized; and space issues must be addressed. To build the momentum needed to obtain taxpayer support, a facilities plan must be conjoined with a practical plan for school improvement, community service activities by students, and the systematic encouragement of community and college partnerships in the education system. In addition, Poultney needs to build a process to evaluate the long-term viability of the high school. This evaluation should include a cost/benefit analysis and review of potential alternatives. If the town determines to maintain its high school, it should develop an improvement plan, consider essential enhancements including, for example, distance-learning options, and provide other supports necessary for Poultney students to be successful. If the town decides to pursue options other than maintaining its local high school, then it needs to plan and provide for alternative educational opportunities.
- ❖ **Poultney Community Vision:** Poultney residents should build a vision of the future of the community that would help to guide decisions on everything from town planning and zoning to educational funding, and economic development strategies.
- ❖ **Economic Development:** Poultney should build an economic development team to support economic diversification including value-added agricultural products; marketing slate slag and other slate industry issues including regulatory barriers; attracting and developing retail, banking, lodging and restaurant services downtown; attracting knowledge-based industry; encouraging entrepreneurs; and attracting businesses to the community. In this area, internet and high-speed telecommunications access should be improved by an analysis of existing needs and a community-wide pooling of demand to attract a provider who can develop a positive local solution. The issue of

cell phone coverage also needs to be addressed. Poultney should also develop a coordinated tourism and marketing plan that includes improved signage, gateways at each end of the town, public access to the lake, agro-tourism opportunities, development (or attraction) of overnight accommodations, trail signage and improvement, and tourist information services.

- ❖ **Community/College Partnership:** The Town of Poultney and full community need to build a systematic relationship with Green Mountain College. Community members seek access to College resources, and the community could be a tremendous educational asset for student involvement, education and leadership activities across the board. Residents would also like to support the college and pool resources. The College, its students and staff, could be a tremendous asset in confronting any established priorities of the community.

II. Poultney - Major Challenges

Identified by Focus Groups – September 26, 2002

- ❖ **Youth Activities/Recreation:** High School-aged youth lack creative outlets and activities. This gap in recreation resources could be addressed with support of the tremendous untapped resource of outdoor recreation and arts students and curriculum at Green Mountain College. Community members are concerned over a disconnection between youth, adults and elders and the lack of opportunities for youth in community service, community leadership, and joint activities with adults, elders, and school children.
- ❖ **Community Center:** Poultney youth have no place to go; there is no one place that serves as a center for community activities for youth, teens, and adults. The community lacks public facilities, parks, skating rinks, a skate park, or appropriate places for youth to hang out. A community center could provide recreational activities, arts and drama, and outlets for community service to all ages.
- ❖ **School Facilities:** Poultney School buildings need to be upgraded. The Elementary School needs a new roof; science labs should be modernized; and space issues must be addressed. To build the momentum needed to obtain taxpayer support, a facilities plan must be conjoined with a practical plan for school improvement, community service activities by students, and the systematic encouragement of community and college partnerships in the education system.
- ❖ **Transportation:** Limited busing and the lack of a rural taxi system leave elders and youth without ready access to regional resources, recreation and activities. Transportation is a major issue for senior citizens both within the community and to reach health care and shopping opportunities in Rutland. The lack of public transportation minimizes youth recreation opportunities; there is no ski bus or way to get to Rutland for movies or evening activities.
- ❖ **Recreation Coordination:** Recreational activities are currently uncoordinated, and communications surrounding recreation are limited.
- ❖ **Educational Perception:** Because of negative perceptions about educational results and discipline, taxpayers, including many elders on fixed incomes, have difficulty making the sacrifices required to improve the schools. The community as a whole needs to see and participate in developing forward momentum for the schools. Then, by celebrating and publicizing that momentum, the community may build upon it.
- ❖ **Community Service/Volunteerism:** Poultney residents have terrific untapped volunteer resources. There's a need for volunteers to work with elders; youth need positive activities; Green Mountain College students need practicums and other ways to participate in community betterment; elders wish to participate in support of the schools. A system for volunteer coordination, including expectations for community service by students in the schools, could provide resources for positive activities throughout the community.
- ❖ **Community Communications:** Poultney should set up a systematic information exchange between community service groups, churches, schools, the village and town and all working for the betterment of the town. Information exchange could be facilitated by a town sheet in the local paper,

town announcements on radio at a set time, the integration of town info in the College and school newsletters, a central public bulletin board, and a regularly updated website.

- ❖ **Tourism and Marketing:** Poultney should develop a coordinated tourism and marketing plan that includes improved signage, gateways at each end of the town, public access to the lake, agro-tourism opportunities, development (or attraction) of overnight accommodations, trail signage, and improvement and tourist information services.
- ❖ **Poultney Community Vision:** Poultney residents should build a vision of the future of the community that would help to guide decisions on everything from town planning and zoning to educational funding, and economic development strategies.
- ❖ **Academic Performance:** It is critically important for Poultney schools to raise test scores from Reading, Writing and Math Evaluations in 2nd Grade to SAT scores for high school students anticipating college attendance.
- ❖ **Economic Development:** Poultney should build an economic development team to support economic diversification including value-added agricultural products, telecommunications infrastructure, marketing slate slag and other slate industry issues including regulatory barriers, attracting and developing retail, banking, lodging and restaurant services downtown, attracting knowledge-based industry, encouraging entrepreneurs, and attracting businesses to the community.
- ❖ **Affordable Housing:** The Poultney community should build a plan for affordable housing development or renovation and find partners in development to upgrade housing stock and uplift neighborhoods.
- ❖ **Town/Village Division:** Poultney municipal management and decision-making would be simplified, and costs potentially lessened, if a town/village merger were to take place. The community should institute an evaluation, including a cost-benefit analysis, of a town/village merger.
- ❖ **Telecommunications:** Internet and high-speed telecommunications access should be improved by an analysis of existing needs and a community-wide pooling of demand to attract a provider who can develop a positive local solution. The issue of cell phone coverage also needs to be addressed.
- ❖ **High School:** Poultney needs to build a process to evaluate the long-term viability of the high school. This evaluation should include a cost/benefit analysis and review of potential alternatives. If the town determines to maintain its high school, it should develop an improvement plan, consider essential enhancements including, for example, distance-learning options, and provide other supports necessary for Poultney students to be successful. If the town decides to pursue options other than maintaining its local high school, then it needs to plan and provide for alternative educational opportunities.
- ❖ **Community/College Partnership:** The Town of Poultney and full community need to build a systematic relationship with Green Mountain College. Community members seek access to College resources, and the community could be a tremendous educational asset for student involvement, education, and leadership activities across the board. Residents would also like to support the college and pool resources. The College, its students and staff, could be a tremendous asset in confronting any established priorities of the community.

- ❖ **Police Coverage:** Concerns about nuisance crimes, multiple offenders “on the street”, and lack of visible coverage converge to suggest that the Poultney should evaluate its current police coverage, analyze options, and build a plan to address the issue for Town consideration.
- ❖ **Downtown Development:** Poultney needs to improve its downtown, diversify downtown businesses, and improve the attractiveness of its center.

III. VCRD Resource Team Recommendations

In response to the Five Poultney Priority Challenges

Poultney Community Vision

- **Create a vision** inclusive of shared values and principles that reflect what is of fundamental importance to the citizens of Poultney. The Poultney vision is of paramount importance and can unify the community and bind the work related to the other challenges and future issues together. Galvanize the community by developing processes for involvement that respect and welcome diversity of interest but strive to clarify common ground that the entire community can embrace.
- **The vision should provide leadership and unity to community efforts.** The vision should identify real opportunities and be grounded in hope, optimism and community pride—pride of the past and pride of what could be.
- **Create a slogan** – symbolize and showcase community enthusiasm and commitment, articulate Poultney’s spirit! “Poultney on the move!” (or something to that effect). This could serve as an easy first step and a rallying point for coordinating community efforts.
- **Create a logo to accompany the slogan** – visually express the community’s character and energy, give citizens an emblem with which to identify and signify the essence of Poultney.
- **Town colors scheme** – use color to link the vision, slogan and logo so that the uniqueness of Poultney is associated with those colors. Color is a marketing advantage. Seek to integrate the vision colors into other aspects of community life that will serve to reinforce the notion that Poultney does have a vision and that there is something special about this community. For instance, perhaps a local business association has a banner but its color is not especially important to that group. They could replace it with the community’s colors. Given the priority of school progress perhaps the vision colors should be the school colors.
- **Town web page** – beyond the usual information municipalities and towns post about the community, use the Poultney site to articulate and highlight the community’s vision, plans and progress.
- **Recognize and award community service** – It doesn’t have to be much. A simple certificate is adequate but make the presentation highly visible. Again, great opportunity for using the vision logo/slogan to reinforce Poultney’s commitment to the future.
- **Post banners** – the logo and/or slogan should be visually displayed throughout the community to serve as a constant reminder of Poultney’s enterprise.
- **Community kiosk** – a central symbol of community spirit. In addition to the vision, slogan and logo having a visual home base, the kiosk can serve as a place to post important information about the community. It should clearly project a welcoming and user friendly image.
- **Town benches, trash bins, flower boxes** – another opportunity for promoting a unique image about Poultney by using normal fixtures to display the visions logo and/or slogan. Visually radiate the town’s spirit.
- **Announcements, communication, community projects** – the logo and/or slogan can be used extensively throughout the community to demonstrate that Poultney is alive! The possibilities are endless: Posters, brochures, official and unofficial letterhead, annual reports,

patches on sport's teams, decals on town vehicles, tee shirts and caps, throughout the school, bumper stickers, entering Poultney signs, the logo can be sprayed on the pavement, the local newspaper may be willing to incorporate the logo, etc. Saturate the community with this expression of community pride!

- **Create a strategic plan** – use the vision to galvanize the community, to reinforce and accentuate Poultney's positive energy and community building initiative. Clearly define and articulate community challenges within the context of achieving the vision and delineating broad direction.
- **Create implementation plans** – think long term, act short term. Determine and explain incremental objectives in relation to the strategic plan. All steps should be easily understood as one piece of achieving the vision.
- **Link the community's infrastructure to the vision** – all community constituencies, groups, organizations, businesses, etc. should feel invested in the vision. Develop ongoing processes for continuing engagement around the plan so that it serves as a basis for maintaining and strengthening connections.
- **Celebrate the vision and progress** – since the vision manifests community spirit, create an annual community spirit award to acknowledge an individual (s) or group that personifies the vision. Make the presentation a special event as well that can also serve to inform the community about progress in realizing the vision. Also, create an additional ongoing acknowledgement process to spotlight individuals and groups that contribute to progress. Ongoing recognition of community spirit is essential to sustainability of the vision.
- **Vision volunteers** – beyond the need to engage citizens to create the vision, the activities and projects that reflect the vision provide extensive opportunities for local residents to participate and contribute in a tangible way. For instance, the town could choose to contract with a graphic artist to create a logo. An alternative that may more actively engage residents might be a community contest to create the logo for the town. Rather than pay to have fabric banners made, the town could organize a project using volunteers to make banners. Taking it a step further, rather than just seeking a few volunteers to take on this task, the project could be organized in such a way that assembling the banners is a community building event itself that is more family focused and celebratory in nature. The process itself is just as important a product as the products produced by the process.
- **Formalize process for inclusion, growth and feedback** – all the assorted activities associated with general vision development provide residents with opportunities for being involved, for being part of the dialogue and for gaining understanding. On a macro level, it would be desirable to have an organized routine process that ritualizes and encourages participation, that welcomes both positive feedback and constructive criticism, that legitimizes suggestions and recommendations by recording them, that acknowledges and thanks the source for their interests, and that validates receptiveness by informing the community about the actions taken in response to the input. Select board meetings and the annual report could serve as anchors of the process.
- **Use the community logo/slogan to link all activities to the town vision** – For instance, an organized community service team that picks up litter could all wear a tee shirt, cap or some other visual representation of the vision logo.
- **Use the community to design programs and activities, not just experts** – Also, use a diverse group of citizens to build or construct a community asset such as revamping a park, designing a medallion garden, building a new climbing structure at the school, etc.

- David O'Brien, Executive Director of the **Rutland Regional Economic Development** is willing to work with the Vision Task Force to help move the entire Poultney effort forward. David can be reached at 773-9147.

Youth Activities/Recreation/Community Center

- Poultney should integrate the recreational focus of and potential internships with Green Mountain College and its students. This could include **program leadership and mentoring relationships by college students**. This may require a graduated mentorship where college students and Poultney students climb a relationship ladder of increasing trust and complexity to show themselves, parents and teachers that the mentorship works and both parties are responsible participants.
- **Identify Leadership for a potential Teen Center**—This could be done, again, in partnership with GMC as part of recreational and other majors like business and child psychology (as pertinent).
- **An Ice Rink** could be developed in the short term as a cooperative venture with the college or surrounding communities. There are low budget ways to proceed, including the use of town highway and fire station equipment to level a place for a rink, flood the surface, and shovel snow as needed. This might make for an easy and tangible success.
- **Create local conflict resolution capacity** – although the community safety issue seems to be less of a community priority at the present time, all communities face social cohesiveness challenges due to crime and conflict. Routine community undertakings are often beset with conflict and effective problem solving is overshadowed by win/lose perspectives. Having a pool of residents trained in restorative conflict resolution skills could serve the community in addressing a broad range of problems and in a variety of conflict settings, not just criminal matters. Restorative experiences and philosophy could strengthen the town's vision and enhance its future. Poultney could establish a citizen board to deal directly with low level crime and conflict. The Department of Corrections offers assistance in setting up "Justice Centers" to provide for Restorative Justice and conflict resolution, including school disciplinary and truancy issues. Leaders include David Peebles at 241-2261, and Hans Johnson, 786-5034.
- **After School Program** – No need to wait until a center is established. Programs, activities and services can be arranged at multiple locations as necessary. Involve private sector as well for volunteers and support. Program design should be formed around a core essential foundation of good citizenship and responsibility. Create opportunities for learning that support school efforts and bring the community's diverse assets together.
- **Create a Community Service System** – have a blueprint and calendar to organize and ritualize community service so that it becomes a cohesive and valued community norm.
- The Vermont Children's Forum has developed a new **Youth Leadership Training Program** which might be invited to hold sessions in town to help develop youth leadership and community service projects. Carlen Finn is their director: 229-6377.

Education

Academic Performance/Educational Perception

- Poultney Schools have to work to improve student performance in a systematic fashion. They should engage the community as fully as possible in this effort, and tell the story of school improvement through every possible medium.
- The Task Force should form the first circle of a **community-wide dialogue** exploring the importance of school performance. This dialogue should include skeptics as well as supporters, and constituencies who benefit from strong schools: business, realtors, and the college. Part of this dialogue is a full understanding of the costs of low performance to the economic and social fabric of the community over the long-term.
- One way to build community participation would utilize a **Study Circles** process to inform the public about the challenges and at the same time involve the community in solutions. This grass-roots level of communication can be more powerful than a PR campaign. Winton Goodrich, at the Vermont School Board's Association (223-3580) can explain how to use the Study Circles model. Hans Johnson, Regional Director of Community and Restorative Justice, is also available with information on planning and methodology—786-5034. Finally, Sarah Campbell, the Program Director at the Study Circles Resource Center, can be reached at 799-7997.
- The nature of the two prioritized educational challenges are closely interconnected. This suggests that having two groups could be less productive than one. Work on both issues should concentrate on performance, using a broad-based community effort that will eventually lead to broad-based community support. {The community adopted this recommendation at the Resource Meeting on December 2}.
- Avail the resources of the **Vermont Institutes** for reading, writing and math program evaluation and improvement. They are part of a statewide collaboration dedicated to enhance school performance. Contact Doug Harris, their Director, at 828-0061.
- **Supplement the traditional curriculum with direct community links** – For example, use seniors and other residents knowledgeable about Poultney to inform students about their community's history and uniqueness. These types of dialogue could be integrated into traditional curriculums and also presented as special events.
- **A Weekly Speaker's Program** at the High School or Middle School level is one way to link the school, students, community-service and community leadership together. Contact Julie Wolcott in Fairfield to learn how volunteers in that community built and operate such a program, 933-4592.
- **Acknowledge good students, parents and education supporters** –For instance, good performers could be featured on the town kiosk. Businesses, banks, and other organizations could feature the same thing. Here's another opportunity to be creative and comprehensive in asserting what is important to the community. Award these folks! Celebrate success!
- **School as community resource** – The school is a community asset that should widely serve all citizens. Structured activities should be designed to close the distance between stakeholders.
- **Detailed problem identification** – why and where is the school academically struggling? Is the curriculum inadequate? Poor quality teachers? Too many disruptive students? Too many special-Ed students? Poor school environment? Inadequate resources? Find out

what's wrong. Use professional analysis and survey students, parents, school staff, faculty, administrators and school board members. What's working? What isn't?

- Bruce Parks is the Department of Education **School Improvement Coordinator** working with the Poultney schools; he can answer many of the status questions and is a great resource for planning: 875-2753.
- **Ask Vermont DOE for technical help** – beyond what may be normally available, cultivate relationships and gather information that can help Poultney. Find out what successful schools/communities are doing. Doug Dows can refer you to experts in each problem area: 828-5109.
- **Pride in school campaign** – do special things to place the school in a positive light in the forefront of the community. Another good opportunity for partnering.
- **Tutoring/support program** – anyone struggling gets special help.
- **Mentoring program** – link students/parents, college students and other residents in an organized fashion to support educational interests and responsible citizenship. Who have you helped today?
- **Explore the possibility of a systemic connection of the high school curriculum to offerings at GMC, especially for AP Courses.**

Poultney School Facilities/High School Plan

- **Involve the community in all discussions.**
- **Explore joint opportunities with GMC.**
- **The needs of the facilities** should be substantiated in clear documentation. An analysis and update of current needs then can serve as the basis for a **cost analysis**. Finally, an **affordability study** will provide a realistic assessment for prioritization of facilities needs.
- A similar **cost-benefit analysis** should also be instituted to determine the liabilities and assets to the local high school. Build a team of credible and critical thinkers who can collect information and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of keeping the high school. 1. An analysis of liabilities should be completed. 2. A realistic **school improvement plan** should be designed that would ensure a quality high school education to Poultney young people. 3. This plan should be **cost-analyzed**. 4. Then, an **affordability study** would help the community make the decision of funding toward implementation of the local school improvement plan or making other provision for the successful education of Poultney youth.
- Another potential way to proceed would be to invite an **expert outside team** to review High School performance, the challenges before the school, and options for educating young people in other regional settings. This team of educational experts could then make a recommendation to the community.
- **Explore private academy concept** – find out about how this model works in other communities such as St. Johnsbury.

Community/College Partnership

- **Green Mountain College** is an under-utilized resource; efforts should be made to create, improve and sustain relationships between town and school leaders and the leadership at GMC; trust-building efforts should be undertaken with students at GMC and the community;

financial leveraging might be possible between GMC and Poultney with respect to infrastructure resources like athletic facilities and education facilities and courses. The Task Force should begin by identifying activities and resources that could benefit both town and college.

- Given opportunities, most college students will accept responsibilities—community responsibility could become a hallmark of the GMC program.
- **Fall welcome event** – establish a highly visible, animated welcome for new students, a true joint venture between GMC and the town. Activities should require interaction between residents and students so they have a real opportunity to get to meet each other and begin to be neighbors in the ideal sense. Symbolize the partnership.
- **Community Festival** – based upon GMC’s specialty, inaugurate an annual festival as a joint venture with the community, that promotes the specialty disciplines of the college, that links the college in a pragmatic way to the community and that draws others - vendors, customers, and other participants to the town. (This may be an opportunity to generate revenue!)
- **Community college theater** – Use an art form like theater to establish another joint venture that brings the GMC and Poultney community together, as well as outsiders to generate revenue. Work toward having outside resources “underwrite” local events.
- **Community Neighbor Program** – have residents become mentors (good neighbors) for college students.
- **A GMC Scholarship for a Poultney resident** – offer an annual scholarship to a local student to attend GMC. This could be innovatively linked to a partnership among the college, local high school and the community at large.
- **A Poultney scholarship to GMC** – the same as above in reverse. Criteria should be a little different. Both reinforce local commitment.
- **Community access program** – create a plan to use college resources such as athletic facilities, library, etc., as a way for engaging locals and developing relationships with the GMC community. For example, rather than just opening the pool (if the college has one) to the community at certain times, have an organized annual plan that includes special events and more elaborate activities. Instead of just making the pool available, offer swim lessons. Make it special.
- **Honor GMC for its community contributions** – bestow some “attaboys” for students, staff, faculty and administrators that reflect the town’s vision and exemplify the “shared spirit.” Consider a formal annual award and ceremony—celebrate the partnership.

Economic Development Issue

- Start with one project that everyone likes and wants to be part of—this will help solidify partnerships and gives a visible and concrete success for you to build on.
- The Poultney community must focus on ways of not only bringing revenue to town, but on keeping revenue/revenue generators in town.
- Consider recommendations listed under the Vision Issue above and coordinate efforts with that committee.
- **USDA RD** can be of assistance with run-down housing. Contact Robert McDonald at 828-6015.

- **Housing Vermont** is also a significant resource: Andy Broderick, President, 863-8424.
- **State agencies** dedicated to supporting economic development strategies include: The Vermont Economic Development Authority, 828-5627, www.state.vt.us/veda, The Vermont Economic Progress Council, 828-5626, fkenney@dca.state.vt.us, and the Vermont Community Development Program, 828-3211, cdaley@dca.state.vt.us.
- **Cross-promotional marketing:** Artists and artisans can serve an important function in drawing tourists to an area. Are there artists, woodworkers, crafters, who could market in conjunction with the slate industry? An inventory of studios and shops could be mapped and cross-promoted to regional visitors. For more information on this form of cross-marketing, contact Deborah Doyle-Schectmann at 828-5547 or Stephanie Carter or Diane Konrady of Tourism and Marketing at 828-3683.
- Poultney should partner with GMC to make the case that the area needs **broadband access** and cell service, assess demand with the town and contact potential providers. VCRD's Telecommunications Committee has produced a community planning guide for this purpose which can be accessed at www.sover.net~vcrd.
- **Economic vitality consortium** – create a group of varied key stakeholders who can act as a consultant group for both established businesses and prospective newcomers—this may be a role for the Task Force itself. More than marketing the area, these folks have skills and expertise to assist with specific challenges and interests.
- Be sure to invite seasonal **lake residents** to be involved; they could be a resourceful and energetic addition to each effort.
- **Poultney Feature** – given historic link to *New York Times* and *New York Tribune*, explore feasibility of parlaying that into some publicity for Poultney in a big media venue.
- **Create a revolving loan fund** - to subsidize both vision and challenge interests. Pool and recycle resources instead of lots of individual fund raising. Establish criteria that promote full utility. For instance, the community theater idea could borrow money from the fund to get started and then repay the fund when they play to paying full houses.
- **Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility** is developing a student membership program, which might connect Green Mountain College students with economic development strategies to benefit the community. Contact Spence Putnam, VBSR at 862-8347.
- The **Rutland Economic Development Corporation** could be a first line of support for Poultney's Economic Development Task Force. REDC can help with strategies ranging from permitting assistance to business attraction, and maybe grant writing. Contact David O'Brien at 773-9147.
- The **Vermont Department of Economic Development** can help access state resources in support of Poultney efforts. Contact Kiersten Bougeois at 828-5238 or Richard Smith, 828-5774.
- The **Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs** supports efforts to promote viable downtowns. Peg Elmer, 828-5220, is a good sounding board in the department.
- Or, contact Jane Lendway, Preservation Planner, Certified Local Government Program, **Downtown Program** at 802-828-3042 or Joss Besse, Downtown Program at 802-828-5212. They are experts at helping downtowns make progress and know of all state and non-profit resources that can help a downtown development program.

- **The Development of a Tourism and Marketing Plan for Poultney** could proceed through three steps.
 1. **Inventory of Assets.** What are the opportunities for visitors to have authentic and engaging experiences in Poultney? What resources/attractions does the town have to offer? What compelling story(s) does the community have to share? Is there a predominance of certain types of activities? Is there a market for these activities? Do they fit with opportunities in near-by communities that could be marketed together? What are the existing initiatives? Are they successful? If not, what are the challenges?
 2. Based on the Inventory of Assets, develop **Theme-Based Initiatives** to promote the expansion and diversification of the tourism and recreation economy.
 3. Take all the information gathered and build a unified **Marketing Plan**.
- Make sure all Poultney 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).
- Vermont's **Cultural Heritage Tourism Coordinator**, Deborah Doyle-Schechtman, 828-5547, didoyle@arts.vca.state.vt.us may also be of assistance. All of Vermont's Regional Marketing Organizations (RMOs) are listed on this website as well. The Department of Tourism and Marketing does not have monies to award, except through RMOs.
- Contact **Crossroads of Vermont**, the Regional Marketing Organization for the Poultney area, for help and support: Joe Cerreta at 775-5608.
- Diane Konrady in **Public Relations at the Department of Tourism and Marketing** is ready, willing, and able to support the efforts of the Task Force. If folks need help but are not sure whom to contact, they should feel free to use her as an ongoing resource and referral agent (223-2377).

Additional Resources

- 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. Because VCF leaders participated in the Community Visit, they have an interest in the progress of Poultney initiatives and should be contacted for advice and application materials as Task Forces implement their action plans. Contact Ann Jones-Weinstock, Vice President, at 388-3355 to discuss projects and the application process.

- VCRD and **USDA Rural Development** have established a partnership wherein USDA provides direct follow-up support to either one of the Task Forces that emerge from the Community Visit Process or in support of the Task Forces with the Community Visit Chairperson. Mike Dolce, Community Development Specialist at USDA, (775-7014) is ready to support the ongoing work of the Task Forces by providing facilitation and resource referral over the course of the next year.

IV. Poultney Task Force Action Plans

Established on the December 2nd Resource Day

Poultney Community Vision Task Force

- ❖ **Poultney Community Vision:** Poultney residents should build a vision of the future of the community that would help to guide decisions on everything from town planning and zoning to educational funding, and economic development strategies.

Chairperson: Tim Kononan (362-2424, Ext. 248)

Committee Members:

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Jack Veno	287-5743	jjveno@sover.net

Action Steps:

1. Coordinate the actions and inputs of the other 4 committees to develop “The Vision” of Poultney. Also, work with the Downtown Revitalization Committee and Quality of Life Survey (GMC) and the Town Plan.
2. Determine our “Best Fit” ie, what larger region are we (Poultney) a part of?

3. Collect town-wide opinions about the visions that Poultney residents have of their community and its future.

Resources:

1. Get action plans from the other 4 Committees.
2. Extract the vision statement from the Town Plan.
3. Obtain a copy of GMC survey.
4. Review the downtown design application.
5. Email capabilities.

Youth Activities/Recreation/Community Center Task Force

- ❖ **Youth Activities/Recreation/Community Center:** High School-aged youth lack creative outlets and activities. This gap in recreation resources could be addressed with support of the tremendous untapped resource of outdoor recreation and arts students and curriculum at Green Mountain College. Community members are concerned over a disconnection between youth, adults and elders and the lack of opportunities for youth in community service, community leadership, and joint activities with adults, elders, and school children. In addition, Poultney youth have no place to go; there is no one place that serves as a center for community activities for youth, teens, and adults. The community lacks public facilities, parks, skating rinks, a skate park, or appropriate places for youth to hang out. A community center could provide recreational activities, arts and drama, and outlets for community service to all ages.

Chairpersons: Jonas Rosenthal (287-9751) /Sheryl Porrier (287-4087)

Committee Members:

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Action Steps:

1. Facilities survey for youth “hang out”. What is/may be available, when, and for what?
2. Find/open an initial “hang out”.
3. Define might a “coordinator” role might look like for Poultney.
4. Survey human resources.

Resources:

1. Recreation Department at GMC.
2. Americorps/VISTA.
3. Paid Coordinator.
4. Youth to serve on the committee.

Education Task Force

- ❖ **Academic Performance/Educational Perception:** It is critically important for Poultney schools to raise test scores from Reading, Writing and Math Evaluations in 2nd Grade to SAT scores for high school students anticipating college attendance. Because of negative perceptions about educational results and discipline, taxpayers, including many elders on fixed incomes, have difficulty making the sacrifices required to improve the schools. The community as a whole needs to see and participate in developing forward momentum for the schools. Then, by celebrating and publicizing that momentum, the community may build upon it.
- ❖ **Poultney School Facilities/High School Plan:** Poultney School buildings need to be upgraded. The Elementary School needs a new roof; science labs should be modernized; and space issues must be addressed. To build the momentum needed to obtain taxpayer support, a facilities plan must be conjoined with a practical plan for school improvement, community service activities by students, and the systematic encouragement of community and college partnerships in the education system. In addition, Poultney needs to build a process to evaluate the long-term viability of the high school. This evaluation should include a cost/benefit analysis and review of potential alternatives. If the town determines to maintain its high school, it should develop an improvement plan, consider essential enhancements including, for example, distance-learning options, and provide other supports necessary for Poultney students to be successful. If the town decides to pursue options other than maintaining its local high school, then it needs to plan and provide for alternative educational opportunities.

Chairperson: Mary Jo Teetor (287-5836)

Committee Members:

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Royal Sheeley
Harry Stanyon
Larry Sullivan

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Action Steps:

- 1. Improve the Communication System: News out – feedback in. Website, newspaper, radio, newsletter.**
- 2. Develop a Volunteer System**
- 3. Conduct a Study of potential high school consolidation, specialization, and college relations.**
- 4. Explore Outside Environment – impact on students.**
- 5. Develop Adult Education Opportunities.**

Resources:

- 1. AmeriCorps – (personnel)**
- 2. Business - GE**
- 3. Local – retired citizens**
- 4. Colleges**
- 5. Faith Community**
- 6. Students – faculty**
- 7. Doug Dows – State of VT (Bruce Parks)**

Community/College Partnership Task Force

- ❖ **Community/College Partnership:** The Town of Poultney and full community need to build a systematic relationship with Green Mountain College. Community members seek access to College resources, and the community could be a tremendous educational asset for student involvement, education and leadership activities across the board. Residents would also like to support the college and pool resources. The College, its students and staff, could be a tremendous asset in confronting any established priorities of the community.

Chairpersons: **Beth Sanderson (sandersonb@greenmtn.edu), Chair**
 Harry Stanyon (287-9987), Co-Chair

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Action Steps:

- 1. Build Shared Activities in the Arts and Sports – Facilitate discussion between arts and sports departments at the local schools and college (Dept. Heads, Coaches, Teachers) to address expanded publicity of events and to promote student/artist performance exchange for events/shows/games. (Dale and Bob)**
- 2. Develop Service Learning Opportunities – Facilitate meetings between the community, GMC, local school, and Chamber representatives to identify potential paid/unpaid internship sites for service learning; manage press releases and announcements of activities. (Beth and Marli)**
- 3. Set up Student Mentorships – (1) follow up with the Education Committee on student mentoring (Harry); (2) Obtain contact info about the Dartmouth “DREAM” program (Beth); (3) Provide VT Youth Forum information to chairs (Chip).**
- 4. Green Mountain College Signage – Follow up with Downtown Revitalization group to provide signage identifying that a college is in the community. (Harry)**

Resources:

- 1. Beth Sanderson (former GMC student and current AmeriCorps employee).**
- 2. Education and Downtown Committees.**
- 3. Local school and college staff and community members.**
- 4. Chip Evans (program contact information)**
- 5. Dartmouth College (mentorship DREAM program info).**

Economic Development Task Force

- ❖ **Economic Development:** Poultney should build an economic development team to support economic diversification including value-added agricultural products, marketing slate slag and other slate industry issues including regulatory barriers, attracting and developing retail, banking, lodging and restaurant services downtown, attracting knowledge-based industry, encouraging entrepreneurs, and attracting businesses to the community. In this area, internet and high-speed telecommunications access should be improved by an analysis of existing needs and a community-wide pooling of demand to attract a provider who can develop a positive local solution. The issue of cell phone coverage also needs to be addressed. Poultney should also develop a coordinated tourism and marketing plan that includes improved signage, gateways at each end of the town, public access to the lake, agro-tourism opportunities, development (or attraction) of overnight accommodations, trail signage and improvement, and tourist information services.

Chairperson: Rosalie Cooksey, (287-5131)

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Action Steps:

1. **Further Develop an Inventory of Poultney's Assets** – This was done at the 9/26 meeting and the Committee would like to continually update and revisit the list.

2. Marketing Poultney – Identify audience(s) (Resources: RMO, REDC, Mary Jeanne Packer). Determine message. Determine goals. Research other communities for best practices suggestions (Resources: Vermont Chamber, Vermont League of Cities & Towns).

3. Work with the Vision Committee – Work to continue to expand quality of life in Poultney (Resources: GMC Quality of Life Survey).

4. Improve Infrastructure – a. Leverage Downtown Designation (Resources: State and local Downtown Teams). b. Explore telecom issues surrounding cell service, towers and high-speed access (Resources: REDC, GMC, state legislators, local officials, Institute for sustainable Development). c. Determine ways to improve streetscape. Address issues relating to signage, including regulations and cost. Submit suggestions to Town Manager.

5. Expand Tourism Economy– Determine what kind and how much tourism is desired (Resources: local retailers): Recreation, cultural heritage/historical, educational, natural assets.

Resources:

As stated above

V. Notes and Major Issues

Points of Testimony from the Community Visit Day, September 26, 2002

Resource Team A

Cynthia Gubb, Director of Community Services, Chittenden Bank (Team Facilitator)
Kiersten Bourgeois, Economic Development Director, VT Dept of Economic Development
Deborah Doyle-Schechtman, Cultural Heritage Tourism Coordinator, VT Arts Council
Wayne Fawbush, Executive Director, VT Sustainable Jobs Fund
Joe Fusco, Vice President, Casella Waste Systems, Inc.
David O'Brien, Executive Director, Rutland Economic Development Corp.
Spence Putnam, Executive Director, VT Businesses for Social Responsibility
Mike Dolce, Rural Development Specialist, USDA Rural Development (Scribe)

I. Tourism and Natural Resource Recreation Issue Focus Group

Harry Bingham

Barry Bradley

Meriel Brooks

Chuck Colvin

Nina Corbin

Ruth W. Czar

Joe DeBonis

Barbara Fenhagen

Alejandro Flores

Kitty Galente

Randy Kniffin

Tim Kononan

Ed Lewis

Caryl T. Morash

Andrea Mott

Mary Jeanne Packer

Marli Rupe

Harry Stanyon

Bob Williams

Bill Willson

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Poultney is close to Lake St. Catherine which provides opportunities for activities such as warm and cold weather fishing.
- The town has historical sites, particularly residential and commercial buildings on Main Street.
- The Rail Trail has year-round potential for use of snowmobiles & bikes.
- Poultney is close to regional ski areas.
- The low level of vehicular traffic makes living in Poultney pleasant.
- Slate quarries are revenue generators both in their industrial capacity as well as their potential as tourist attractions. The proximity to the Slate Valley Museum and other nearby historical sites in New York could benefit the Poultney economy.

- The presence of Green Mountain College within the town is an asset with potential for great community enrichment.
- The Educational “Trail”, State Park, golf course and Poultney River are desirable attractions.
- There is maple syrup and sweet water production in the area.
- East Poultney has several notable historic sites (H. Greeley home, et al.).
- Farmers’ Market & Town-wide Garage Sale are terrific community events.
- The countryside surrounding Poultney is very beautiful.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- There are no major highways--which is both a positive and negative feature.
- Inadequate signage for area attractions/sites/area trails does not maximize usage.
- Limited public access on lake and private land creates issues.
- The lack of public restrooms at slate quarries hinders tourism.
- There is no inn/motel capacity to accommodate tourists.
- A marina is needed.
- Town versus Village governments can be an issue.
- East Poultney’s 3 museums lack adequate volunteer staffing and heat for winter hours which minimizes their ability to draw tourism.
- The Regional Marketing Organization has reduced its Poultney “focus”.
- Trail use needs to improve. The Rail Trail needs more summer use and surface finish work for walking and bike use.
- The Town should facilitate “cross-use” of trails for bikes, hikers, snowmobiles, and improve signage and public access.
- It needs to be recognized that not all local businesses benefit from snowmobile visitor trade.
- There is inadequate tour housing capacity at Green Mountain College.
- Town-wide volunteering (for other than “1 event” commitment) is limited and needs to improve.
- Poultney lack a central/coordinated “bulletin board” to disseminate information on town events/activities.
- Poultney has no welcome center or Chamber of Commerce office.
- Milfoil is a persistent problem at the lake.
- High school student volunteerism needs improvement and there is limited community service capacity/support at high school.
- There needs to be an improved use of Green Mountain College land re: community education.
- The community lacks a common vision and sense of direction.

II. Natural Resources Economy Issue Focus Group

*Harry Bingham
India Burnett-Holliday
Nina Corbin
Mark Fedolfi
Joel Flewelling
Paul Hancock
Asa Johnson*

*Randy Kniffin
Steven Letendre
Ed Lewis
Fred Maslack
Bob Pawling
Mark Riley
Harry Stanyon
Larry Sullivan*

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Lake St. Catherine hosts 2 fishing derbies, both summer and winter, and is a four-season recreational “draw”.
- There is an aquifer under Poultney that serves the town and slate quarries.
- Natural resources consist of the Poultney River, forestland for logs, wood products, and recreation, and slate quarries that produce unique, high quality, Vermont slate.
- There is dairy, livestock, and vegetable farming as well as maple sugar production in Poultney.
- A VAST snowmobile “corridor” goes through the village.
- Wind and biomass are potential energy sources.
- Wildlife includes deer and turkeys; the area is good for hunting.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- Mechanisms need to be developed for keeping integrated slate processing facilities in VT instead of exporting them to NY.
- The permitting process (Act 250) and high electrical costs negatively impact the slate industry.
- External competition is impacting local industries (Canada-wood, China-apples and NY-slate).
- Village demographics are a concern--especially the high number of single parent households, high elderly population and the high poverty rate. There need to be strategies on how to integrate these groups into the local economy.
- Poultney should improve the retail business “mix”; pharmacy, bakery, and clothing outlets are needed in the community.
- There is an inadequate supply of affordable housing.

- The local economy needs to be diversified.
- Poultney should develop value-added agricultural products.
- The community needs improved high-speed internet capacity and lacks adequate cellular service.
- The small farm economic “malaise” offers potential for community support initiatives.
- Act 250 process is burdensome – rotation of Act 250 review members might help.
- There is a need to develop a market for slate slag in order to generate income and get rid of the piles; this will improve the scenic beauty in the area.
- Slate industry challenges (cyclical industry, high employee turnover, high waste generation) need to be addressed.
- Poultney needs to develop strategies to promote agro-tourism.

III. Barriers to Economic Development/Encouraging Entrepreneurial Activity Issue Focus Group

*Nina Corbin
Ann DeBonis
Andy Donaghy
Bruce Ferguson
Paul Hancock
Paul Hermann
Asa Johnson
Lou King*

*Steven F. Letendre
Mary Jeanne Packer
Henry Piccolo
Larry Sullivan
Ann Williams
Bob Williams
Newman Williams*

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- The Community has a good water supply and good wastewater treatment capacity.
- 42% of adult community members are college educated.
- Poultney is an attractive area with an ambiance highlighted by the village life, lake, trails, recreation, and other positive features.
- Poultney received a “downtown designation” in June 2002.
- There is good access to major east/west transportation while the location has the benefit of being off the “beaten track” and has not been over-developed.
- Poultney has a skilled workforce.
- There is good building infrastructure (William’s Machine and potential for Howe Scale type facility).
- Historic assets/characteristics are present in both the town and village.

- There is a high level of local “brain power”/human resources among the population.
- Green Mountain College has an incubator program (Center for Sustainable Community Development), community service potential, and is a “green business” attractor.
- Transferable technology is “in place”.
- There are some good existing local businesses (e.g. Ghost Writers).
- Poultney has the potential to attract arts & crafts businesses, small branch-type businesses, and professional development/education events/services (through Green Mountain College).

Challenges in this Issue Area

- Industries need to be encouraged to use the resources that are present.
- The College could be used as a professional mandatory training site for areas such as healthcare.
- The school system has a very poor image and must be improved in order to attract new residents/potential business owners.
- Affordable housing is greatly needed in Poultney.
- Village vs. Town government raises conflicts and issues.
- Businesses are challenged by small town market limitations.
- Poultney struggles to compete with “Big Box” stores in Rutland.
- The community needs a real local bank, video store, real lodging facility and a mid-priced restaurant.
- Internet and telecommunication capacity needs to be improved.
- The community should promote people traffic in village so businesses can benefit from customer flow.
- Poultney needs a health food store.
- Poultney should encourage student entrepreneurship and lure visiting entrepreneurs to establish businesses in Poultney.
- Partnering opportunities between the high school and Green Mountain College should be explored.
- Poultney need to improve village’s poor visual image caused by dilapidated buildings, gas stations, and unoccupied buildings (Williams and Stonebridge Inn).

Resource Team B

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

Greg Brown, Commissioner, VT Dept of Housing & Community Affairs

Doug Dows, Director of Safe & Healthy Schools, VT Dept of Education

Patrick Flood, Commissioner, Dept of Aging & Disability

Jeff Francis, Executive Director, Vermont Superintendents Association

David Rahr, President, The Vermont Community Foundation

Chuck Ross, State Director, US Senator Patrick J. Leahy

Erin Croom, UVM Center for Rural Studies (Scribe)

I. Quality of Life for Seniors Issue Focus Group

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Paul H. Hermann
Hayden Morris
Alberta Pritchard*

*Ina Smith
Rutherford VanVlaanderen
Gail Vreeland
Sylvia Williams*

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- The town leases the space for the senior center at a minimal cost.
- A foot-care clinic and flu shots are provided in the senior center.
- The senior center has a good cook and also offers Meals on Wheels.
- The center offers day trips for seniors for minimal fees.
- Several comments were made about the connection with the college--helping to close generation gaps between elderly and young. Some students volunteer with projects.
- Poultney offers a great library, good sidewalks, and has a good literacy rate.
- Poultney is a small town where everybody knows everybody.
- Citizens feel very safe and comfortable with other residents.
- Poultney offers good housing for seniors (Autumn Way-18 apartments, Heritage Court-14 apartments, and School House-11 apartments).
- The Water Department is good and the sewer system is brand new.
- The College makes swim hours available to seniors.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- Transportation is a major concern for senior citizens.
- Driving is out of the question for some seniors.
- Private or subsidized taxis are needed.
- Transportation is provided to Rutland and back, but it is also needed for within the Poultney area.
- Many senior citizens go to Rutland for doctors and clinics. The senior center provides a bus to Rutland twice a month for doctor appointments, shopping, etc.
- The senior center would like a bus to bring in elderly from outside of town (i.e.: Castleton, Fair Haven).
- Transportation was the #1 problem for senior citizens in a 1992 survey.

- Funding education is a huge burden to the elderly who live on fixed incomes; many feel they should not have to pay the school tax.
- Senior center members feel there is a misconception that the Young at Heart Center is for the poor only, and there is a stigma attached to belonging.
- A couple of seniors mention the low attendance--few people who have money come to socialize. However, the staff is changing and they have seen a recent increase in participation.
- The center would like to offer more entertainment from high school, etc. They want it to be “more exciting for all the people in town.”
- It has been harder to find volunteers.
- The center has only 2 paid part-time staff, both of whom work overtime. Their salaries come from fund-raisers.
- The center, which is Board run, will probably be “in the hole” this year.
- Seniors who want to maintain their status cannot because high taxes reduce their quality of life.
- Senior housing rent is high, services are poor, water and sewer rates are too high.
- There is a disconnect between elderly and youth.
- Young people gather by Stewarts—there is no other place for them to congregate, and little for them to do.
- Schools and education are a concern, primarily related to discipline and the ill effects of poor family life for some students. Some feel sports are emphasized over academics.
- The mandates from Washington DC for Special Education have to be backed by local money.
- Senior Citizens would like to be invited into the education scene somehow, potentially through Arts and Culture. There needs to be a way to create cross-generation interaction.
- Poultney has high voter apathy with less than 20% of residents voting; this is a real problem in trying to fill 48 elected town slots, some of which are empty.
- Seniors would like a poll taken entitled “Seniors living in homes and paying taxes.”
- Seniors feel that taxes are forcing seniors to sell their homes and move.

II. Community-Based Recreation, Arts and Culture for Youth **Issue Focus Group**

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Kerry Devlin
Peter Dorrance
Barbara Fenhagan
Marni Goldenberg
Charlotte Hampl
Jesse Klein
Melissa Kristiansen

Alicia Marcy
John Moriarty
Hayden Morris
Andrea Mott
Rev. Stephen Payne
Sheila Seamans
Ashley Starr
Gail Vreeland
Sylvia Williams

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Poultney has good summer recreational programs for ages 12 and under; fees for these programs are kept low.
- The college has some concerts and has brought in other events.
- A large portion of the youth is involved in Halloween activities.
- The snowmobile club has an emphasis on youth and training.
- A ropes course on the college campus is available to the community.
- There are natural resources, such as lakes.
- A couple of residents mentioned that Poultney has trails by the river and golf course.
- The school offers tennis courts and basketball courts, which are lighted.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- The skate park was good, but was taken down because of liability.
- There is a lack of facilities in Junior High and High Schools.
- Several residents expressed concern that there is no place for older kids to go, besides a friend's home.
- Residents refer to the youth riding around town as the "Poultney 500."
- There is a lack of interior facilities for wintertime.
- The Women's Club has an Art show only once a year, but it is not for youth.
- A Skate Park is needed: it would require town management for insurance. It was suggested that Manchester's town run skate park be checked out, as they could advise on liability issues.
- Students who are not involved in sports have nothing to do.
- Poultney used to have a skating rink, bowling alley, and dance club.
- Youth cannot rent a video or buy a CD in town, and there is no way to access Rutland for shopping, movies, or healthcare. There is no way to get to Killington. Transportation is needed.
- Poultney should have a hockey team and a hockey rink.
- The Recreation Department is very active in the summer for children 12 and under, but not in the winter. Therefore, there is not much to do in winter for children 12 and under.
- There should be more flexible activities offered instead of just programs. High school sports are too competitive for everyone.
- There is no community theater anymore, but there is a stage in the Catholic Center.
- There is a concern that the Catholic Center could not be used because of liability reasons.
- Kids are going out of town for recreational activities.
- The Physical Ed program is geared more towards competition than lifelong healthy activity.

- The High School Drama Department has no on-site space so they use the Catholic Center.
- Currently, the Arts Alliance has a district-wide art show two times a year.
- The Arts celebration is in its 7th year and runs one day, traveling to 5 schools. They would like to collaborate with Green Mountain College.
- There is no large community space to use besides the school since the old Town Hall burned down: the new one is too small.
- An obstacle for getting the college involved is that although students and faculty have lots of resources, they have little time.
- There are 640 students and 44 faculty at Green Mountain College.
- There are 120 Outdoor Recreation students who need practical experience.
- Poultney has approximately 340 students between 7th and 12th grade.
- There are limited opportunities currently set up for community service and volunteerism.
- No transportation is provided to these volunteer activities; Green Mountain College has vans and might be asked to make them available.
- There is a lack of awareness about service opportunities
- Two residents commented that people are ‘involved only when their children are involved.’
- Several years ago, Whispering Pines brought bands for youth, but this closed down due to underage drinking.
- Summer recreation fees are low, but not low enough.
- Poultney could ice over a field in winter for hockey and free skating.
- Parents are concerned about letting kids intermingle with college kids.
- There is a community band at the college, but it is not well publicized. There may be other programs that the community doesn’t know about.
- There should be journalism at the high school that could produce a weekly column for the area newspaper to inform town what students are doing besides sports.
- A relationship with radio station is needed.
- Two residents shared their vision of a teen center/community center. Poultney could benefit from something similar to the Ludlow Teen Center, which offers yoga, skate ramps and a pizza place. This might be a good solution because it will not close in winter.
- A couple of residents said that this center would be a great place for college recreation majors (there are 120) to volunteer, contribute to the community and provide fun and education to youth. These students need a practicum and internships for degree and are currently going out of town to fulfill this requirement.
- College kids are also willing to help build a skate park for the community.
- Some school groups not considered as good as others, i.e.: Arts, Drama. They are told to “Rotate your activities around the sports schedule.”
- It was an issue for numerous residents that many groups compete for the same space. They should see if Mason’s or Men’s Club would offer them space.
- Senior Center does not want to allow clubs or community to use their space because they pay for everything. But they will consider.
- No current coordinator for activities--it needs to be somebody’s job.

III. K to 12 Education Issues Focus Group

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Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Several residents stated that the school has excellent teachers and wonderful leadership (2 new principals).
- The PTA has an outstanding turn out.
- Many good, hard-working people are interested and ask, “What can we do?”
- The human resources of the community are strong.
- The children and families are great to work with and gladly want to work with the community.
- There is consistently high quality teaching.
- The scale is small. There are 250 students, which is an opportunity to have good interaction. (This also seen as a challenge.)
- Teachers get to know everyone--which is something most teachers can't do.
- Teachers have a willingness to take risks and make changes. They feel they have a support base to call upon.
- Last year there were several deaths in the school and the crisis team did a good job.
- Teachers are flexible. Students can take classes at the college sometimes.
- Teachers are very accessible to parents.
- Parents feel very comfortable with faculty and are welcome to talk about concerns.
- The people of the system are the major strength.
- There is a tremendous attendance at school events by both parents and community members.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- There is a need to improve testing scores in Reading, Writing, and Math from 2nd grade and up.
- Poultney needs to inventory its resources to deal with the scale issue through enrichments.
- The level of education is not as good as other states or other countries. The school system should not just compare itself with other Vermont schools but set higher goals. More focus needs to be put on traditional education.
- Too much time is spent on under-average students.
- Numerous comments were made about the science labs being antiquated.
- The facility needs to be upgraded. A new addition is needed. There is no space for a conference room. Special Education classes are held in the High School Library. The Facility Committee has not been able to pass anything with the Poultney voters.
- The elementary school cafeteria and gym are not separate facilities.
- There is no operating kitchen facility at the high school. Lunches get shipped in from the Elementary School.
- Programs for low socio-economic status children are lacking, ie: there is no breakfast program.
- Some made the suggestion to join with Fair Haven High School and convert the current high school building into a 6-8th grade Middle School.
- The school is losing many tuition students.
- Students from out of town refer to Poultney school as a “dump.” It is unfortunate that these people do not see the teaching on their tour, but merely the school building.

- There is a tuition difference.
- Parents who went to Poultney are sending children elsewhere.
- Tuition was bringing in \$600,000 at the school's high point. Now, with a budget of 6 million, tuition brings in \$450,000.
- The Elementary School needs a new roof.
- New facilities will not upgrade education; dedicated teachers will.
- Poultney charges the lowest tuition in state.
- There has been a big administration turnover, which has made it hard and unstable for teachers.
- No exit interviews have been done with exiting principals to help explain the high turnover. It was perceived that Poultney may be a 'stepping stone' and principals take jobs closer to home.
- The faculty of Green Mountain College with families either move their children to other schools or leave town altogether. This is due to poor science labs, a poorly perceived high school curriculum (no advanced placement classes), and low SAT/ standardized test scores, especially for girls.
- There is limited computer access at the high school. There is no monitor in computer lab.
- 'Catch 22': An architect estimated the cost of an addition for schools at \$3.5 million; state approval was denied because it was too small. It was then moved to \$8 million and subsequently dropped for being "fiscally impossible". There is not much industry in Poultney to support the tax base for such expenditures.
- One of the biggest industries is moving out.
- There is a second 'Catch 22' – Poultney does not have a tax base to support new additions, but industry will not come because school is perceived as 'bad.' Poultney lacks the tax base to add improvements, but if the town doesn't make improvements then businesses will not be attracted to town, or stay, or grow here to build the tax base.
- The school is financially strapped.
- Poultney is losing Vermont children to NY schools because the tuition is lower across the border.
- Some steps are being taken toward better test scores, ie: Remedial Reading teacher, improved libraries, Sim's Math Program.
- There is a core group in the community that has much animosity toward the school.
- The Poultney School budget failed 4 times—it was the last school budget to pass in the State of Vermont this year.
- All issues are intertwined. For example, as the college improves, businesses and schools will improve.
- We need to improve the public image of the school. Good PR is needed, perhaps through a school newsletter. It was suggested that the Journalism Club write up a page each month for the Lakes Region Free Press. (The newspaper has a weekly section spotlighting Fair Haven High School.)
- A different approach should be taken with elementary school.
- Getting parents involved is a challenge. Parents are reactive, not proactive. There is so much talent that is not getting tapped into.
- Some participants fear that many members of the community are passive or apathetic about the school. There is no group of people advocating for schools.
- There is an irony that in a college town education is under-valued. There is a lack of awareness of education.
- Collaboration in the town is missing, and particularly with the tie between the schools and business and economic development.
- Some people in town feel that unless schools are good, taxes should not go up.

- The schools feel that their good assets are put in shadow by tax controversies. Good schools are both important and expensive.
- The needs of the schools are great--and unrealized.
- In many cases, both parents work, and there are also single parents who can't participate easily with schools.
- A couple of residents stated that everyone must get involved.
- Citizens must invest in the school before it gets better. Children are the best investment.
- The schools should see students and parents as customers.
- An action plan should be made from the survey that was done.
- Perhaps there should be an information booth at the Chili Cook-Off. The highest percentage of people in town shows up for this event.
- Poultney would have to show momentum to convince people that they need to support schools.

Resource Team C

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Hans Johnson, Regional Director of Development, VT Dept of Corrections

Anne Jones-Weinstock, VP for Donor Relations & Communications, The Vermont Community Foundation

Bill Kurtz, State Director, US Senator James Jeffords

James Mongeon, States Attorney, State of Vermont

Mike Reilly, Development Director, Snelling Center for Government

Fred Schmidt, Director, UVM Center for Rural Studies

Candy Koenemann, Executive Assistant, Vermont Council on Rural Development (Scribe)

I. Public Safety Issue Focus Group

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Andy Donaghy

Tom Johnson

Tim Kerber

Perry Moyer

Pat Roberts

Kate Sojka

Mary Jo Teetor

William D. William

Uma Jean Capman

Asa Johnson

Dale Kerber

Fred Maslack

Jane Pawling

Jonas Rosenthal

Jo Taran

Josephine Williams

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Residents expressed several times that they feel the small size of the community is appealing.
- The rural setting is very attractive to residents and visitors.

- A number of residents sited the recreation attributes of the local lakes and rail trail as community assets.
- Having Green Mountain College in town is a positive element for the community.
- Residents are involved and participate in many community activities.
- The Fire Department is a great source of pride for many residents.
- The community is considered relatively safe.
- The Ambulance/Rescue Team is excellent. The personnel are well-trained and certified; they have good equipment and a quick response time.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- Most crime falls in the nuisance category, such as noise, speeding, and young people loitering.
- Residents feel that the lack of activities for the community youth contribute to the nuisance crimes. At one time there were two movie theaters, a bowling alley, a place for dances: these places no longer exist. Only a small percentage of the youth get into trouble, but some activity options for youngsters would be desirable.
- Some residents suggested that joint activities with college and community kids could be helpful. The college kids already act as reading mentors and host Halloween parties but more is needed.
- Parents need educating about what the kids are doing; some are in denial that their children are involved in negative activities, and in families with two working parents there may be a lack of supervision for the children.
- Concern about multiple offenders being “out on the street” was expressed by a high number of residents. The offenders set a bad example and feel no sense of consequences for their actions. Residents want to know how other communities handle this problem.
- Numerous residents expressed dissatisfaction with police coverage. There has not been a police department in the community for approximately 30 years. Limited coverage is provided by State Police at a contracted cost of \$55,000 per year. This allows for 40 hours of patrolling and paperwork plus time for emergency incidents. Most residents believe that this is not enough and were particularly concerned about the early morning hours when patrolling officers are off duty.
- There is a high number of vacancies on the State Police force and very few potential officers are in line for recruitment to replace retiring officers.
- A Petition to reinstate a local police department has failed due to the inability of the community to agree on the definition or structure of the force.
- Proximity to the border of New York State where bars are open until 4:00 AM creates a problem with those people who travel over the line to drink late and then drive home under the influence. Lack of police patrolling at that hour is a public safety concern.
- Teen drinking is a concern in that alcohol is easily accessible to underage children and children as young as 12 are involved. The problem seems to be getting worse.
- The college population doesn’t add any particular problems to the crime situation, and the College has its own security force.
- There is concern among residents that the lack of local visibility of law enforcement leaves the community vulnerable to migrating offenders who leave areas where there is police presence and find places like Poultney that lack law protection. Residents would like to be involved with a network of local, state, sheriff and municipal offices that could share information and maximize resources in following up on law offenders’ locations.

- While the ambulance service works very well, it is comprised of volunteers and more help is needed. Issues with dispatching and service zones need to be addressed. Several residents feel this is an important challenge.
- The Fire Department is dedicated, responsive, and works well with EMT staff, but it is difficult to get enough volunteers with the required hours of training. Most residents see the importance of this and the need to improve training opportunities, especially in view of state training funding cuts.
- Fire personnel participate in fundraising but residents feel that is a poor use of their time and think there should be grants or other funding resources to help out. Residents expressed deep dissatisfaction that federal funding is being directed to the law enforcement efforts in dealing with terrorism but no funding consideration is being given to the role that fire department staff plays in potential terrorism emergencies.
- Residents agreed that the emergency services are doing well with what they have, but more money is needed to bring everything up to the level it should be.
- There are no ladder fire trucks in town that could reach upper floors in the dorms at Green Mountain College in case of fire. Some of the college kids work on the emergency squads.
- There is a need to address safety concerns relative to automobiles not yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks and the development of “pace” cars to slow down some of the speeding drivers.

II. Community/College Partnerships Issue Focus Group

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Alejandro Flores

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Joan Donaghy

Dick Hanson

Paul Hermann

Tim Kononan

Tom Mauhs-Pugh

Jonas Rosenthal

Ina Smith

Bill Throop

Bob Williams

Newman Williams

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- The community members are very caring and supportive.
- It is a great family community due to its size, safety for bikes and outdoor activity potential.
- Green Mountain College is available to the young people but benefits all ages of residents.
- The geographic size is such that everything is in walking distance; this is especially important in winter.

- The community is very spirited with high participation on July 4th activities and other community events.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- Residents would like to access College resources such as the pool, auditing classes and other campus facilities at either low cost or no cost. They would like to see the College host monthly movie screenings in the auditorium. Residents would particularly like to have access to the library for both materials and internet services.
- There needs to be a mechanism for advertising what events are occurring at the College.
- The community needs to find ways to support the College and work collaboratively for the good of both.
- At one time, high school students could access courses at the College; residents would like to see that happen again.
- Residents feel it benefits both the community and the College to pool resources; one resident expressed a wish that there be a shared science lab that would address needs of both groups which are presently under-funded. Perhaps there are federal funds to support a K-16 partnership.
- Green Mountain College is financially fragile right now; they are tuition dependent, have a small endowment and an old physical plant. The faculty and administration are committed but cannot overcome all problems without help; it is hoped the new president will turn things around.
- Poultney downtown area could be made more attractive; a project is currently underway to address redevelopment. This would help make the College more appealing to visiting parents and students.
- Downtown businesses are very generous in donations and support, and some offer discounts to college students. Making the students feel welcome in the community with friendliness and courtesy will also help strengthen relations.
- The college does not pay high taxes due to a freeze on property value (dates back to 1940's) but does contribute to local economy through the provision of employment and as retail consumers.
- There used to be a monthly meeting between college staff and local residents, but the college employee who used to organize this no longer works there. It was mentioned repeatedly that residents would like to see this meeting resurrected. With new staff, there is opportunity to build new relationships. This would help work toward better communications since there are currently limited publications or tools to share information between college and the community.

III. Communications Between Community Groups Issue Focus Group

*Linda Nye Barbaro
Francie Coloutti
Thomas Coloutti
Barbara Fenhagen
Joel Flewelling*

*Kim Lanier
Jonas Rosenthal
Afton Rupe
Sylvia Williams*

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- There are more than 30 activity groups in the community; a list of which is located in the town manager's office.
- These groups are very active and provide a great deal of service to the community.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- There is a need to bridge the communication gap so that residents are aware of existing efforts and informed about what the groups are doing.
- Residents shared various ideas about how to educate the community about the groups and their activities.
- Many residents expressed the need to advertise what the groups have accomplished.
- The residents discussed having each organization prepare a one page history and description that could be handed out to new residents, possibly through the town office or through the Chamber of Commerce for distribution to both new and established residents.
- Residents are frustrated that there is no local newspaper that shares local activity information and sited examples of nearby newspapers not including articles that have been submitted in the past. They were concerned that negative publicity finds newspaper space, but articles of less exciting but positive activities or community projects are overlooked.
- A suggestion was made to organize a monthly breakfast meeting at which all club leaders could share what each club is doing so that word can spread throughout the community.
- Currently there is a small newsletter at the College and some items get posted on bulletin boards in the community, but these methods are considered inadequate for communication needs.
- Another resident suggested that there be a specific time established each day when a local radio station could announce events.
- The community is rural and lacks the medium for communication, such as cable, or internet, or computers to access to a town web site.
- Costs to insert an activity schedule in a weekly newspaper are prohibitive.
- It was unknown if there is a public access television channel that could be used for advertising an activity schedule; even if there is, many residents do not have cable television.

VI. POULTNEY RESOURCE TEAM

MEMBERS

Poultney Community Visit Day Team

This team met with community members in nine focus sessions on

September 26, 2002

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Poultney Resource Day Team

This team met with Task Force Members to build action steps and review potential resources on December 2, 2002

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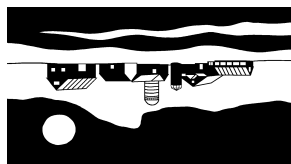
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