



Vergennes Community Visit

Report and Action Plan – June 2014

Vermont Council on Rural Development

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I. Introduction

In so many ways, Vergennes is the gateway city between Vermont's agricultural heartland and the more metropolitan Chittenden County. With all its assets it epitomizes so much that Vermont communities statewide strive for: a strong village center surrounded by a beautiful working landscape; strong, committed community members; a dynamic and balanced downtown business sector along with manufacturing, retail, services, and food businesses.

The VCRD Visiting Team was deeply impressed by the strength and commitment of the city and by all that has been accomplished over the last 20 years to make this such a wonderful place to live, work, and enjoy. A strong and responsive municipal government invited and encouraged the Community Visit process. Wonderful community institutions like the Bixby Library and the Vergennes Opera House are cornerstones of downtown vitality—matched with the private sector energy of entrepreneurs who have made major contributions to revitalizing the downtown and are continuing to invest in the next stage of its development. Restaurants and shops make this the north Addison County hub. Part of the excitement of the process for our team was the sense that this is a city that has great momentum and where residents, and folks from neighboring towns, are geared to working together to make it the most vital center possible. Another part, which gives great confidence, is that the community has the resources, skills, and leadership to accomplish great things. Altogether, Vergennes is an enviable community, one that represents so much of the best of Vermont.

While Community Visits are designed to help towns come together, review major issues, develop priorities, and line up for action, VCRD has a couple of other goals behind these efforts. We look to build new volunteerism and encourage more local folks to get involved in moving the community forward. We want to help build the connections of the community to human, technical, and funding resources from lead agencies and organizations in the state. And we want to help the Visiting Team that we build learn more about local needs and the dynamics in the diverse towns of rural Vermont so they can better serve these communities.

With over 170 local people participating in the process and over 70 volunteers now engaged in active Task Forces to advance priorities, we know that there is great energy for real progress in Vergennes today. We also see strong, practical work plans and already some direct connections being engaged for key leadership help from the Addison County Regional Development Corporation and the Addison County Regional Planning Commission, from the Agency of Commerce (especially Tourism and Marketing and Economic Development) and from the Agency of Transportation. Vergennes has a map, and is on the map, to move its projects forward.

It is always hard to set community priorities. Vergennes residents care about youth engagement, recreation, their schools, and the agricultural future of their region. When it came to choosing priorities for action, which is the center of the Community Visit process, residents lined up overwhelmingly over three practical areas of work that they believe would have ramifications for the future opportunities and that would leverage progress in all the issues cited in brainstorming sessions and in the longer list of community goals and opportunities. They chose things that can get done, that are in the power of the community to advance, and that will leverage momentum in so many areas, from tourism, to youth, to quality of life.

We look forward to working with the Vergennes Task Forces as they advance the priority projects identified in the process to:

- **Improve Transportation & Parking**
- **Advance the Vergennes Economy & Expand the Community and Economic Development Capacity of the City**
- **Redevelop the Vergennes Falls Basin & Open a Riverwalk**

The Task Forces working to advance these issues are organizing today – please support their efforts, or join them by reaching out to their chairs (listed in the work plan section of this report).

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

1. On the **Community Visit Day** on March 18, 2014, Visiting Team members heard testimony from Vergennes 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 VI. Based on the testimony received, the Vermont Council on Rural Development identified an initial list of the key **Opportunities** before the community (Part II).
2. The second stage of the Community Visit occurred at the Vergennes **Community Meeting** on April 16, 2014 when VCRD presented the Opportunities list and facilitated the review and prioritization of these issues by town residents. The resulting list of **Vergennes Priorities** (in Part III) were then the focus for the formation of three Task Forces established to build plans that would address them (see bulleted list above).
3. In the third phase of the Visit, the **Community Resource Day** on May 21, 2014, 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 Work Plans** are listed in Part IV.

Resource Team Members (listed with contact information in Part VIII) signed on with a commitment to serve as sounding boards and referral agents for the Vergennes 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 Vergennes’s efforts in each challenge area. Their **Recommendations** (Part V) **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 potential next steps, and as lists of potential resources as the Task Forces make their way forward.

In the end, Vergennes has established solid priorities for action and set momentum toward the achievement of short and long-term goals that will lead to a great variety of successes in improving the life and prosperity of the city.

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 Vergennes as it moves forward and to provide follow up help to Vergennes Task Forces as called upon. VCRD will also serve as an advocate for Vergennes projects with appropriate agencies and organizations in Vermont. Call on us, and on Visiting Team members, when we can be of help.

There are many people to thank for their leadership in this process. Robin Scheu, Director of the Addison County Regional Development Corporation, introduced VCRD to Vergennes and encouraged this process. Mel Hawley, the City Manager, was an eager partner and a help at each practical step in the process. The City Council invited the process, and members were active in the work sessions. The Vergennes Steering Committee helped set the issues and reach out to the full community for the event. We appreciate the Opera House (and Gerianne Smart) and the Bixby Library (Jane Spencer) for hosting sessions, and the high school for organizing sessions for us to hear the ideas and priorities of young people. Food was provided by Three Squares with help from the Northland Job Corps. And the Community Visit was funded with help from our wonderful partners at the Vermont Community Foundation, the State of Vermont, and members of and donors to VCRD, many of them residents of towns previously served by the process. We appreciate the leadership of each member of the VCRD Vergennes Community Visit Team listed at the end of this report: these public servants go the extra mile in service to Vermont communities, and it's really an honor to work with people with their skills and dedication.

We are especially grateful for the leadership of Mayor Bill Benton, the Community Visit Chair, who was a key touchstone for the project, deeply committed to Vergennes and its future, and who will coordinate with Task Force Chairs as they work forward addressing community priorities.

Finally, we deeply appreciate everyone who put themselves on the line for Vergennes in this process – you are greatest of all, and you make us proud of Vermont.

II. Initial List of Opportunities and Challenges

Identified by forums with community members on March 18 2014 and Vergennes high school students on March 4 2014.

More than 100 Vergennes residents joined with VCRD staff and a 25 member Visiting Team for the Community Visit Day on March 18, filling meeting rooms in the Bixby Memorial Library and the Vergennes Opera House. They took time from their workday and other commitments to attend forums and a community dinner at the St. Peters Church, and to begin to work together in shaping the future of the town. The following issues emerged as initial challenges and opportunities. This list was presented back to community members at the Community Meeting on April 16 for voting and prioritization:

Improve Transportation and Parking

A Vergennes Transportation Task Force could work to systematically improve town walkability, public safety and, by improving parking options, contribute to downtown commerce. This working group could expand parking areas and work with all downtown businesses to get all employees to park away from critical spots for customers in the downtown. The working group could advocate for crosswalk enhancements, expanded signage and lights (including for the train station when stops begin in 2016) and areas for sidewalk improvements. Some residents would like to see improvements for walkability by the bridge and access to the falls, including the idea of ultimately developing a walking bridge for viewing the falls. A task force on transportation could also promote bike lanes, trails and racks and look into opportunities for a shuttle or other public transportation in Vergennes.

Become a Biking Center and Destination

With the beauty of the lake and the rolling hills of Addison County, Vergennes is uniquely situated to be a regional center for bicycling for Vermonters and tourists alike. A Vergennes Biking Task Force could plan for and work to implement improvements ranging from bike racks downtown to bike paths (potentially beginning with a path between the high school and elementary school), bike lanes, welcoming signs and safety improvements. Vergennes could welcome bikers and expand their numbers with local maps and route guides, and look to develop tourism packages to encourage them to stay, shop and enjoy the city and surrounding countryside.

Advance the Vergennes Economy

An Economic Development Task Force should be developed to take leadership in promoting businesses in Vergennes and surrounding towns, and systematically working to attract and grow new businesses that fit with the community. Residents would like to see additional businesses that expand and balance with the downtown, including a brew pub, bike and canoe rental outfitter and businesses that would attract and serve young people. An economic development plan could be produced and implemented potentially in partnership with the town of Ferrisburgh and other surrounding towns. The town could also consider hiring an economic development director to work with this leadership team and include representatives and investment from surrounding communities.

Build a Unifying Calendar & Improve Communications

Vergennes needs a single unifying calendar to bridge all community groups and list all events for residents and tourists alike. A calendar widget could connect all community, municipal and tourism websites to ensure that all city residents, regional folks and tourists can see and participate in all the

rich activities in the Vergennes area. The municipal website could be more actively managed and could connect more directly to marketing, economic development, and recreation in the city.

Develop a Vergennes Community Center

With the Boys and Girls Club needing new and improved space, and Mary Johnson Center seeking new pre-school facilities, this might be the time for Vergennes to plan and develop a multi-use and multi-generational community center. In addition to after school programming for younger students, high school youth would like to see recreational space, an arts room, dance or rehearsal space, and a “third space” (neither home nor school) to meet friends, play music and hang out.

Develop a Vergennes Arts Committee

A task force could be formed to work to systematically boost the arts as a key feature of Vergennes culture and commerce. It could work with landlords to expand studio space in the city and attract more artists. It could develop and manage an art walk to link galleries with studios and key cultural sites and assets.

Expand Tourism in Vergennes

Vergennes has a major opportunity to expand tourism and enhance commercial prosperity. A Task Force could develop a Vergennes region tourism map, a map of biking and walking routes, an agriculture and arts tour and/or a Vergennes Cultural Heritage Walk and a promotional sheet of “ten reasons to visit the little city”. By developing itineraries and packages, multiple businesses can benefit and tourists can have a path to follow to explore the many wonderful assets of the City and region.

Expand the Community and Economic Development Capacity of the City

The City of Vergennes could develop a citywide, local option one percent, sales and consumption tax to fund community and economic development in the city. Such a fund could potentially bring \$130,000 annually that could be used to expand the capacity of the Vergennes Partnership, invest in community projects and recreational opportunities for youth, provide for improvements to streets, parking or infrastructure, expand amenities in the falls basin, or seed other urban renewal projects as determined by the voters and city council.

Expand Recreational Opportunities for Youth & All Members of the Community

Young people have good things to say about Vergennes, but many of them wish there was more to do besides high school sports. With the high school serving the 5 towns, many regional young people leave at the end of the school day, many do not see Vergennes as a place to shop, visit or recreate. Vergennes residents could strengthen the Recreation Committee and expand the scope of activities for recreation, especially for high school aged young people. A recreation group could enlist a leadership team of young people to lead in creating youth-oriented activities, especially at the Opera House. This team could plan and manage a regular open mike night, teen movie nights and a youth café. Students could also be recruited to be involved in community service, especially for work on walking trails and other community efforts. An expanded Vergennes recreation program could build an outdoor recreation club featuring field trips, hiking, kayaking, skiing and other healthy activities for teens. Some residents see the need for a city recreation department and staff person; this task force could evaluate those needs and advocate to advance needed services.

Develop a Year-Round Farmers Market & Expand the Food Economy

Vergennes is at the heart of Vermont's breadbasket and has many celebrated restaurants but has not been as aggressive as other regions in advancing innovation, diversification and value adding food processing and development. A Task Force could work to deliberately connect to local and regional farmers and develop space for a year-round indoor farmers market. Over time this market could potentially provide kitchen access to incubate new small businesses or provide links for aggregation, storage, and distribution of local foods. It could also work to advance food security and access to local food all residents and expand community gardening opportunities.

Marketing Vergennes Businesses

Vergennes should consider forming a local chamber of commerce, building a local committee of the Addison County Chamber, or expanding the capacity of the Vergennes Partnership to provide for group marketing and advertising of local businesses and amenities and could build packages of events, places to see, dining and lodging.

Redevelop the Vergennes Falls Basin & Open a Riverwalk

The basin and riverside are unparalleled but underutilized assets for the future of Vergennes. A Basin and Riverside Task Force could galvanize community volunteers for immediate work to improve the area and to plan longer term strategic improvements. Residents envision a small mooring field for visiting boaters, a modest expansion of the docks, improved trails, expanded seating and picnic tables, landscaping, beautification, extended WiFi, improved lighting on the east side, and better signage. Some see future steps including building a boat house with rest rooms, or even a pavilion on the west shore, and improving a gravel path or a board walk on the east side. Work should be completed to connect the rail trail to the park. With heritage trail signage and public artwork this area could be an enormous benefit to local folks and draw to tourists. Some envision a day when events, bands, food, and a new pedestrian bridge could make the basin a major attraction for the entire region.



*Community members read the list of opportunities aloud on **Community Meeting Day**, April 18th.*



III. Vergennes Priorities

Determined by Vergennes residents at the VCRD Community Meeting, April 16 2014

Proving that those who live, work and raise their families in a community are best qualified to understand its needs and potential, Vergennes community members whittled down a list of 12 issues through discussion, reasoned arguments and thoughtful reflection. In the end, voting with red and blue stickers, over 100 participants chose three issues that offer opportunities to enhance existing resources, and to strengthen the town through exciting new ventures. Residents concluded the April 16 meeting by signing up for one of four Task Forces in the selected areas.

Vergennes residents selected three priorities for future action:

✓ Improve Transportation and Parking

A Vergennes Transportation Task Force could work to systematically improve town walkability, public safety and, by improving parking options, contribute to downtown commerce. This working group could expand parking areas and work with all downtown businesses to get all employees to park away from critical spots for customers in the downtown. The working group could advocate for crosswalk enhancements, expanded signage and lights (including for the train station when stops begin in 2016) and areas for sidewalk improvements. Some residents would like to see improvements for walkability by the bridge and access to the falls, including the idea of ultimately developing a walking bridge for viewing the falls. A task force on transportation could also promote bike lanes, trails and racks and look into opportunities for a shuttle or other public transportation in Vergennes.

✓ Advance the Vergennes Economy & Expand the Community & Economic Development Capacity of the City

An Economic Development Task Force should be developed to take leadership in promoting businesses in Vergennes and surrounding towns, and systematically working to attract and grow new businesses that fit with the community. Residents would like to see additional businesses that expand and balance with the downtown, including a brew pub, bike and canoe rental outfitter and businesses that would attract and serve young people. An economic development plan could be produced and implemented, potentially in partnership with the town of Ferrisburgh and other surrounding towns. The city could also consider hiring an economic development director to work with this leadership team and include representatives and investment from surrounding communities.

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IV. Task Force Action Plans

Resource Meeting, May 21 2014

Vergennes Task Forces are comprised of community members and an appointed chairperson. On Resource Day committee members worked closely with a facilitator and small resource teams to develop step-by-step action plans and to devise a list of human and financial resources to help achieve their goals. This final phase of the program marks the time when residents truly take ownership of the work, and begin the exciting process of turning ideas into action.

Task Force: ✓ Improve Transportation and Parking

Chairperson: **Greg Edwards**

Facilitator: **Brian Searles**, Secretary, Agency of Transportation

Resource Leaders: **Emily Boedecker**, Executive Director, Local Motion

Adam Lougee, Executive Director, Addison County RPC

A Vergennes Transportation Task Force could work to systematically improve town walkability, public safety and, by improving parking options, contribute to downtown commerce. This working group could expand parking areas and work with all downtown businesses to get all employees to park away from critical spots for customers in the downtown. The working group could advocate for crosswalk enhancements, expanded signage and lights (including for the train station when stops begin in 2016) and areas for sidewalk improvements. Some residents would like to see improvements for walkability by the bridge and access to the falls, including the idea of ultimately developing a walking bridge for viewing the falls. A task force on transportation could also promote bike lanes, trails and racks and look into opportunities for a shuttle or other public transportation in Vergennes.

Status of current efforts

- Reports done in 1998 and 2001 – many of the recommendations have been accomplished, others need to be done.
- Greater Vergennes Traffic Impact Study from 2002:
http://www.acrpc.info/transportation/corridor_studies/VERG_TrafficImpact_200207.pdf.
- “Finding Vergennes” report. Ask Adam Lougee from <http://acrpc.org/about-acrpc/staff/>.
- ACTR.vt (<http://actr-vt.org/>) is working on a plan for a shuttle bus from the Park & Ride to the downtown and from the Park & Ride to Shaws. Some questions remain such as will there be a kiosk or station, where’s the hub?
- http://www.acrpc.info/transportation/bikeped/VERG_CultivatingCommunityBikePedReport_2012.pdf.
- http://www.acrpc.info/transportation/bikeped/VergennesFerrisburg_MultiusePathSidewalk_2006_0526.pdf.

Action Steps:

This group will take action on some of the recommendations from previous efforts including:

1. **Group projects for action geographically:** The group will work to address the ideas listed below focusing their efforts first on Main Street from the bridge to Monkton Road.

2. **Pedestrian Safety:**
 - a. Pedestrian Signals: add pedestrian signals at Main and Green, and Main and Monkton.
 - b. Crosswalks: differentiate crosswalks to make them more visible by adding texture, lighting, bump-outs, in-street crosswalk signs; increase space between parallel parking spaces; install crosswalks to shopping center, Park & Ride, and others.
 - c. Sidewalks: create linkages between the Elementary School and the High School; between the shopping centers and the downtown; from the downtown to the Park & Ride.
3. **Biking and walking trails and safety:**
 - a. Create a bike network plan and signage to go along with it.
 - b. Install bike racks.
 - c. The streets are laid out in a grid. Explore one-way street options for Maple Street, Green Street, others...; it would create more parking along streets as well as make room for bikers.
 - d. Explore back-in parking on Main Street.
 - e. Create painted bike lanes where the road is wide enough.
 - f. Install walking bridge below the falls at the Otter Creek.
 - g. Build a pedestrian walkway on the bridge; Green Street access.
 - h. Install pet waste stations around town.
4. **Parking:** Parking in the downtown is limited; need to encourage merchants not to park on the street all day. A number of solutions include:
 - a. One-way streets (as mentioned to facilitate biking) will increase the number of parking spaces on side streets in the downtown area.
 - b. A shuttle bus from the Park & Ride to the downtown is in process.
5. **Traffic calming:** work to divert big truck traffic by:
 - a. making the city Gateways more inviting and at the same time slowing down the traffic by creating roundabouts, or add textured pavement.
 - b. Adding solar radar speed feedback signs.
 - c. Installing signs to direct trucks and bikes to where we want them to go.

Resources

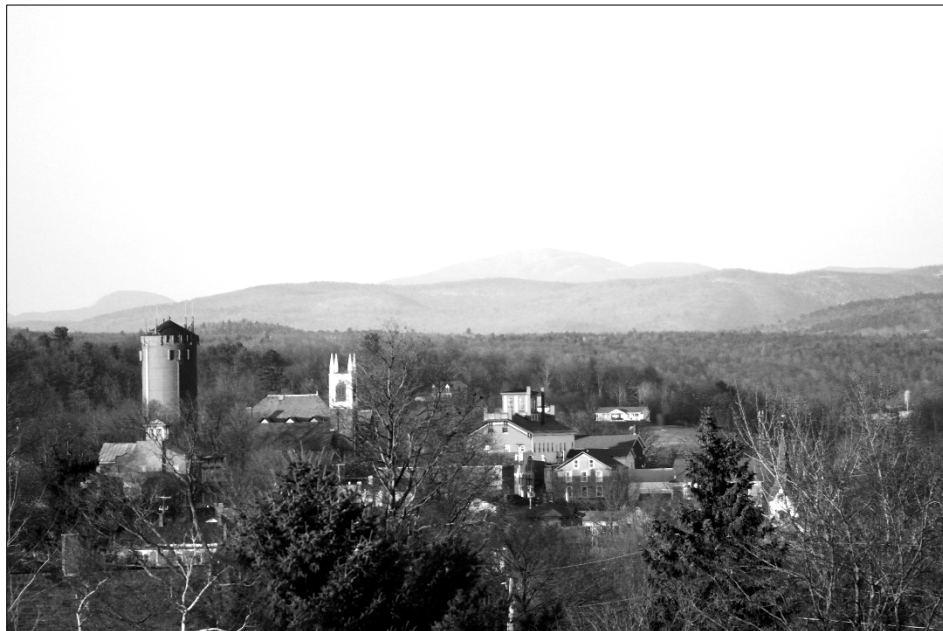
1. Links to many of the grant programs listed below can be found on the Addison Regional Planning Commission grants page: <http://acrpc.org/grants/>.
2. Bike / Ped Grant Application to VTRANS for a sidewalk extension project from Vergennes Redemption to Champlain Foods/Police Station and include some access management improvements at Kennedy Brothers is due on June 27th.
3. "Transportation Alternatives" grant through VTRANS for up to \$300K in August September timeframe.
4. Transportation grants for designated downtowns through ACCD.
5. State Infrastructure Bank that lends SIM money through VEDA with VTRANS.
6. Addison Regional Planning Commission Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). Application due July or August.

Task Force Signups

Linda Cook, Greg Edwards, Connie Goodrich, Shannon Haggett, Joe Klopfenstein, Diane Lanpher, Stephen Lowe, Margaret Lowe, Joel Melnick, Ann Metcalf, Karen Petersen, Rebecca Rey, Faith Terry, Amy Barr, Timothy Cook, Michael Daniels, Renny Perry, Chris Von Trapp



ALEX RATLIFF



ALEX RATLIFF

Task Force: ✓ Advance the Vergennes Economy & Expand the Community & Economic Development Capacity of the City

Chairperson: **Sarah Cowen**

Facilitator: **Paul Costello**, *Executive Director, VCRD*

Resource Leaders: **Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup**, *Philanthropic Advisor, Vermont Community Foundation*

Lisa Gosselin, *Commissioner, Department of Economic Development*

Robin Scheu, *Executive Director, Addison County RDC*

An Economic Development Task Force should be developed to take leadership in promoting businesses in Vergennes and surrounding towns, and systematically working to attract and grow new businesses that fit with the community. Residents would like to see additional businesses that expand and balance with the downtown, including a brew pub, bike and canoe rental outfitter and businesses that would attract and serve young people. An economic development plan could be produced and implemented, potentially in partnership with the town of Ferrisburgh and other surrounding towns. The city could also consider hiring an economic development director to work with this leadership team and include representatives and investment from surrounding communities.

The City of Vergennes could develop a citywide, local option one percent, sales and consumption tax to fund community and economic development in the city. Such a fund could potentially bring \$130,000 annually that could be used to expand the capacity of the Vergennes Partnership, invest in community projects and recreational opportunities for youth, provide for improvements to streets, parking or infrastructure, expand amenities in the falls basin, or seed other urban renewal projects as determined by the voters and city council.

Action Steps

1. The work of this task force will need to connect to municipal staff leadership to advance economic development in Vergennes; a first priority of the Task Force will be to find the way to fund this leadership position.
2. The Task Force will evaluate the idea of a one percent sales and consumption tax to fund community and economic development.
 - a. It will talk to businesses to gain their perspective on the tax and to consider beneficial investments in economic development.
 - b. It will research and talk to other towns that have successfully developed this funding stream and invested in economic and community development projects.
 - c. Based on its findings, the Task Force will build recommendations for investments and a case statement to advance the 1% tax.
3. The Economic Development Task Force will lead in market and development research toward building a strategic economic development plan.
 - a. It will review past Vergennes market studies.
 - b. Survey current businesses in Vergennes about what works well, and what doesn't.
 - c. Analyze unsuccessful businesses, or those which have moved on, to learn what didn't work for them.
 - d. Include an analysis of food systems business opportunities.
 - e. Connect with Vergennes' large employers.
 - f. And inventory empty or underutilized building space and land.

4. Establish goals and metrics to be measured for economic development: how will you measure your success? And, as a team, inviting leadership from the 5 town area that Vergennes serves as market center.
5. Look to the establishment of a local chamber or business group; review models used elsewhere; consider a strengthened and better funded Vergennes Partnership as a foundation to this effort.

Two practical Actions were identified that could be done immediately:

1. Reviewing the draft city plan with an economic development lens, and
2. Advocating with the State Department of Buildings and General Services for the allocated \$50,000 budgeted for evaluating future prospects for state lands in the city.

Resources

1. Robin Scheu and the Addison County Economic Development Corporation can provide some facilitation and help build connections for the group.
2. USDA Rural Development may be able to fund some projects.
3. The VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development can help in many ways.
 - Megan Smith, Commissioner of Tourism and Marketing will bring her team to work on a brand and marketing campaign.
 - Lisa Gosselin, Commissioner of Economic Development can act as a sounding board for the group’s efforts and help with measurements and also work to leverage funds coming from Department of Buildings and General Services.
 - Lars Torres, Director of the Office of the Creative Economy, can help small businesses, incubators, and co-working spaces.
 - Josh Hanaford is the link to Community Development Block Grant funding for planning or implementing projects.
 - The VT Downtown Program at ACCD could also help.
4. The Vermont Community Foundation could have interest and has small grants available for projects. The Walter Cerf Fund is available for community and economic development projects in Addison County. Jen Peterson is the regional leader.
5. On reviewing the 1% tax; this would require a charter change...it’s a process. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns’ Stephen Jeffrey could be an instrumental advisor. The VT Department of Taxes could tell the committee what the taxes would affect and provide figures for municipal income. Kathleen Ramsay, Middlebury Town Manager could describe how it works there, and in Killington which passed a 1% while she worked there; and Bill Finger of Lincoln led the Middlebury process and could share the steps they went through.
6. Key lead businesses could be really helpful and should be invited to participate: UTC, VT Gas, Green Mountain Power, Country Home Products and the task force will want to connect to youth, schools, health care, agriculture and landowners.
7. Paul Bruhn and Preservation Trust could be key project resources.

Task Force Signups

ED Biello, Danelle Birong, Tara Brooks, Kathy Cannon, Sarah Cowan, Jon Crystal, Laura Fall, Bob Feuerstein, Peter Fried, Jeff Fritz, Scott Gaines, Lisa Gosselin, Mel Hawley, Lynn Jackson Donnelly, Julie Jones, Lillian Kennedy, Bob Kesner, Mark Koenig, Sarah Morris, William Northrup, Kitty Oxholm, Renny Perry, Kevin Rooney, Kathy Rossier, Jen Russell, Kendra Schpok, Gerianne Smart, Liesje Smith, Steve Terry, Emily Tupper, Chris Von Trapp

✓ Task Force: Redevelop the Vergennes Falls Basin & Open a Riverwalk

Chairperson: **Mike Winslow**

Facilitator: **Ted Brady**, State Director, USDA Rural Development

Resource Leaders: **Tom Berry**, Office of Senator Leahy

Sharon Combes-Farr, *Digital Economy Project Director*, VCRD

Bill Laberge, *Chair of Manchester Riverwalk Task Force Group*

David Raphael, *Landscape Architect & Planner*, Landworks

The basin and riverside are unparalleled but underutilized assets for the future of Vergennes. A Basin and Riverside Task Force could galvanize community volunteers for immediate work to improve the area and to plan longer term strategic improvements. Residents envision a small mooring field for visiting boaters, a modest expansion of the docks, improved trails, expanded seating and picnic tables, landscaping, beautification, extended WiFi, improved lighting on the east side, and better signage. Some see future steps including building a boat house with rest rooms, or even a pavilion on the west shore, and improving a gravel path or a board walk on the east side. Work should be completed to connect the rail trail to the park. With heritage trail signage and public artwork this area could be an enormous benefit to local folks and draw to tourists. Some envision a day when events, bands, food, and a new pedestrian bridge could make the basin a major attraction for the entire region.

What has the community done already?

- Plan 15 years or more ago. Possibly the “gateway project.”
- Vergennes downtown project a few years later.
- Staircase was done.
- Town got the Pump House.
- Added some interpretive signage in Settler’s Park / Falls Park.

Action Steps

1. Create Base Map.
2. Study “Old Plan.”
3. Site Assessment. Physical. Historical.
4. Define Scope of Project.
5. Create Sub-Committees.
6. Visioning. Create Project Plan.
7. Quick Hits for This Boating Season.

Resources:

- NPS – Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Program
- City Rec Fund.
- City Engineer.
- Nature Conservatory.
- Green Mountain Power.
- Job Corps – Urban Forestry.
- UVM Forestry Plan.
- UVM Rubenstein Studies.
- Lake Champlain Basin Program. Federally funded program. Annual. Cultural Resource Inventory. Cultural Heritage Resource.
- Middlebury College.
- Local Students.
- Long Boat Program. Maritime Museum.
- Rozilla. They are active in Vermont and they clean up shorelines.

- Vermont Youth Conservation Corps.
- Vermont Dept. of Tourism.
- Vermont Fish & Wild Life
- UVM PR Projects. Capstone.
- Regional Planning Commission. For Mapping.
- Local Businesses.
- Look for Private Donors for Your Fund Raising Campaign.
- USDA Conservation Inventory.
- Agency of Transportation.
- Anne Sullivan. Local Resource.

- Cookie Stepanitis.
- Vergennes Historical Society.
- Maritime Museum.
- Dept. of Transportation Tiger Grant.
- USDA Rural Development.
- Arts Community.
- CDBG.
- VT Arts Council.
- Church community organization.
- Vergennes Partnership.

Raw Notes:

Stakeholders:

- Green Mountain Power
- City
- Otto Creeks
- Landowners
- Goodrich

- Vermont Fish & Wild Life
- David Shelanski (owns several things)
- Historical Society – archaeological dig, etc. Old Ship Yard.
- Maritime Museum.

Brainstorming a list of potential Action Steps:

- Cleaning up. Especially now after the spring.
- Using the debris etc. to start with public artwork to get the public involved.
- Cross walks. Easy ways to access the basin.
- Make the curb appeal better. Signage. Landscaping. Lighting. To attract pedestrians. Something symbolic of the basin with signage.
- Graphic rendering of what we have here so that the community members and visitors are aware of the basin.
- “Way finding strategy.” There is an old plan, a few of which already had some steps implemented. Way finding from the falls to the downtown.
- Scholansky building with mural by the way down.
- Determine the scope of what are the riverside and the basin and what is under the scope of the project.
- Confusion about directions along the riverside.
- Generate a map and maybe photos to mark up in the next meeting to physically identify on a physical plan what the next steps are for us to do.
- We need to do things to make the water a destination.

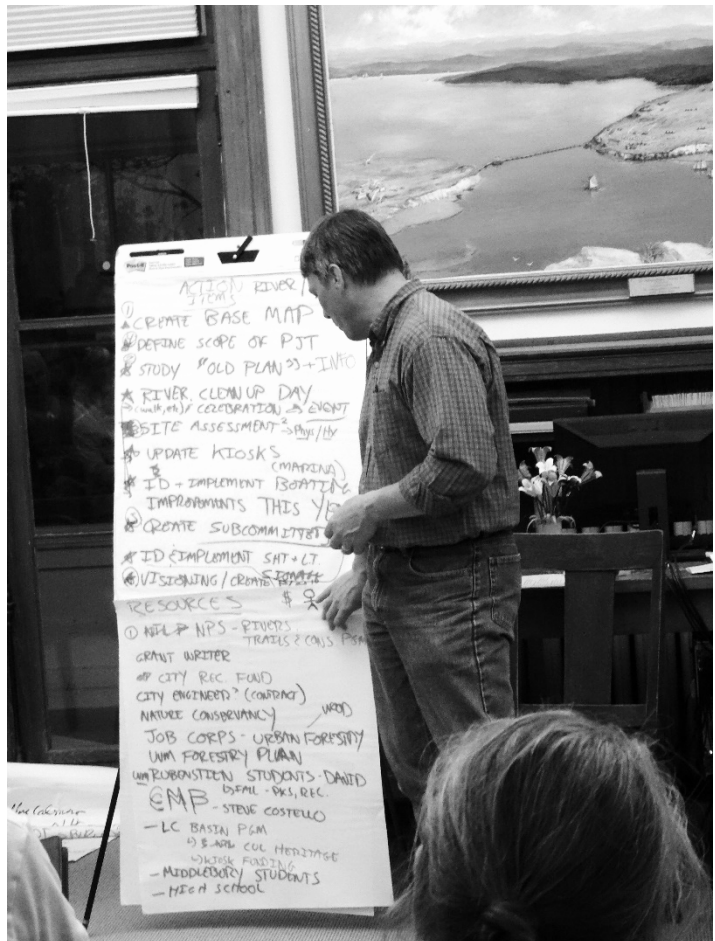
- The City owns the Pump House. We could do something with that.
- Above the falls should be included in the falls at some point also. Settler’s Park is sketchy and under-utilized. Parking. Boat launch. Needs lighting.
- River walk. Mapping it out.
- Need a plan of how the river ebbs and flows floodway planning. Geomorphic assessment.
- Green Mountain Power wants to put in a museum (Vergennes is the birthplace of GMP).
- Find ways to use the land now to get people down on the water front:
- Dog park put in a space that is currently being mowed.
- Playground to use the river space and make it inviting to families.
- Community garden.
- Giant sun dial to give us direction / orientation.
- Opportunity for community engagement: inventory, analysis and mapping process: audit and look at local conditions. Establish baseline.
- Issues of navigation. Dumping.
- Survey people locally and ask them what they would like to see. Was one already done?
- Use social media / Front Porch Forum.

- Historic assessment.
- Leverage boating. Bring boaters in. Create tourism.
- Bathrooms. BBQ. Facilities.
- What are the permitting etc. for having businesses along the river.
- Infrastructure that exists and what is needed for other things.
- Stakeholder outreach.
- Physical – determine space.
- Programming – elements that you are planning for.
- Marketing / PR.
- Physical inventory / analysis.
- Historical inventory / analysis.
- Wayfinding / beautification/ landscaping.
- Some other group is already doing a dog park.
- Clean-up and short-term improvements. Quick hits / low hanging fruit to get done before this boating season.
- Show them that physically things are happening but also show them a vision.
- Lots of volunteers will crop up. What can be done by volunteers? For what do you need to hire people?
- At the next meeting, have a work day to do clean up.
- Communicate.
- Make a map – vision map.
- Communicate.
- Planning commission, etc.
- Get going and have a point of contact and continue to report.
- Monthly emails that includes updates from each chair about what is up.

Task Force Signups

Sandy Beck, Betsey Benton, Beverly Biello, Chris Bradford, Vaughn Collins, Timothy Cook, Sean Costello, Tim Cowan, Matt Daniels, Michael Daniels, Kate Donovan, Susan Ferland, Scott Gaines, Teena Hayden, Deb Healey, Connie Houston, Nancy Klopfenstein, Matt Kohler, Andrea Lalumiere, Carrie Macfarlane, William Northrup, Renny Perry, David Raphael, Allison Rimmer, Betsy Rippner, Ashley Robinson, Erin Roche, Kathy Rossier, June Sargent, Kendra Schpok, Jeff Scott, Liesje Smith, Jill Strube, Jon Turner, Dave Welch, Mike Winslow

Task force groups started building their workplans at the Resource Meeting on May 21st



V. Resource Team Recommendations

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

✓ Improve Transportation and Parking

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

The Task Force should work with the Addison Country Regional Planning Commission and its Transportation Advisory Committee to develop the plan and eventually include the implementation of the plan in the state transportation budget. But it should also look at some smaller steps that are immediately implementable by the municipality or by volunteers.

Downtown businesses could work together through the Vergennes partnership to create incentive programs for employees to carpool, walk/bike or take transit and the longer term plan could include preferential parking for carpooling. Parking is a symptom of a car issue in general so that the best solution is not just getting employees to park away from critical spots, but not drive to work.

Although it would be good for a cohesive plan to emerge from the group that meets all the goals, it is important to recognize the utility of individual chunks of the plan so that you have some possible subjects for small grant programs like the Transportation Alternatives Program that is part of the most recent federal transportation authorization. Although there isn't as much money available as there was in the old Transportation Enhancement program, this new category is a good match for some of your goals. Further, VTrans still has a Bike/Ped program and new projects are being accepted. Segregating the sidewalks and paths as much as possible is advised in terms of seeking project funding. The planning commission connection is important in understanding the variety of possible funding options.

There are two great groups currently working on walkability and transportation issues – Local Motion (based in Burlington) and AARP Vermont (in Montpelier). Both have dedicated staff working with local communities at the grassroots organizing and policy levels to improve streetscapes, make towns more walkable, reduce carbon footprints and encourage more alternative transportation. Emily Boedecker is the director of Local Motion and Kelly Stoddard is the staff person at AARP. Kelly has great experience bringing different stakeholders, who sometimes disagree, together for a common vision around walkable towns. Towns that are more walkable for senior citizens are towns that are more walkable for everyone!

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE TRANSPORTATION, PARKING & BIKING TASK FORCE:

VTrans has a number of grant funding opportunities for project scoping or design/build projects including:

- Transportation Alternatives Program: <http://vtransengineering.vermont.gov/sections/ltf/transportationalternatives>
- VTrans Bike/Ped Program: http://vtransengineering.vermont.gov/sections/ltf/bike_ped

- VTrans Class I Town Highway Program (for enhancing crossings etc.):
<http://vtransengineering.vermont.gov/sections/highway>

The Addison County Regional Planning Commission is a key resource – Adam Lougee (alougee@acrpc.org), Executive Director, and Daryl Benoit (dbenoit@acrpc.org), Transportation Planner.

The VTrans Planning staff could also be helpful: Sommer Roefaro, sommer.roefaro@state.vt.us, 802-828-3884.

ACTR, Local Motion, Go Vermont and AARP could all lend assistance.

The Vermont Community Foundation offers several funding programs that could help with any of these taskforces, including the Walter Cerf Fund that is specifically for projects in Addison County as well as “Small and Inspiring” grants designed to help build social capital at the local level and “Innovation and Collaboration” grants that take a look at larger structural changes (contact Christopher Kaufmann-Ilstrup, info pg. 50). In addition, Preservation Trust of Vermont may have resources to keep Vergennes downtown streetscape active and well-utilized (Paul Bruhn’s contact info pg. 50), and Vermont Downtown Program at the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Economic Development might also be a useful funding and consulting resource.

Local Motion in Burlington, led by Emily Boedecker (contact info pg. 50), helps move all sorts of bike and pedestrian projects forward...they could lend advice and maybe energy for project development. Local Motion offers a variety of printed resources for promoting walking and biking. Most are available at no charge. Local Motion is available to consult on bike infrastructure projects – path development, road redesign, and so on – on an hourly fee basis. Services include the following: helping project advocates map out partnerships and strategies for maximizing the transformational potential of their project idea; providing guidance on funding sources for walk-bike projects that are a good fit for Task Force goals; conducting a technical review of concept plans or scoping studies for projects that are already in the design phase, helping advocates understand the planning process and identify opportunities for influencing project design; advising local leaders about smart strategies for mobilizing community support for the project and channeling that support in ways that maximize its impact.

✓ Advance the Vergennes Economy & Expand the Community & Economic Development Capacity of the City

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

Vergennes should consider adopting the local option tax by amending the city charter like Burlington, South Burlington, Winooski, Killington, Middlebury and St. Albans Town, among many others have done.

The city could even consider adopting it in conjunction with Ferrisburgh or other partnering communities to address some regional issues and to invest in regional economic development action. While a bit more complex to initiate, a regional approach is very important and useful. It would require a clear understanding and commitment from all municipal partners around goals and how much skin they must have in the game.

For help crafting the language or advancing the concept, contact Steven Jeffrey, Executive Director at the VT League of Cities and Towns at sjeffrey@vlct.org or (802)229-9111 ext. 1915.

The Task Force will need to build the case for a local options tax around what it can contribute in incentives and supports for the future of the community, including all it can do for future tax revenue by encouraging local business startups, growth of emerging businesses, and the location of more mature operations. Part of that investment could be in a new municipal position, part or full time, in a community and economic development professional. This person could support task forces, write grants and raise funds and provide staff leadership in project implementations. Some funds might also be designated to the Vergennes Partnership to expand its capacity and its role as a downtown and business association with an aggressive agenda. Some could be devoted to immediate practical and impactful project elements that will show short term momentum.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY OF THE CITY:

Look at the charters from those towns mentioned above (24 VSA Appendix). Propose the same language. Steve Jeffrey at VLCT can help with not only the wording but also estimates of how much it would bring in.

As it takes state action to amend the charter, the Addison County Vermont House and Senate delegations should be able to get it passed once voters approve it.

Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development staff can also lend advice and expertise on economic development planning, project implementation, and on tax issues. Robin Scheu at the ACRDC can be an indispensable ally and partner in all the work ahead.

✓ Task Force: Redevelop the Vergennes Falls Basin & Open a Riverwalk

POTENTIAL ACTION STEPS:

Vergennes residents demonstrated a terrific commitment to the redevelopment of this under-used precious city asset.

Some of the planning and development in the basin area may take years; but some things can be done immediately. The Task Force should build a short list of things that could be immediately accomplished with volunteer labor and minimal resources then invite the Vergennes community and volunteers from neighboring towns to a Basin work day with clean up, brush clearing, painting or other jobs framed for immediate action. This can build momentum and interest and mark out that this is an action-oriented process, not just a planning discussion.

It will be important to create and share a vision: develop a physical design scheme for what the Riverwalk could look like. Share the vision with key stakeholder groups to create buy-in. Evaluate costs and viability for the vision (including zoning, possible environmental permitting considerations, transportation nodes and access, etc.). Build a constituency of support. Raise funds locally and through potential grants.

There's a great opportunity here to work with Job Corp, with the Tech Center and with the High School to engage young people in projects around the basin—some could be invited to serve on the committee, others may participate in volunteer work to improve the basin.

There's also an opportunity here to work with Basin Harbor and the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, to mark out the history in the basin, connect it to the cultural heritage tourism path, and perhaps to even develop some sort of Museum annex that addresses the important role that the basin played in the Lake's maritime history and the history of the state of Vermont.

It would be terrific to see a historical self-guided walking tour of Vergennes that included the basin and took visitors to a number of landmarks (and past great shopping and dining while they are touring). There might there also be an opportunity to use the basin as an outdoor summer concert venue in collaboration with the Vergennes Partnership.

It will be important to identify all potential stakeholders including land owners and abutters as path and project planning goes forward.

All local conservation partners including the Vermont Rivers Conservancy, Vermont Land Trust, and the Vermont Chapter of the Nature Conservancy could be convened to get their help and buy in for the creation of trails and development of the Riverwalk.

It will be important to develop a baseline understanding of the river's own needs relative to flood mitigation and biological health. Any work to include the river as a downtown feature needs to consider these factors.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE FALLS BASIN & RIVERWALK TASK FORCE:

The Task Force will ultimately need some professional help. David Raphael of Landworks (see contact info in Resource Team section) could be a potential contractor, or other potential planning and implementation partners could be evaluated, to help the Task Force and community build a unifying design for improvements, trails, and infrastructure features at the falls and basin.

It seems that some of this could be paid for with a fundraising campaign, opportunity for businesses to "adopt" tables, the dock, etc. The Task Force could explore the potential for some funding for basin improvements through the 1% economic development tax and communicate with the economic development committee that the redevelopment of the basin as a community priority would be an investment with a strong return in quality of life, tourism and economic development in the city.

The Vermont Community Foundation would be interested to hear about opportunities to help as the Task Force identifies ways to better utilize this great spot. Other organizations that could help might include the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, Lake Champlain Committee, Watersheds United and other water and recreation groups. Connecting more intentionally with Quebec tourism groups would also be a good idea, to encourage Quebec boaters to visit Vergennes. The New England Grassroots Environment Fund might be another small funding source for seeding community projects at the falls (Cheryl Fischer, 802-223-6848).

Many of the resources that could be available to the Riverside Task Force are closely connected to the Transportation Task Force goals related to biking and walking; clearly these two teams will want to work closely together. Representatives from both may want to meet with Kingdom Trails, and the citizens who recently put together the Barre Town Forest project as well as the Stowe Land Trust which recently closed on the Cady Falls mountain biking project. Other resources of local inspiration are Nona

Estrin who headed up the East Montpelier Trails group, Nancy Malcolm who led the fall redevelopment effort in Middlebury, and Rob Woolmington who has done great work through the Fund for North Bennington. Nancy, for example, could be invited to share the story of Middlebury's efforts and their 'lessons learned' at a Task Force meeting.

Paul Gallo (775-7673) and Susan Schreiber (775-0871 x207) who have led the development of the Rutland bike and pedestrian path and could share advice on fundraising and project development.

Vermont ANR River Management Program can provide info on stream ecology and management (802-828-1294).

The National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program can help with planning, implementation, and identification of resources; they have recently been working with the Manchester Riverwalk group. Contact Jennifer Waite, 457.3368, ext 21, Jennifer.Waite@nps.gov.

The Vermont Downtown Program could help access funds or tax credits: Vermont Downtown Designation, Leanne Tingay, Downtown Program Coordinator, 828-3220 and leanne.tingay@state.vt.us. Or visit their website for more information: http://accd.vermont.gov/strong_communities/opportunities/revitalization/downtown.

Scenic Byways Grant Program and Transportation Enhancement Grants (now called Alternatives) could be investigated through VTrans (828-3522). VTrans staff can help in other ways too; Sue Scribner at VTrans could help identify funding options. This includes the bike/ped and enhancement programs (828-3588).

Community Development Block Grant program managed by the Agency of Commerce: ACCD Vermont Community Development Program, Local Transportation Facilities: http://accd.vermont.gov/strong_communities/opportunities/funding/vcdp. Cindy Blondin, Grants Specialist, 802-828-5219 and cindy.blondin@state.vt.us. And ACCD Municipal Planning Grants might be useful in funding for further framing of the project: http://www.accd.vermont.gov/strong_communities/opportunities/funding/overview/municipal_planning_grants. Wendy Tudor, Grants Administrator, 802-828-5249 and wendy.tudor@state.vt.us.

Vermont Community Foundation, Christopher Kaufman Ilstrup, Philanthropic Advisor for Program and Grants, 802-388-3355 ext. 295 or cilstrup@vermontcf.org. <http://www.vermontcf.org>.

USDA Rural Development. Vermont office: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/NH-VTHome.html>. Jon Muise, Area Director, (802) 257-7878 x106 and jon.muise@vt.usda.gov.

National Conservation District, <http://www.nacdnet.org/vermont/>. Jill Arace, Executive Director, (802)496-5162 and jill.arace@vacd.org.

Vermont Land Trust (<http://www.vlt.org/>) and Vermont Nature Conservancy (<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/vermont/index.htm>) are natural allies in advancing this effort.

Communities that have done significant riverside development over the last few years include: Springfield, Middlebury, Manchester, Stowe, Winooski, Montpelier, Waitsfield, Bennington—any and all could be visited to learn how they were successful.

VII. The City Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held with over 100 Vergennes residents and the VCRD Visiting Team on March 18 2014

Although the prioritization work of the Community Visit Program requires a town to decide what is most important as it moves forward with Task Forces, nothing is lost in the process from the long list of concerns and ideas expressed in early community focus sessions. Many interesting and diverse thoughts are represented here, and are presented as a reminder of issues explored, and a possible foundation for future projects.

Municipal & Nonprofit Resources

Resource Team: Tom Berry (facilitator), Karen Glitman, Steve Jeffrey, Ryan Leamy (scribe), Adam Lougee, Michael Moser, Brian Searles, Mark Snelling, Leanne Tingay

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Several major employers (UTC; Country Owned Products, Job Corps Center (which trains around 250 students).
- Elementary and High Schools.
- Emergency shelter.
- Clay Brook Residential.
- Regional sewer system in run out of Vergennes, not in Ferrisburgh.
- Food shelf.
- Temporary shelter.
- 14 miles of roads, meaning less maintenance than other towns in area.
- Strong fraternal organizations, including the Rotary, Lion's Club – the largest Lion's in state – but growth is limited and membership is currently skewed old in its age distribution.
- Boys & Girls Club.
- Vergennes Partnership.
- Vergennes Opera House.
- Rescue squad.
- John Graham shelter.
- The Water Tower Fund: The tower behind the opera house generates nearly \$100,000 annually and is earmarked for infrastructure/capital improvements. Goal of funds are to be leveraged into other dollars. In budget, listed under own tower fund so they can trace and see where funding goes. Can be seen as "only 100k", but is generally seen as a great resource and is good for matching for federal or state funding projects.
- A strong communication infrastructure:
 - Broadband: Comcast serves city but Panton/outside towns don't get it; free Wi-Fi downtown.
 - Cellphones: cell towers on water town.
- Green Mountain Power and Vermont Gas soon to come. Many like to think pipeline will help attract business but the city is not planning on it. Does offer an energy alternative for citizens. Currently allowing for hookups. The current expansion is all about the Vergennes/Middlebury corridor.
- The compact nature of city is an asset. It is walkable and offers the ability to commute around easily.
- City water infrastructure.
- Fire Department is all-volunteer, and responds quickly and effectively.
- Good place to do business - currently has a commercial rating of 4.
- School Assets: Having two schools in city limits is one of their biggest resources.
 - City has two union schools: The elementary (260 students from three towns, has capacity for 350 students) and high school (580 students at school, with 660 student capacity).
 - High school is seen as an economic driver in the community. Two gyms bring people into community almost every weekend. These facilities bring people to the city and spend money.
 - Maintaining schools have good impact; one of the most attractive things about town or cities.
 - High school is one of best in state with a high graduation rate; one of highest in country.
 - Student enrollment: Elementary has been steady for past five years and will be for next five years; the High School saw a decline for 10 years but has now evened out. No projection for next 5 years.
 - There is also the private Champlain Valley Christian School in the city.
- School Issues:
 - Elementary has 52% rate of free/reduced lunch rate. This isn't reflected in other avenues of city life.
 - This last year, the High School budget failed. Many voted against it because it was seen that by increasing budget by 2.4%, there would really be an overall 15-20% increase in resident's tax rate because of new state tax (7%) and municipal bond costs.
 - Both a benefit and a hindrance is that many of the local government and non-profits have the same board members. A select few are involved in everything. Currently there are no formal meetings between government and local non-profits.
 - The Bixby Library has advantage because it's free which enables them to be more useful to both groups and citizens. The library encourages Wi-Fi in community.

What are the Challenges in this Area?

The city feels stuck because of both physical and financial limitations. There are a vast amount of resources in the city, but they are limited by only 1,600 acres of city property and the limited financial resources.

Physical Limitations

- They have no lake access, so are limited in resources.
- Limited city space. Of land in city limits: 272 acres is owned by the state, 100 acres is school property, 50-60 acres is city property, 66 acres is occupied by Northlands Job Corps.
 - 272 acres of state land is flood plain/agriculture; used by the city for lagoon sludge (35 acres).
 - There is an item in State bill to appropriate \$50,000 to develop master plan for State land.
- Unlike Winooski, there is a little space to grow. Limited to certain areas of the city. There are 40-50 acres available in the Industrial Park; Northern Gateway District near police station available; Marketplace space.
- Library is not eligible for US Rural Development Grants; the five towns are a little too rich so they don't qualify.
- There are issues of property ownership:
 - Median household income is higher than people might think – compared to free/reduced lunch there is a disconnect which is related to age demographic.
 - 1,133 living units and 358 are rental apartments. Many of these overall units are single family mobile homes.

Financial Limitations

- \$1.8 million total budget without sewer (includes administration, police, public works).
- Other appropriations, including share to library, fire and rescue squad comes from \$40,000 in voter appropriations.

Grand List

- Grand list is only 220 million dollars which hasn't changed in last few years. As a result, tax resources are stuck.
- In comparison, nearby Ferrisburgh used to have same size grand list but are now at \$453 million dollars. Many see that the towns around Vergennes are growing without changing municipal demands but Vergennes hasn't grown.
 - Highest % of non-taxable property – 1,600 acres total land/remove roads.
 - 30-40% of real estate is not on grand list.
 - Green Mountain Power pays taxes but in the scheme of things, it's very little.

Public Services

- Infrastructure for five towns is run out of Vergennes with Addison, Ferrisburgh, Panton, and Waltham paying-in. All towns also are paying/supporting per capita basis for Bixby Library.
- This leads to many issues, include that the demand for municipal service is difficult to meet given the (limited) tax resources.
- Public works always in catch-up mode; overall, struggling with how to balance stable tax rate and not lay off employees or change services.
- Police cost is high for city because of a new station and the fact that the community has appetite for a strong police presence. Currently don't have 24/7 police duty. With 6 full-time and 4 part-time officers, cruisers, insurance, supplies,

- etc., cost is over \$800,000 per year. They spend more on police than other towns or cities do in their entirety.
 - JG Shelter, for example, relies heavily on police services.
 - For residents, the further they live away from the fire/police services the less benefits they get from insurance.
- Local sewer treatment plant has a capacity of 750k/gallon/day and is currently operating at 329k/gallons/day. There is a large capacity available but not combined system. They've had 1272 order because of overflows at pump station (Macdonough Drive).
- In reality, the 329/750 of capacity doesn't give a real representation of system. Have to allow for storm-water overflows so with that, don't have unused capacity. Still have infrastructure needs to manage.

Other Limitations

- **Public transportation** is an issue, especially on weekends. Getting to/from Middlebury in early morning good but later is tough. ACTR said they need more businesses to support extra bus service.
- **Local tax rate:** In surrounding towns there are some very generous individuals who help support city but feeling besieged with tax rates. Vergennes needs them for charity and their philanthropic projects are now being threatened. In general, these same individuals are questioning whether they want to remain in Vermont because of taxes, and many have the choice to leave.
 - Majority of donors of Opera House also don't live in Vergennes and are from the feeder community.
 - The 2008 downturn hurt a lot of local donor base. Vergennes Partnership has brought \$400,000 into the city from donors and grants and has only received \$7,000 dollars from the city. Over half comes from businesses and downtown property owners. Unfortunately, the donor base isn't growing.
 - Currently the city has an endowment but not utilizing it in fully sustainable way. Despite this, there is a light at the end of the tunnel and many feel as if it will turn itself around.
 - City will no longer tax machinery and inventory for businesses. This was developed as a result of a pre-negotiated deal with UTC. The intention was to phase-out taxes over 10-year period and was sold to voters on the premise that "and then business will come." They can see now that they didn't come; the 3-5% increase in the grand list hasn't happened liked planned. Now, the demand of budget increases not being met by tax revenue.
- **Local business:** Main Street makes money in summer but isn't a winter destination because of a lack of local skiing options.
 - Small retail having trouble as a whole.
 - Restaurants doing well, but with the Opera House having trouble as of late (they, for example, don't have paid employees), there is less business on Saturday night.
 - Basin Harbor drives people through and the city has become a cycling destination. Going forward, they are looking to capitalize on this bike traffic.

- The majority of retail sales in city are not from people who live Vergennes.
- If city decides to start a recreation department, there is a potential for using a local tax option similar to Middlebury, Burlington or Williston. Vergennes Main Street lends itself well to a consumption tax.
- **Local non-profits:** Maintaining or keeping nonprofit infrastructure is challenging and has been hurting for the past couple years.
 - The Boys and Girls Club is currently in financial straits. They recently lost a major funding grant and had to cut K-5th grade after-school program. This had a significant effect on the community and working parents as the Elementary school doesn't offer an after-school program.
 - Many of major donors are reconsidering staying in or around Vergennes. This is a greater issue for the state and not just in city. Most donors don't live in Vergennes.
 - Vergennes Partnership: There are four parts of mission: 1) help design city, 2) provide oversight, 3) promote city and 4) economic development.
- This economic development component is limited, as only one person volunteers and will be retiring soon. This is a very small part of their role in city. They play a role in recruiting business.
- A state mandated non-profit.
- **Job Corps:** There is a concern that Job Corps across country will dwindle and although Vergennes may not be on top of chopping block, that day may come.
 - Currently, the campus is not at its best use and something better could go out there. Many guessed that the 125 employed are probably under employed. This relates back to the feeling of "being stuck" that the town has.
 - A majority of the people at the Job Corps are people not from Vergennes but instead from New York and drive over across the border every day.
 - Less than 30% of students are Vermont residents. Of the 185 students, 17 are from Vermont.
 - They, proportionally, take a lot of municipal resources and don't pay in. In many ways, they don't drive community development.
 - The parents/students/employees don't spend time/money in the city and they don't make wages that could be spent in the city.
 - Many of their buildings are old and in rough shape. Facilities were started in 1880 and are now a liability for the state of Vermont.
- State earns \$6,400 a year from Job Corps (pilot money based on insured value of property). There was 1978 agreement that required contractors to pay Vergennes for their services but this was lost in 2002-2003. Seen as a sore spot for the city. Seen as "changing rules/part of the deal" after the fact.
- Overall the city feeling towards Job Corps is mixed. It is tough to speak out against program because they do offer good services for youth that are there but the other side that says, "what are they doing for us? We provide but what do they give back?"
- They do bring diversity to the community, in a civic sense.
- One of the big problems is that the facility has no face – City doesn't know who they are and only hear negative side of program. Many don't know the positive side. This is a real problem with community but could be an asset if relationship was different.
- One suggestion was that they could contribute to municipal projects or help around the city. For example, St Peter's uses students to do lawn and cemetery in summer.
- New director has shown signs of wanting to communicate Job Corps' mission to the city.
- The state earns \$300,000 in rent per year from Federal government from property. If the Federal government stopped appropriations, 125 people would be out of work and the state would both lose their rental income and have a large property without someone paying for rent or maintenance, which is the real cost, it dwarfs the cost of rent. The Vergennes master plan helps support this what if situation.
- **Regional planning commissions:**
 - City has no delegates or alternates to Addison Development Commission although Mel (Vergennes) and Adam (Planning Commission) communicate regularly.
 - City does actively participate in transportation advisory committee.
 - These issues come from no representation. Every March there is a push for someone to go but recruitment is low and it is tough to recruit when you don't know what the commission does. Many feel the need to keep good workers in the city and working in the city.
 - Will avail themselves to funding but not excluding themselves.
 - Regional Economic Development Agency – Mel is representative.

Questions going forward:

- Does city need a recreation coordinator or development officer?
- A large number of non-profits in the city rely on city funding. How much should the city be paying for these resources?
- Who will/should pay for these services?
- Currently there is no district tax and no local sales tax. Many are asking whether they should add a local sales tax to better share the wealth rather than increasing property tax.
- As Vergennes is not one of the first land grant chartered towns it has the potential to consolidate with local towns. The question is if they couldn't consolidate schools, how would they do towns?
- Town of Waltham – 453/483 residents have had talks about joining services.
- Town of Panton has property tax issues that Vergennes consults on. They feel like they can't afford a town administrator.
- Team with Bridport and Addison to find opportunities.
- No merger between towns and Vergennes.

Role of Municipal Government

Resource Team: Tom Berry, Margaret Gibson McCoy (scribe), Karen Glitman, Steve Jeffrey, Ryan Leamy, Adam Lougee, Michael Moser, Brian Searles, Mark Snelling (facilitator), Leanne Tingay

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Best part of city Government is Mel. He runs the city well, is conscious of what the city needs, what it looks like and is cautious about the dollar. We have a strong alderboard which will guide the city positively into the future. Lots of positive things about everything about Vergennes. So much good is happening especially in the last 15 years starting with the opera house renovation, the basin block, filling the downtown. People in town all came forth and changed it.
 - Institutional knowledge Mel brings is impressive in the stewardship he provides. When the decision was made to resurrect the city 15 years ago.
 - A lot of vested people who are interested in bringing us to the next level.
 - Pool, swim team, t-ball but it's not centrally run.
 - City owns the cemetery.
 - Job Corps: culinary, welding.
 - Good base of volunteerism.
 - Great city.
 - Want to keep what we have going here in the downtown.
 - We have a lot of capacity with water treatment, sewer, broadband, school space. The bones are there compared to most of the other municipalities in Addison County and maybe even the rest of the state. How do we capitalize on the community development infrastructure we have?
 - Is our zoning policy too restrictive and hurting population growth? Or do we want to grow? Do we want to be a municipality with 5,000 people? We're in a balancing act. Want to have, but not too much. People in the basin don't want it to be a Burlington waterfront.
 - Basin Harbor Club is an asset.
-

What are the Challenges in this Area?

- Personal inability to be more involved in city workings.
 - Vergennes incorporated school district doesn't have a purpose but needed to stay active because it owned the municipal pool. But the city took over the pool in 2010. We have recreational opportunities but we don't have a recreation department or coordinator.
 - Should the municipal government play a role in economic development? Maybe there are some things we're in that we shouldn't be in.
 - 3 city staff, 6 full time police, 4 full time public works, 2 full time wastewater treatment plus some part-time sprinkled in. Fire Department is volunteer. City owns library but staff don't work for the city. Plus 7 City Council, 8 Planning Commission, 7 Development Review Board, Mel is Zoning Administrator, Board of Listers.
 - A resident of the city designed the website. Mel can post things but he's not maintaining it. It's volunteer driven.
 - From website perspective, wish I knew more about our customer. Who are they: residents, tourists? How to serve them with event information.
 - Pool of people that make things happen here is getting smaller. Those that have are burned out, they can't do it anymore.
 - Small city with small property tax base.
 - If something happened to UTC, or DR, or to Nathaniel we'd be in trouble. We have a 50 house sub-division bringing new people to town to UTC. If we don't do something about employment, we'll lose who we are.
 - If the Partnership focused on the downtown by putting up new light poles, putting trash cans out, filling stores, but someone else trying to fill Pantan Road and creating traffic jams with people trying to get to work.
 - Look at the tenant mix – what is needed downtown? What are the store hours? Do all the restaurants close on Monday? When tourists have questions, they talk to least paid person (like convenience store clerk, gas station) about what to do here and they wouldn't know. The workers need to be educated so they know how to answer the questions; the business community has to train the first greeters to be ambassadors to our area.
 - Vergennes chamber doesn't exist anymore, so Partnership is trying to fill in.
 - If want to draw more people to town, we have to have housing.
-

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Should the city government take on greater or lesser role? Should they add functions like Economic Development?
- Recreation director. In the tourism session talked a lot about recreation for the community. Is there a way government could help communicate and promote recreation opportunities throughout the community so folks know about them and take advantage of them?
- Communication is an opportunity. It would be helpful to know what's happening in town. A website or some other informational communication system.

- Market Vergennes on the website to draw the type of people you want to draw to Vergennes.
- Agency of Transportation owns the train station (owned by Ferrisburgh but it's in Vergennes). Interested in having a welcome center there and are looking for help to run the facility. Between the city, state and chamber there might be some solutions to accomplish marketing and recreation goals out of that facility.
- Maybe have a job corps student as an intern to work on the website.
- For little money we could make things happen through the city government. They should put some money on the table, eventually hire an economic director to promote economic growth. Need someone engaged, instructed and paid to make things happen.
- Look what Middlebury did with Exchange Street. Take that extra step for Vergennes. Addison County groups could help bringing industry. Why can't we attract them? There couldn't be a better place to live. Opportunity for city government to do economic development or allow it to happen. We could split it with Bristol; we don't necessarily have to fund the whole thing. Why is Kennedy Brothers empty? Power costs and access are challenges.
- If took same resources for Addison County Economic Development Corp would get a bigger bang for your buck. Vergennes is a small city. There is a reason people work regionally to aggregate resources. The city tried to work that route 20 years ago, need to try again. Further conversation could move those concepts along.
- Addison County Regional Development Corporation can be helpful; you can see the fruit of their efforts with Nathaniel. But they haven't done anything for us lately. May just need more communication between Robin and City Council and some way to measure success. Want to be able to link a success to the work of ACEDC.
- JP Carrera owns the property but nothing has been built there. Can't compare Panton Rd to Exchange St. Pantan Rd, the Cornfield, VT Industrial Parks owns 20 acres in the valley, undeveloped high density area with a lot of topography problems. Country Home Products. Simmons Precision left in 1995.
- Marketing and coordination of recreation.
- Finish the bike path.
- Is it a function of government to grow the grand list which is at 20.2M now?
- How to be more effective and efficient. Last few years, the country has been at economic plateau at best. We're there locally too. Getting new industry is tough locally and nationally. There is a role for the municipal and regional agencies in promoting some growth, but not too much growth. With funding we have with the city now, there's no room for that. If we increased funding somehow, like with sales tax; don't know how well it would go with voters.
- Town area is limited and parking is limited. Need convenient parking for employees to leave Main Street for patrons. Need the people that work in the area to come downtown to lunch but how do we park them, make them feel welcome, that they feel like they are part of the downtown? They won't park two blocks away to eat, especially if they have limited time.
- Vergennes has excellent community development infrastructure.
- Our population is shrinking, 300 lower than 2000 census. It's concerning. The 2010 census should be a little bit of a wakeup call. It's true of the whole state. Over 40 years, we've grown 1.5%. We're below replacement rate in terms of reproduction so it's immigration. Baby boom is retiring and older folks moving to warmer places.
- Local option taxes – don't want to see a community divided. Vergennes tax rate structure is atypical. Budget is on the fiscal year. We have a charter limit on the local tax rate but it's a meaningless number; we would need a charter change. The municipal rate is .66 cents. The community should have some discussion about a local option tax to provide resources. There's a need and an appetite for improvements.
- Municipal government should be more active in the school budget realm. The combined city and school tax drives the taxes up. If we could raise .25 cents to run the city with a recreation director, no one would say anything. If had more input into the school budget and could control it in some way it could all work itself out.
- The funding formulas are killing us. Don't want my taxes to go up 1,100 dollars because we bleed students out of the district.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Folks feel that Vergennes has all the elements; all dressed up to go to the dance but no one is taking it. Feel tension around growth; figure out what is the optimal population for the city. How to improve the economic lot of the community without resorting to growth as the logical way to do it.
- Sounds like local government works pretty well here. But how to get out of stuck position in terms of economic development. When think about the role of government want to think about it without reference to specific people. Have to look what you need notwithstanding who the people are that run it. Discussion became similar to other discussions like you here around. In the 70s Vermont decided it didn't want to grow too much. But here, sounds like you want to grow. High costs, high taxes, all kinds of issues, underscores the need to go out and do marketing. Decide where you are, what you want and have someone go out and do it. What will it look like here if you do all of this.
- There are a lot of things that are just making it. If you had a larger population base it would be easier for those businesses to operate. Some growth can be good. Will we be more of a bedroom community to Burlington in 20 years or will gas get more expensive and will that change.
- Diversified economy, have all the systems in place. No real financial woes.

Transportation & Pedestrian Safety

Resource Team: Tom Berry, Karen Glitman, Steve Jeffrey, Ryan Leamy (scribe), Michael Moser, Brian Searles (facilitator), Mark Snelling, Leanne Tingay

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Link Express to Chittenden County and Middlebury – popular and used often by local residents.
- ACTR system – not sure what popularity is; tri-town Middlebury and Bristol.
- Valuable to John Graham Shelter though they need weekend and night coverage.
- Vergennes is center of great road bike riding with some of best in country. Popular in summer.
- Compact – 14 miles of roads; can focus on downtown and most of city is within walking distance.
- River – Otter creek to Lake is highly utilized and only 7 miles away.
- Access to railways is nice.
- Large number of sidewalks, many which are well maintained. City plows sidewalk and is diligent about plowing and salting in winter.
- Good job marking cross walks – many are known and well respected.
- Good signage; always room for more but most are good.

What are the Challenges in this Area?

- Need for better visibility on Main Street:
 - In summer, tourist traffic makes crossing difficult and curves in road make it difficult to cross.
 - Some of the cross walks are tough to see and parking covers over where crosswalks are.
 - Markings disappear and really tough at night after Opera event.
- Truck traffic:
 - Estimates two trucks a minute causing heavy truck traffic on Main Street; roughly 800 trucks a day.
 - All the fuel for northern Vermont comes through Vergennes.
 - Used to use other streets but now using 22a exclusively.
 - If accident on bridge, rescue and fire would be split because one is on one side and the other on the other – 30 mile round trip to get to other side.
- Condition of infrastructure:
 - Roads are considered “Addison County smooth.”
 - Aged water infrastructure which leads to some deteriorating road.
 - The Class 1 paving program helps and they’re getting close to cycle again; every 15 years.
 - Every year, state can fix about 50% of need in roads and need to dig up water lines in near future.
- Bridge:
 - Only having one bridge offers challenge but good that there aren’t more around. It is of age where it needs to be considered for renovations.
 - Fairly sharp transitions on both ends – not much of an approach of bridge.
- Parking:
 - Any handicap or large vehicle is tough.
 - An event in the city makes it tough.
 - Considerations of a safety issue with parking.
- Discussion for being able to pull in diagonal and backing out can be tough especially for people biking through the city.
- Speeding:
 - In the city can be an issue when police are busy or on other side of the city.
 - North Main there are speed issues; cemetery hill is another bad spot (passed going 30-35).
- Congestion
 - In summertime, especially around 3:30.
 - Seems to have been reduced in last couple years.
 - Panton Road when aerospace plant gets out. Recommendation for a traffic signal which would reduce congestion during commute.
 - Parents picking up kids at high school creates congestion.

Future Factors

Bike Tourism

- Install shoulders on road for bikers:
 - If near shoulder of road can be dangerous – feel much more exposed when there isn’t a shoulder.
 - Between Maple Road and Rt. 7 there aren’t shoulders; once on Rt. 7 there are large shoulders for commuters.
 - Route 22a south are treacherous and any places where safe, direct option for commuting aren’t available.
- Bike Paths:
 - Potential to install bike path for running errands in the city. One that linked the elementary and high school would be great.
 - Small path by tennis courts offers opportunity for mountain bike but not other bikes.
 - If some of streets were one way, it would offer an option for bike lanes.
 - Some grid system to streets allows for possibility for paths connecting the city.
 - Champlain Bikeway has several catch basins that could trip up bikes.

- Ultimately, getting bikes across river is goal.
- Bike safety and Police presence:
 - Consideration for police to up monitoring for left hand turn into diagonal parking spot.
 - Several tough spots in the city: right on red between Green street and Monkton Road are tough; can restrict if lots of pedestrian traffic. Intersection to Monkton Road where buses stop for Graham Shelter is dangerous.
 - Several locations in the city where people are trying to beat yellow light.
 - State law with wrong way parking needs to be enforced stronger; police say opposite side of street parking get warning first then ticket.
- Enhancement-grant got rejected which planned a sidewalk from city center to Park and Ride.

Rail Traffic

- Rail comes outside of the city and many would like passenger service to Burlington (the Ethan Allen from Rutland to Burlington).
- Starting in 2013, US government gave 10 million dollar grant to improve rail line – roughly 12 miles away; 12-15 million dollars more to complete and may take couple years to finish. The state has been offering some funding too.
- Discussion: Is there an option for a gas tax to subsidize rail? Tourists buying gas would help to fund trains and even a penny per gallon would go a long way to helping.
- Rail bring freight traffic and they already do fuel and propane and slurry.

Parking

- Traffic committee encourages 2hr parking rule.
- Police wrote letters to businesses to stop employees from parking in front of store.
- Recommendation for bikes to rent or shuttle from park and ride.
- Recommendation for parking lot for public and employees instead of 2 hr limit. One could have stickers on cars, give tickets for parking outside lot.
- Shuttle in summer that goes around from park and ride/boats to downtown or grocery store – Denniker Chevorlet used to donate cars for this purpose; people used it– insurance and gas price issues stopped it - volunteer drivers – city may have helped pay.

Future Need for Public Transport

- 16-20 y/o no longer showing same interest in cars: expensive to have car and may mean need for public transport.

What needs to be addressed?

- Crosswalks:
 - Painting gets wiped out with traffic and there may be a need to try other devices such as textured pavement or brick/faux brick to emphasize walking locations.
 - Signs tend to get lost on busy street. Maybe the city should try to put signage on road to emphasize.
- Lighting for cross walks and lights that show only on crosswalks (featured LED lighting).
- Crossing at corner is difficult and even at red light in the city and trying to turn, difficult to cross at.
- Build cross walk under bridge, next to river?
- Pedestrian bridge underneath to pump island.
- Putting sidewalk on downstream side and cantilevering it.

- Desire to get employees from manufacturing jobs to downtown for lunchtime to run errands and buy food.
 - There is a commuter bus (ACTR) which goes down to job site but not same purpose.

Trucking

- An accident on singular bridge causes issues and may be need for second bridge.
 - Trucks in the city during snow storm – three entrances blocked by trucks with flatlander tires that couldn't get through – 4-6 hours street was blocked up hill from bridge.
- Noise issues, safety, infrastructure issues:
 - Concerns about 22a – use jig brakes rattle west Main Street; signage isn't adequate. Noted it was illegal to prevent them from using these brakes – engine brake really helps stop weight of big trucks.
- If second bridge came up, how many trucks and cars would stop coming through the city?
 - Can want to limit trucks but can stop cars too and hurt economy.
- Constant 24 hours a day is what makes this so tough.
- Florida town put in roundabouts, and then trucks found other routes without any city legislating; cars still come through.
 - Try to route trucks out of Vergennes – to Brandon on Rt. 4 then 7 north from Rutland.
 - Roundabout under light can't happen because it's a state road (22a) – regulations on what can do make it tough – 13-14 years ago (90s).
 - Small roundabouts can fit at any intersections; tough for trucks and allows for bikes to keep moving.
- Bypass may have unintended consequences
 - Middlebury now have big roundabout that solved issues
- Lots of trucks from NY State bridge – reroute – smooth Rt. 17 from Addison corners to Rt. 7. There would be plenty of room for this to happen.
- Trucks will always try to find shortest route.
- When rebuilding bridge there is a need to bring elevation up.
- Bypass around Vergennes would have cost millions of dollars.

Other Considerations

- Scenic byway sign may draw people in.
- Bringing in electric car charging stations would be really helpful for people traveling in/through the city – if traveling 22a from need place to stop and charge.

- Road is wide enough to pull curbing out to accommodate pedestrian traffic.
- River flood waters make these difficult.
- Pedestrian walk across the river where dead end street (water street – Isols court) is – bike path from there; floods there 200-300 foot cross; needs to be raised so kayaks can go underneath.
- Should improve small park near there.
- Parking:
 - Green info booth could offer parking for bikes in summer; charge a buck or two for ‘valet’ parking.
 - Lot of on-street parking – allow for places where people can cross and be visible and not hidden by cars.
 - Middlebury College study recommendations:
- Add pedestrian signals on Main and Green.
- Main and Monkton road signs.
- Eliminating parking to allow for 10ft spacing – issue of contention because it sacrifices tourist parking versus safety.
- At 360 Main street crosswalk (Pump Island/bridge).
- Additional infrastructure connecting cul-de-sacs.
- Sidewalks:
 - Wider sidewalks necessary – doesn’t allow for two people shoulder to shoulder.
 - Condos have no sidewalks.
 - Hopkins Road needs sidewalk – in planning for full street and part is already created. 5-6 houses will have sidewalks
- and next phase is Clay Brook. Planning to construct sidewalk up 22a to Hopkins Road.
- Nowhere to cross rail road track from downtown to park and ride; excavate old 22a underpass – would be major infrastructure project.
- Opportunity to get downtown bike friendly – look at putting bike lanes on 22a; white strip to designate.
- Take out diagonal parking and make it back-in diagonal so kids aren’t put out into road; instead on sidewalk; when pulling out can see cars and pedestrians walking.
 - Next time to pave need to have ducks in row to take advantage of future changes.
 - What about extended trucks parking on main street – pull over sidewalk if backed in; bumper to bumper traffic would be difficult to park on main.
 - As biker diagonal parking is tough.
 - Alternative route around main street; Panton road is busy with bikes.
- Want them to stop in the city and buy food and coffee and support the city. Put picnic tables to encouraging stopping.
- Would like to put solar on speed signs – New Haven Road, Maple, Green, Main; one of the recommendations for planning.
- 3-8 mile speed reduction – especially when changing zones coming into the city. 50 mph to 30 mph; 2nd or 3rd speed zone sign where looking to stop speeding.

Reflections of the Visiting Team:

- Create nooks that support outdoor dining.
- Transportation issues and creating sense of place: look at it from perspective of master plan and how does it fit together. Pedestrian circulation will affect economic development downtown and is something they need to consider.
- Ecotourism and ability to be a bike friendly community.
- Parking is always beast and no place has solved it. Take small steps to address such as having little signs that say “don’t be a shopper stopper” and put on employee cars parking in front of stores. Card notes that, on average \$250 lost by these people parking where customers can be. Has worked in other locations.
- The city is embracing its walkability and bike friendliness. Many of their recommendations are of a small dollar cost (signs, painting, etc.) and no major issues other than dealing with the bridge and aging infrastructure came up. Overall, they are in unique position with rail, river, bikes and major roads all coming through one place.

Final Thoughts:

1. Don’t want new road or bypass.
2. Pedestrian/ bike issues – crosswalks: signage, lights.
3. Bike destination with some fairly simple changes.
4. Bridge infrastructure – raise when renovating.
5. Bring rail to city.



Tourism

Resource Team: Alex Aldrich, Sharon Combes-Farr, Paul Costello (facilitator), Anna Dirkse (scribe), Lucy Leriche, Jenny Nelson, Robin Scheu, Megan Smith

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Access to Lake Champlain and being at the cusp of Route 7 and 22a.
- Wonderful restaurants (Black Sheep Bistro, Antidote, Vergennes Laundry, Luigi's, 3 Squares, Starry Night Café in Ferrisburg, Basin Harbor, etc.). We didn't use to have restaurants where business lunches could occur; had to go all the way to Middlebury.
- As an extension of Otter Creek, we have 600 to 700 boating visitors annually. People come to the municipal docks and can access free power and water.
- Some work is being done on promoting bicycling; there could be more done though. There is a bike shop.
- Architecture and history are amazing assets, people are always taking pictures and commenting about our beautiful buildings.
- Rich history of the basin and ships being built here.
- Entry to Vergennes looks better than it used to, used to be "gnarly" looking.
- We have a number of guest houses: Emerson Inn, Basin Harbor Club has 140 rooms, Strong House Inn has 14 rooms.
- Basin Harbor is an asset and brings a lot of people to the area. These people then come back and buy first or second homes.
- Cultural assets: Rokeby Museum, Maritime Museum, two art galleries, Opera House.
- Lake Champlain Byway.
- Button Bay State Park, D.A.R. State Park, Kingsland Bay State Park.
- Great little shops.
- Kennedy Brothers Factory: two fitness centers there, meetings are held there, chocolatier there. Current business owner is engaged in getting more people in there as well.
- Train doesn't currently stop here, but Vergennes is scheduled for a stop in 2016 with Amtrak, along the Burlington/Rutland route.
- Addison Chamber of Commerce and Middlebury Chamber of Commerce are resources.
- "The Bahamas of Vermont," it is always 10 degrees warmer here than in the mountains.
- Municipally supported events such as French Heritage Day (brings in a lot of people from Canada and around the state), Vergennes Day, Memorial Day Parade (biggest in the state, Bernie Sanders always comes), a Halloween event and a Christmas event.
- Carnival at the Opera House.
- There is a walking tour brochure (there have been 2 or 3 versions). One is quite good and is available at City Hall, the library, etc.
- Wifi downtown thanks to the Digital Economy Project.
- Farmer's market (a good one!).
- Recreation opportunities: A few small parks, a plan for a walking trail that is partially developed that needs more right of way purchases, a public pool (one of the few public pools that is still making money), basketball, skating, a Frisbee golf course at the high school.
- The Champlain Challenge paddling/rowing race in which 100 people participate.
- Racin' to the Basin race that is mostly still under the radar.
- Winter/off season activities: The Holiday Stroll, ice carving, participate in restaurant week, quilting retreats at the Strong House Inn.
- Lots of incidental traffic through the city; the question is how to drive that traffic here.
- From 22a to Albany, there isn't a restaurant; we are the oasis.
- Bike tour group packages with the Maritime Museum have been successful.
- Beautiful country.
- The Falls.

What are the Challenges in this Area?

- SevenDays Listing: Vergennes restaurants are listed in the Middlebury area which is too far for Burlington people to consider; they automatically discount coming here.
- River area is underutilized, why is there not a small mooring field for boats?
- There really is only shopping and services on one side of the street, sidewalk sales are there and back, no back and forth across the street.
- People go to Middlebury for shopping and breweries or to Shelburne for the Shelburne Museum; they don't come to Vergennes.
- No signs allowed on Route 7 to advertise for things in Vergennes.
- Residual cultural baggage and negative connotation of Vergennes from forty years ago (Don't go to Vergennes because of the Weeks School, local bars, etc.).
- Keeping all the available business fronts full (They are all full except for Hungry Bear and they choose to be that way, even though it makes it look like it is Vergennes' fault).
- Vergennes Partnership get grants for downtown spaces, but the Kennedy Brothers Factory is not in the downtown space so it doesn't get the same amount of funding.
- Train doesn't stop.
- Truck traffic and engine braking can be disruptive. There are often 30 trucks in a row early in the morning going to Walmart and not stopping here.

- There is not enough parking along the main drag. Elderly will say we've been trying to get to you for days, but there wasn't any parking! Employees park in front of the buildings in parking that customers should have access to.
- For a small business owner, the taxes and other fees that increase the price to do business (furnace/sprinkler inspections, liquor licensing, etc.) that come from the State are prohibitive. The State isn't being business friendly and to keep us here, you [the State] have to help us.
- Addison Chamber of Commerce and Middlebury Chamber of Commerce seem very far away.
- Vergennes Partnership acts a little bit like a Chamber of Commerce, but it is constrained. It can't advertise specific businesses, only Vergennes as a general destination.
- In the valley, we get foliage later than the mountains, the State calls off foliage season and it is still occurring here
- Walking tour brochure needs to be reprinted?
- No mobile app for Vergennes (there is a website).
- The Wifi downtown is lousy and weak. There is no signage to let people know about it and no signage down at the basin where people most want it.
- Half the year people don't stop in Vergennes and we haven't figured out how to get them to stop.
- Opera House used to be fantastic, but not so much in the last 10 years. It is coming back slowly, but still needs to be re-energized.
- There are no bike racks downtown! People leave bikes unlocked or lying against shop windows.
- No proper bike lanes, there are some members of the community that don't want more bikers (cultural issues, affordability/perceptions of biking as an expensive sport).
- Information booth is not currently very well maintained.
- The Vergennes Partnership director is only half time (20 hours/week).
- Bike loops are on the city website, but not available elsewhere.
- What to do during the winter? We are half hour away from the ski resorts. We don't get enough snow. We can't encourage snowmobiling. There is already cross country skiing in Middlebury/Breadloaf. The river isn't flat or safe enough to be skated on.
- Northlands Job Corp center has negative connotations (large groups of people just hanging around).
- Rec facilities, but no rec department!

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Someone could swing by moored boats and offer milk, cheese, coffee, and other sorts of grocery services.
- We could make more use of the Green.
- You have to pay for a brown road sign from the State Dept. of Transportation, but other restaurants and businesses should know that is a possibility.
- Rewriting of ordinances is supposed to address the problem of employees parking along the main drag and taking parking spaces away from customers.
- A Chamber of Commerce (or a separate committee of the Addison Chamber) could provide group advertisement and marketing services.
- A theme for marketing Vergennes could be developed. There is currently no logo or tagline that is used consistently. "Quaint, unique, and unexpected" is sometimes used.
- Vergennes Partnership is talking about an Art Walk where visitors could walk around, go to art galleries, shop, eat at restaurants, etc. Art Walks could tie into architecture (or there could be a separate Architecture Walk?).
- Improving and expanding Wi-Fi.
- Nobody around us has a downtown (Ferrisburgh, Charlotte, Waltham, North Ferrisburgh). Vergennes take on more of a regional role and market itself to these towns, "Vergennes is your downtown."
- A Facebook page? There is a Facebook page managed by Vergennes Partnership.
- There should be the smell of fresh baked bread and bacon in the city to entice people.
- Pub or brewery? Or a winery? This could happen at the Kennedy Brothers space. Snake Mountain Brewery is currently operating out of someone's garage.
- Two of the restaurants currently have "The tourists are gone, but we are still here" cards that give \$3 off a drink, \$2 off, etc for regulars. If you are a local and have a license from Ferrisburgh, Vergennes, etc., restaurants could give a 10% discount.
- We could put a billboard in New York. "Last billboard, come to Vergennes!" "If you've made it this far, you can make it to Vergennes!"
- Mobile applications could be developed or people could already use existing apps such as Google Places, Instagram, Yelp, Urban Spoon, Pinterest, Trip Advisor, etc. more. Could the Chamber have a workshop for businesses about effectively using these things? We (small businesses) need help doing this!
- Someone should open a kayak rental shop?
- Western New England Greenway is a resource for bike routes. Bike racks could be put in the bulbout/bulgeouts where the flowers are. Bike rack to be incorporated into the bus stop.
- We need a kiosk near the docks and to better maintain/update the information booth on the Green (currently maintained by the Partnership).
- The Partnership is doing a lot. Is it more work than they can handle? Is there another similar organization that can help them?
- Develop tourist maps and trails, a Vergennes Byways map to tell tourists to stop at this farm, do this, like a Vermont Cheese Trail map, etc., and/or a "Ten Big Reasons to Visit the Little City" flyer. There could be an Ag and Art trail. A certain class of tourists really likes having that sort of organizational tool and itineraries built for them.
- Create packages with lodging facilities. This is something the State can help with. Need to sit down more and talk about these sorts of things as small businesses

- 150 to 200 boats come in at the site of the Macdonough Shipyard; there could be information, maps, bikes offered there. People come with money to spend, need to know about different places to go. A business opportunity there at the Shipyard and the Basin could be used to leverage support for other businesses too.
- History major interns from Middlebury College could give history tours for credit. Is there currently a tour developed or does that need to happen too?
- Create a Vergennes Cultural Heritage Walk.
- Before Addison Outfitters closed, one of our huge dreams was to have pedicabs/rickshaws. When it is 90 degrees out, people don't want to walk that hill.
- Opera House could host the Antiques Roadshow episode.
- Quebec City has spectacular decorations during Christmas time. Could Vergennes do something similar and become a destination for their Christmas decorations? Twenty years ago during the first revitalization attempt, every building from the library to the Opera House had white candles and it was quite an effect.
- When I was a kid, the reform school and the city used to have wooden cut-outs that people would drive through during December. Could we have a winter cutout design competition and get the schools involved?
- The Falls used to be lit up during the summer. The former mayor hired a lighting effects firm at the cost of 2 to 3 thousand dollars per year. Lights could be permanently installed so it would be less expensive. (The lights have a polarizing effect: some people love the lights, some people hate them.)
- Build a bridge below the Falls to better access them. How do people even know about the Falls?

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- I am hearing that a lot of good stuff is happening. There are a lot of recreation opportunities (biking, walking, arts, etc.). The challenges I heard didn't sound like they were huge, mainly about marketing and coordination. Overall you are in a good place; Vergennes just needs a brand or theme to tie things together.
- French Heritage Day sounds exciting. I hadn't heard about it before. What is the possibility of a Tour de Vergennes during French Heritage Day?
- We need to be working with the Partnership. There are huge opportunities to develop byway itineraries, PR opportunities, etc. I just need to bring my staff here and get people involved. We need to get in here and get more attention on Vergennes. Katherine Brooks at the Dept of Tourism does cultural heritage tour development work.
- Vermont isn't known for boating, Vergennes could capitalize on this. You need to inventory your assets and decide what you want to share and what you don't want to share (things you don't want tourists overrunning). Don't make a huge investment in a Vergennes mobile app; make sure your current SEO is being productive. Be on AroundMe, Tripadvisor, etc. and make sure your websites are coming up vibrantly
- There is a lot going on and you do collaborate, but you can go farther with that collaboration. The Partnership maybe needs a boost and more staff. I am excited about the train stop and the bike racks. It sounds like the walking tour brochure needs to be reprinted; the logo/theme should be incorporated in that. You could bring back something that you had before such as the Christmas lights and/or the cut outs. There is nothing wrong with looking back to the past for ideas.
- There is so much unity here and you are all positive and happy; there isn't a lack of faith in yourselves or your city. This is a beautiful city has its act together and can accomplish great things. There are probably ten little ideas that only take a few thousand dollars or something that someone just needs to spearhead. If you made your own look and came up with a theme, you could distinguish Vergennes from everywhere else. You have a lot of assets; you just have to tell people about them.

Basin & Riverside Development

Resource Team: Alex Aldrich, Sharon Combes-Farr (scribe), Paul Costello, Anna Dirkse, Lucy Leriche (facilitator), Jenny Nelson, Robin Scheu, Megan Smith

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Very dramatic view of the falls which run underneath route 22A.
- Vibrant with people, pedestrians, wildlife, fishing, boating, power generation.
- Scenic, as well.
- City has over the years made some extensive improvements to the basin area, including the stairway, cutting trees, and other maintenance.
- There is also a park on one side with boat access.
- We get a lot of summer boat traffic from the Lake. This is the last point on Otter Creek that you can reach from Lake Champlain.
- Many of the boat visitors are from Canada.
- City has right of way around the basin.
- The City owns the docks.
- Footpath that runs from the park to UTC. It's a nice little walk.
- The park is on both sides of the Creek.
- The stairs are part of a walking trail that was started and is still under development – called the "rail trail."
- Recreation Committee is a sub-committee of the City Council. Will further develop the trails. There is a "grand scheme."
- There is a lot of history there.

- 631 boats spent the night there for the summer – that is average. The year before, it was 700.
- There's a lot of wildlife there. Great opportunity to appreciate that. Osprey, etc.
- There are electrical hook-ups on both sides.
- We hold a fishing derby that attracts hundreds of kids.
- Lovely pump house building (boat house island).
- There is a bridge that lets you cross over the island.
- Shade roller building.
- It's classified for swimming and the Canadians do it but others don't.
- Green Mountain Power has a significant investment in the Falls.
- People who come in on the boats patronize the businesses in the city.
- Fishing access.
- Docks.
- Free docking for 48 hours.
- Putting in self-serve donation box for registration, etc. to donate \$ to defray some of the costs for power and water.
- School class trips.
- Good photography spots.
- Park is used for a lot of different things, not just for dogs.
- Foliage is very nice.
- City of Vergennes owns the falls.
- Can accommodate 25-30 boats to anchor in the basin.
- Middlebury College stores some boats here.
- Fishing derby and other events that take place down there.
- History. Archaeology.
- Handicap accessibility.
- Steamboats come in at some times.

What are the Challenges in this Area?

- Flood plain.
- There is some private property in the way of the trail plan. (Some right of way issues).
- No sufficient place for people to congregate by the water front.
- Traffic issues.
- Kids from Job Core with no place to go and nothing to do hang out down there.
- Mud issues some times of the year prevents access on the stairs. Could there be a bridge?
- Limited parking to go down and enjoy the waterfront.
- Limited seating.
- Wi-Fi coverage lacking. This would be big for the Canadians.
- No sidewalk on one side of the road and there is no crosswalk either. Makes it difficult to walk there.
- Restrooms are limited. Port-a-potty only on the far side. Nothing on the other side.
- Noisiness is rare. The problem is actually the local people – not the visitors.
- The Army Corps of Engineers have us keep the channel open. We end up getting trees stuck in the basin and the channel. Last year a huge tree.
- Some years extremely low water.
- No buoys to let you know the depth.
- Dark and remote on the east side. Sometimes drug dealing there, etc.
- Some camping on the path in.
- No web cam.
- Many of the boaters want to see things that are outside of their ability to walk. Need some type of transportation method for them; taxi costs \$50 to take them anywhere.
- Insufficient dock space.
- Some of the docks are rough.
- It is not in great condition. It is all pretty basic stuff. It needs to be more attractive and be in more inviting.
- What about above the falls?
- Wet Land issues.
- The west side is a floodplain.
- Access is a problem. Driving by the city garage, etc. Diving there is not obvious. You feel like you are driving into the power plant.
- Don't want to move events down to the water by taking it away from the downtown merchants. And, you cannot walk down there, etc.

What should we do about it?

- Wi-Fi coverage there would be a benefit.
- More kayak or canoe accessibility. Rentals. Place to secure them.
- Add a web cam.
- Add more dockage and improve the dockage that is there.
- Adding "pay as you go" options on the docks.
- Boat house facility with rest rooms and public access on the west side of the basin, where a local high school team or college team could store boats, skulls, kayaks, etc., with running water.
- I think that everyone feels like the Falls is ours, but not necessarily the boating facilities. Does everyone feel like the waterfront is theirs?
- Have info there so that boaters know what is in the city. Have it under glass. The Partnership has this and we are working on expanding it.
- Improving Internet access to include the basin. Use the screen to promote business. Know who is already in the harbor before you get there like accessing a webcam on the Internet as you pull up or before you pull up.
- Did the City use to run a shuttle bus? It was run privately. It was heavily used but not supported monetarily by the city. Opportunity for public transportation to the dock.

- Need more interpretive signage to promote the history there. Incredibly rich in history. Have some bilingual signs. What is there now was from the “basin program.”
- Walking down the stairs – stairway to nowhere for a three month period when it is flooded or muddy. Seems like an easy thing to do would be to get things graded and graveled properly. Work with the Army Corps of Engineers.
- Picnic area down there. Families fish and bring a picnic. Give them some picnic tables, etc.
- Walk-in. Have someone take care of it. To keep it clean. Take care of the landscaping after it is put in. There’s an opportunity for ongoing maintenance. Like a street-scape group, etc. Disconnect on the landscaping.
- Is there a specific group that is focused only on the basin issues? No.
- “Rail Trail” and walking path and the historical aspects of the basin. Tie it together with vision. Connect the Rail Trail to get to connect by MacDonough Park. Nothing really connects. Because we don’t have all of the right of way. Now we bought the last piece of right of way. City Council needs more help and ideas to help develop this. Also to develop connection to the Historic District. The community is behind this idea although it is not fully developed as a vision. Right now the path starts and ends in the middle of the woods...
- The Falls. The only one you can boat to from Lake Champlain. Should use this as a draw. It is a defining characteristic of the city. Power plant and water treatment plant make the area really ugly. This makes it seem more distracting and ugly. Maybe we can do a public art project to make it less industrial and more attractive. Engage the artistic community into this project as the long-term unfolds. Maybe paint the pipes a bright color to make them more fun or more pleasing.
- Create events down by the basin. Food truck round-up in the parking lot. Alcohol. Band. Give people a reason to come down there. Maybe one night a week.
- Bring back the steamboat club.
- Need more facilities and easier access on both sides.
- Designs to spruce up the bridge. Make a way to see the Falls from the bridge. Pedestrian bridge with a clear view to the Falls. Bring back this plan. Planning Commission. It was a \$400K project.
- Build it and they will come. Give them a reason to come down there once per week. They do this in Burlington and other places. Food and music brings people out.
- There is space on the West side for a pavilion or something that will give it a permanent structure that is inviting. Pavilion area. Something more than the bath house.
- Clear the side hill so that people could see right down through and it would feel safer. Don’t want people hiding in the bushes!
- Copper Hill has some land available for a dog park.
- I would like to see more signage. Historic signs. Other signs to say “picnic area” “falls” etc. Public walking trail. Let people know that it is there.
- Make it comfortable to walk across there right at the bridge. Current crosswalk is beat up. Sign is sketchy. It’s not safe but there is no other way to get there by foot. (Issue of stopping trucks at the bottom of the hill – then they cannot get up the hill!)
- Improve the grills down there.
- Vergennes Yacht Club as a way to develop a list of out of town visitors. Reserve your space online. Assign a few dock spaces to the VYC.
- Mooring field.
- Excursion down the river. Nominal fee. There was a boat to do a trip down the river.
- Business opportunity for boat rides, kayak rentals, and bike rentals. Help bring the best things of the area to you. What would you like to buy? Outfitter. Nonprofit to do this? Revolving loan fund.
- Create a nonprofit “Friends of Vergennes River Basin.”
- More parking for events – make it a one-way road. And do need more parking generally also.
- Ability to tie all of the historical activity in the basin to things available here in the Bixby library. Connection. Historical Walking Tour of Vergennes.
- Incorporating fly fishing lessons and other things related to the water – combine them with other things. Things for people who cannot afford to do the boating. Inexpensive ways to enjoy the water.
- Have the City do more events down on the water. Start the season with the “Basin Bash” and then end it with the “Vergennes Day.” Light the falls.
- Have a boat builder down by the water. We have a lot of craftsmen.
- Movie night down by the water. Large screen. Have people down there at sunset by the falls, etc.
- Planning Commission has not done any design work down by the water. Only appropriate uses and regulations.
- Band concerts. Dances. Other events down there. Do things to get people down there again.
- Family oriented fair type thing down on the other side of the water. Like a small scale Coney Island. Bingo, etc. Rubber ducky race.

Visiting Team Reflections:

- Opportunities around wildlife, birdlife, boating, fishing. The opportunity is what the city can do to make an impression for people who come to the city by boat. Create that “then what happens”? Invite them in with the Vergennes Yacht Club.
- You need to have signage, washrooms, and restrooms, etc.
- Friends of Otter Creek volunteer group for a nonprofit is a great idea.
- Charlestown S.C. – when you give over the best land to the public’s use, you create the best value.
- Bring some of the stuff back. Cover the ugly stuff.

- Business and the boats. And then what can the community expect from the basin. Those are the two things. For events – the one-way road. Lots of options for activities.
- Leverage civics organizations to adopt areas and benches to spruce it up down there.
- Make it safer down there.
- Lights on the falls.
- Commission a plan on the river walk etc. that is right now only a vision in someone’s head.
- Engage the art community to make the industrial part of the river front more attractive and engaging.
- Leverage ideas from other states to help Vergennes improve the water front.
- Vergennes is a dedicated downtown. The basin is considered part of the downtown. Financing opportunities are available. Can get \$\$ for signage, lighting, and access.
- Make sure to do things in a thoughtful manner.
- Events can be a great revenue source if they are managed properly. And can use the funds to do some of the work you need done.
- Improving accessibility and access. Encourage boaters to get out and come to the city.
- Connect visitors to the city. Connect townspeople to the basin. You can do both. Some ideas cost a lot of money and some don’t. Some business opportunities also.
- Incubate new businesses along the river. Build jobs around the river.

The Future of Economic Development

Resource Team: Alex Aldrich, Sharon Combes-Farr, Paul Costello (facilitator), Anna Dirkse (scribe), Lucy Leriche, Jenny Nelson, Robin Scheu, Megan Smith

What are the Assets in this Area?

- What makes Vergennes stand out among other towns such as Bristol is that we have city water and sewer developed and we have excess capacity for expansion. We might get the gas line extended which would be good for creating jobs.
- Vergennes is close enough to the Burlington “halo”, but without having to deal with Burlington inflation. Housing is more affordable.
- I wanted a small, centralized town feeling. The downtown was adorable and historical and there was some room to grow and I felt it was a place where I could contribute and where I could start a business.
- Central location. Vergennes is close enough to commute to Middlebury and Burlington and is not as isolated as Bristol in the wintertime.
- Vergennes has a sense of community. It is near the bike path and lake, there is great hiking nearby, and there are major employers such as United Technologies and other niche businesses.
- Travel and tourism and the vitality of the community.
- The Opera House which is currently in the process of regeneration.
- Amtrak is coming in 2016 and will have a serious impact.
- 600 boaters come into Vergennes every year through the Basin.
- Kennedy Brothers is a possible business incubator building.
- Proximity to farms and agriculture serves the restaurant industry well (in addition to the general public in terms of CSAs). Vergennes has a great food scene and is the hub of the Addison County scene. People come in to Vergennes to eat.
- There are still 40 to 50 acres available in the industrial district. It is privately owned but zoned industrial. Undeveloped currently, but fronts the road and has easy access to water and sewer.
- School Street parking lot across from Antidote is also zoned for commercial?
- School is ranked very highly statewide (top 10 in the state of VT) and has one of the highest graduation rates in the country.
- You can live, work, send your kids to school, all in the same city. Demographically, young people wanting to raise a family want a city like this.
- Strong commerce. People come from outside the city to work here.
- A 50 lot subdivision is on the verge of being approved; there will be 50 new \$300K houses built over the next decade.
- Vergennes is on public transport lines: the Tri-Town Shuttle Bus and the bus route to Burlington.
- We have a brand: We Are the Smallest City in the United States.
- Senior community living center sprung up recently and there may be another one in the works?
- Low income housing is available.
- Vergennes is a very unusual small city; it has some high-end, creative businesses in the downtown. Visitors are impressed.

What are the Challenges in this Area?

- Over the last three years, more buyer activity in the housing market but the pricing is not up (sales are up, volume wise but not price wise). Buyer activity comes in fits and starts.
- We have two different markets as a tourist city; we make our money in the summer to survive in the winter. (Sometimes we do as well around Christmas as in August)
- How do we define economic development? Increasing tax base and economy or community wellbeing?

- How are we going to cope with the changes in the farming and the dairy industry? Twenty years from now, is Vergennes going to be a South Burlington, parceled and subdivided?
- If you don't have Comcast, internet isn't very good, this hinders online businesses. Country Home Products and Graze do online orders though.
- High school budget just failed in Vergennes for the first time in many, many years. There is frustration at the state level with property tax funding.
- Higher unemployment than the rest of Vermont, lower incomes than Addison and the rest of Vermont and lower housing prices.
- Fairly limited childcare opportunities for young families. There is no afterschool care program for K-5, only 6th grade and up.
- When you look at the ability to attract investments, there is an economic disincentive to being in business in Vermont. This is not a local issue; it is a state issue and needs to change at that level.
- Can we compete with New York? Geographically, Vermont is more constrained. Our main assets are clean air and clean water.
- There is not a lot of space in the downtown area left to develop, not a lot of growth potential overall. There is some in the outer areas, but the downtown is pretty full and businesses that want a Main Street location can't find one.
- There is a lack of parking for tourists and patrons. We have 2 hour parking, but it isn't enforced and there are no meters.
- Do people know about Vergennes' business opportunities such as the industrial park, skilled unemployed workers and the gas line coming in? Is there a regional development coordinator to get the word out there?
- When things are privately owned, the desires of the owners might not be in sync with the community.
- There isn't one person in Vergennes just focused on economic development, whether that is outreach or developing a marketing program or contacting landlords. Everything is on a volunteer basis and is piecemeal.
- Commercial real estate agents that cover and market Vergennes are located out of Burlington.
- Addison County has economic development, but it is county-wide and not Vergennes-specific. Middlebury hired their own economic development person, but there isn't the tax base to hire someone here in Vergennes.
- Vergennes Partnership has only one person who works 20 hours a week and a lot of things slip through the cracks as a result.
- The first official Vergennes sign is after you turn off Route 7. We need signage that says "Historic Downtown Vergennes This Way" so tourists don't miss it as they go down 7.
- As a small business owner, I want fewer huge trucks going down Route 7, is there a way to re-route those trucks?
- We need more things to do in Vergennes such as a circumferential bike path and more basin development (rent boats, have a boathouse and restaurant down there.) Both tourists and citizens could enjoy these things and it would make Vergennes more of a "place."
- We don't have a lot of businesses in the community that cater to a younger crowd. High school students don't feel that businesses are designed for them; there is no reason to come downtown after school. Kids go home and don't come back at night.
- I moved back here because I could get a job at my family's business, but it is hard to get the foot in the door at small businesses if you don't have family ties and that might prevent people from moving here.
- High unemployment. Construction jobs went away in 2008.
- Opera House is underutilized still. There is no full time staff and nobody marketing the space. It is a huge loss of revenue and could be a huge economic driver if used properly. It can't just be volunteer-based, needs to be run as a business with a paid staff.
- Do we have enough lodging for large groups? Vergennes needs a hotel. There isn't enough lodging for large events like weddings; people end up staying in Shelburne, etc. If you want to do weddings at the Opera House, you need a place for people to stay.
- Problem of people leaving in the wintertime.
- Conflict between Ferrisburgh and Vergennes over development and where water and sewer is located. There is a lack of collaboration currently. Should both towns get together and create a plan that is a win-win situation for both towns? Could the Route 7 be developed collaboratively? (There was an agreement forged between the two communities for sewer extensions; Vergennes voted yes, Ferrisburgh voted it down.)

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- The State of Vermont owns 300 acres in the city of Vergennes and Ferrisburgh.
- Northland Job Corps Campus (used to be the Weeks School, a reform school) might not always be there due to funding. Will a 75 acre campus become available in the future? There would be a potential loss of jobs, but also a potential economic opportunity. The State wants to do a long term planning study on that piece of land. Northland Campus (currently tax exempt) could be used for light manufacturing, private school, start-up company, etc. The rest of the world needs to know about this opportunity.
- Any economic development here is going to be little incremental things, cottage industries, rather than a huge business.
- Kennedy Brothers could be used as an incubator space or maybe used as an indoor winter farmer's market.
- Our website could list community services and have links to properties available (Vergennes Partnership does have this and there is a link to the VP website from the city website).
- An economic development position needs to be created that is 40 hours a week.

- A penny sales tax/beverage tax could raise as much as \$130K for Vergennes according to a study (\$195K would be generated and the State would take 30%). Tax revenue can spur economic development; it takes time though.
- Could a year-round school at the Northlands Campus help the winter economy more so than the current use? Would it attract students with more discretionary income?
- A community college might be interested in the campus (both Castleton State and Middlebury looked at it).
- Should we look toward big business or small business? We should be encouraging small business in the northern area (the Kennedy Brothers building and on other land and buildings on the market) and that will encourage diversity.
- Opera House could be a place for youth activities.
- We could emphasize our architectural heritage and encourage artistic, creative types to come here.
- Food is something we do really well. We could maybe have food festivals. Something like Art Hop and Jazz Fest and could be tied into Vergennes Day. (There is also a need to ensure the success of the restaurants that are already here).
- How do we encourage winter activities? We can't just be a biking mecca; we need cross country ski trails, etc.
- Has a 5, 10, 15 year visioning exercise occurred here? What kind of city do we want to be? Do we want to emphasize local and sustainable practices?
- We could encourage artists to come here for a retreat center. There is also potential for studio space in the roller shade factor. Job Corps campus could maybe be a retreat center if the opportunity arises in the future.
- What about an indoor sports center for kids to have something to do during the winter? Other things like that?
- Attach goals/numbers to some of these big ideas, i.e., create 100 jobs, grow 10% of local food, etc.
- If you are able to generate the resources, a market study could attract a business person to invest millions in a hotel.
- Should we be copying what others have do or capitalize on the uniqueness of Vergennes? What are the things that are uniquely us? We should do things that define the character of Vergennes as different from Bristol or Middlebury or Burlington.
- There are amazing studies done 15 years ago that need to be pulled back out. What have we done, what needs to be done, are those things still relevant? Do we need to invest more time and money into a new study or just look at the old ones? (About 80% of those things have been done according to the mayor.)
- Encourage businesses to apply for things like "Best Businesses to Work" to get recognition, or find a way to get on Outdoor magazine's "Best Places to Live" list.
- Survey the business people in the community and ask "How can I help you?" Do people/businesses have similar problems that nobody has asked them about?
- An economic development planning process that would involve both communities (Vergennes and Ferrisburgh) could be created.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- There is a need to attract youth, including people in their 20s and 30s. Both the retreat center for artists and focusing on marketing the Opera House sound like viable options. The Jobs Corps campus' transition from its current use to a community college could be exciting, but is uncertain.
- There is a need for marketing and coordination of marketing. We need to get the word out about Vergennes.
- Food is the overarching theme I hear people talking about. You need to take an inventory of what you have and see if you can find connections and potentialities for collaborations. There also needs to be a Historic Vergennes sign out on Route 7.
- The Opera House needs to be fully utilized; you have an incredible asset there. Don't just think of yourself as Vergennes versus "the rest of the community;" utilize towns like Ferrisburgh.
- A winter farmer's market needs to happen; you need to tap into the agricultural community. You could turn the Opera House over to a catering company for weddings; you would get residual business for rehearsal dinners in the restaurants downtown, too.
- This city has got a lot of great things going for it: great downtown commerce, a strong mayor and municipal government, and an attractive downtown area. What is in your control? What is in the 10 year plan and what can you do today? The best asset in a community is a sense of progress, community and success and momentum. We already see this. There has been a lot of positivity here. You could focus on developing the Basin and Falls area and creating a penny tax to increase revenues to get a marketing push started.



Recreation and Entertainment

Resource Team: Patricia Coates, Eddy Gale, Christopher Kaufman-Ilstrup, Daniel Keeney, Caitlin Lovegrove (scribe), Doug Racine (facilitator), Lars Torres

What are the Assets in this Area?

- There's an outdoor swimming pool.
- The Opera House is a great asset.
- Sail program is a great opportunity for kids after school and in the summer.
- There is a skate park and a tennis court.
- The two existing playgrounds are wonderful at the school.
- The Bixby Library is great.
- There's the Maritime Museum down the road.
- A summer Farmers' Market happens on the green.
- There are concerts in the park.
- There is a Frisbee golf range.
- The city is surrounded by state parks, the lake, and the creek.
- There's the potential of some walking trails.
- There are community playgroups.
- The Boys' and Girls' Club is a resource for teens.
- The Legion, the Lion's Club, the Rotary, the Eagles' Club, the Knights of Columbus, all have a presence in Vergennes.
- There's a strong and established Memorial Day Parade.
- Vergennes Day happens on the last Saturday in August. It's an end of the summer celebration. There's a dance on Friday night and the next day there are lots of activities.
- Lots of people try to come out for various activities and events.
- The park in general is a great asset. It's where events are held such as the strawberry festival, pumpkins in the park, etc.
- There are church youth groups.
- There's a local drama group.
- The programs that are presented in the opera house are nice. Some of them are local and some of them are presented in the opera house by touring groups. It's a good combination.
- That's true of the programs at the Bixby library as well.
- School sports provides a lot of entertainment.
- There's an ice skating rink in the winter, and at the school there's basketball and volleyball for adults.
- There's a very active little league, which goes right up into a Legion league.
- Front Porch Forum.

What are the Challenges in this Area?

- There is not really any after-school program for working parents. There's a small program within the school, but there's not much.
- There's only a small summer program for children as well.
- There's a lack of overall coordination. There are all of these great things going on, but there's not a central place to go to know about it all.
- There is no comprehensive community Calendar.
- Lack of a recreation director to organize youth activities as well as activities for adults and seniors.
- There was a recent effort to start a lacrosse program, and it ended up being coordinated through the Bristol program. Same with football, because those recreational programs are much stronger than in Vergennes.
- There are excellent recreational programs in Bristol and Middlebury, but a lack of programs in Vergennes.
- Skate park was mentioned as a positive, but in the two years that I've been watching it, I'm more concerned about maintenance and drug use in the evenings.
- There is potential park space that could be developed to be very used.
- Feeling in the past that youth activities are the responsibility of the school, so the local government doesn't feel it needs to do much for kids.
- Historical sites where the stone has been smashed. Upkeep in general is lacking.
- Middle school – after school programs: yes, but then what?
- Lack of recreational opportunities for teenagers beyond the school system that would exist in the summer or draw kids into the city from other towns.
- Kids don't necessarily want to be in a school environment outside of school.
- A lot of teenagers just go hang out at the house, or go to Burlington, because there's not much to do in Vergennes.
- There are opportunities in Vergennes, but we have to develop them, and as a parent, you really have to be proactive. For instance, I set up an apprenticeship with my son with the clockmaker in the city. Work is another option. There are resources, but they are not organized, or communicated so that people know that these are places that I can look.
- Boys' and Girls' Club facilities aren't really adequate for kids to come. It's not a place that a lot of kids would want to come to, because it is a little run down.
- Vergennes has some beautiful restaurants for folks that have money to spend in them. There aren't really any family friendly restaurants for kids across the street.
- A lot of kids go to the mall in Burlington for shopping, movies, bowling, because nothing like that exists in Vergennes.
- Recreation committee doesn't take any notes, and it's not presented to the public. Committee members are selected by appointment.
- A lot of people feel like they're not being represented. People just don't know what's going on.
- The whole toddler park idea has a lot of controversy around it.
- Skate park has become a troublesome area because there is nobody actively monitoring it any more.

- There are a lot of questions that never seem to get answered.
- There is a recreation committee formed by the mayor, though they tend to meet at Friday morning at 8 am. It was broadcast on Channel 17.
- Meeting times are not always conducive (for example the recreation committee meets at 8 am on a Friday morning.)
- Wi-Fi sometimes work, but not always.
- A lot of things just take money, and it's hard to raise money.
- Many activities organized through the senior center, but very few people come, though kids do come and serve the seniors a meal.
- Certain committees need to have certain roles and exist in order to get funding from certain grant opportunities.

What Should Be Done? What action can be taken by the community in this area?

- I'd love to see some coordinated recreation programs like hiking trips, or kayaking trips for teens.
- Outreach programs, and lists of what's here in the city would be great.
- Maybe discount programs from local businesses for kids.
- We used to have a small quarterly newspaper called "City Voice." Maybe that could be resurrected.
- There needs to be communication from the Vergennes Partnership and the municipality.
- A face to face meeting with the aldermen, the partnership, and concerned citizens discussing how we move forward could help.
- We have some existing sites of recreation that are deteriorating in front of our eyes. If you build it, they will come. (I built a tennis program.) What's significant, though, is that you're pretty much on your own once you get going. There are spaces we have, that are valued by youth, but that are not valued by adults in the same way.
- We should raise the standard of the skate park so it's almost like a Bixby for kids.
- It's important to make ourselves visible and there, and to pull in people.
- We need to open up our assets. For example, I once walked a group of kids up to the yoga studio so they knew where it was and how close it was to the school.
- There's a lack of connection between our school and the city. With Bristol, they have an open campus. I see a lot of students come into the café, and it just feels so much more connected.
- Bristol has three restaurants that are very affordable and easy to walk into.
- We need more people to be involved with the Partnership.
- There's an element of coordination that is missing. Perhaps there's some central place that can become the central coordination location.
- We need to remember that we do have a diverse population. We have a lot of seniors, and there are ways to help connect seniors to others.
- The senior center has a great space, so maybe there is a way to have that space used for youth clubs. For instance, there is an older man who is great with photography. Perhaps he could host a photo club there.
- There's an intergenerational "lit club" and the kids walk over, and it works very well.
- The schools could be underutilized, especially at night time. There are a lot of sports, but perhaps we can host other activities there as well.
- We should knock down the two walls on the skate park to make it transparent.
- Let's add more partnerships with Job Corps.
- Involve high school kids in building a walking trail and other city improvements.
- Free movies in the park (like they have in Bristol).
- It's important to expand on things that already exist in this city that aren't being utilized to their full extent, like the skate park. For example, I got taken away by the police because I was using a scooter at the skate park.
- Every organization, whether it's civic, religious, school-related, etc., needs to get together and put in what we know into a database of some kind.
- Maybe the Vergennes website is a place to find information.
- Maybe matching up volunteer opportunities with volunteers. Like linking students with seniors for things like shoveling snow.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- What I see here are a lot of moms and dads and community leaders and folks who care about the whole community. You all have an incredible amount of energy. I think you all have the ingredients to work with to make some great changes here.
- There is a lot of opportunity here, and it sounds like it's the concept of human and social capital. How do people come together and make decisions, and how do you create other venues?
- How could you make something in Vergennes be a destination that other teenagers want to come here to see? Probably teens go to the mall to see fresh faces.
- Very different here now than what I remember when I grew up here now. Biggest thing that I see is a real confusion about the roles of the different leadership groups, and it would really help you to develop some clarity about the different missions and visions of groups. How are they different and how are they the same?
- For the Vergennes Partnership, it might be useful to emulate successful partnerships such as Montpelier Alive.
- Headline: there's a lot going on and too few know about it. That speaks to this theme of inclusion, and that there needs to be a better mechanism for notifying and following up on the meetings.

- Coordination: ongoing calendaring and getting the news out. You need to develop the framework and understand how to use the tools that might already be available.
- We need to invest in and take care of the things that youth value.
- Extending the conversation to youth is going to be a real opportunity.
- I think you're very close to getting things to work. You've got the energy. It's just about communication. A major part of the assets are folks like yourselves.
- Focus on building communication and activities across generational and demographic lines. Right now there are activities for seniors, teens, adults, and kids, but what about crossing those divides?
- It's important that you still have your high school, when so many communities now send their teens elsewhere. You need to make sure to integrate it into the community.

Connecting Youth

Resource Team: Eddy Gale, Christopher Kaufman-Ilstrup, Daniel Keeney, Caitlin Lovegrove (scribe), Doug Racine (facilitator), Lars Torres

What are the Assets in this Area?

- The Boys and Girls club serve approximately 25-30 kids on a daily basis, and they're generally from lower-income families who don't have some of the other opportunities that some of the other kids might have. It goes beyond video games and the pool table they have. The kids also receive good mentoring services. They currently serve 5th through 12th grade, and they're just starting to do some homework work with elementary school programs.
- Fire departments in the area have a very good cadet program. Last year there were 10 cadets and they really play an active role. It's not just the firemen acting as mentors for them, but they add new life and make the older firemen want to be there as well. The current chief came out of the cadet program in the 1980's.
- There are a number of church groups that are very active in the community, though youth group attendance is on a downward slide.
- There are around 6 matches with mentees from Middlebury College who meet up with their mentors for a few hours each week.
- There's a learning kitchen out of Vergennes.
- There is a school to work program: around 73 kids per semester apprentice with local businesses and work in community service.
- Some groups are working to create programming for "transition-age kids" (middle school aged kids,) hoping to make it youth-run.
- Most of the clubs (lions, rotary, etc.) have a liaison student who comes in once a month and talks about what is going on in the school. These clubs also have programs like "books for bikes."
- There are a strong community ties to the school: businesses put jerseys in windows during sports games, there's standing room only at school theater productions, people donate to fundraisers for kids' programs, etc.
- The Bixby Library is a huge resource, and the high school could be as well.
- It's a safe place to live.
- There are many different school programs that kids can participate in, like the Keys program, or the drama program.
- There is a "police explore" program.
- Citizens are very proud of the way Vergennes provides for its kids. The civic organizations, the clergy, the police departments, the schools, all do a pretty good job, and are very open-minded.
- The Vergennes Opera House is a great resource in the city. It's an inspiring space.

What are the Challenges in this Area?

- Involvement in the church groups used to start slowing down around 10th grade, and now it's around 6th grade.
- In the most recent results of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, the question, "do you feel like your community cares about you?" did not give terribly encouraging results. A lot of Vergennes respondents felt that their school and teachers care about them, but the question "does your community care about you?" was 20 points lower. Those kids seem to feel like they don't matter to the community.
- There is a diverse range of kids, who might not all be involved in sports, etc.
- Boys' and Girls' club's goal is to reach out to kids who need them the most, and those kids are often from low-income neighborhoods. These low-income students don't have other places to go: there's school, there's home and there's the club.
- Difficult to find a "third space" that isn't home or school for mentors to bring their mentees.
- There's a lack of activities, particularly in the winter.
- There are local art programs outside of school, but not so much for drama programs.
- Community's trust in youth: if there are youth out in the street between 8 and 3 in this community, there is an automatic assumption that something is wrong. This is very different from a town like Bristol or Middlebury.

What Should Be Done? What action can be taken by the community in this area?

- It's important to go out and go after these kids, and to give them a little push to get them engaged, particularly with a volunteer opportunity that helps them give some meaning to their work.
- There is so much that businesses can do to cater to youth; to invite teens back in as consumers.
- Community Resource Team was an intervention team that helped if there was a youth that was starting to go astray or needed some assistance. It was very effective.
- There used to be a community visit day where students came out and met businesspeople and learned what they did. It helped students feel a personal connection with businesspeople in the city.
- Give encouragement to the kids on the periphery who might not be as engaged as some of the others.
- Find ways to get kids into the Opera House, which doesn't do as much for kids as maybe it could.
- There might be more opportunities for kids to find work and apprenticeships.
- There used to be a pizza place and arcade on Main Street, and it was great. We could use a couple of smaller businesses that would cater to youth.
- Tying connections into the Keys program to keep growing opportunities into the community.
- There is a listing of businesses and community resources within the school that could be passed out further beyond the school.
- How are community organizations thinking about how they can get involved with youth? What are organizations doing to reach out to kids?
- Leaders of organizations will need to talk with each other and work to create relationships with the kids and each other in order to get kids more involved. For example, some kids from the Boys and Girls club end up in the Cadets program.
- There needs to be a better understanding of financial literacy for kids. Kids don't even realize that they should be worried about it.
- All of our assets, like the good education system, the safety, and the current activities for kids, will allow youth to leave Vergennes with a good feeling, and when they need a place to come back to in order to start a family, they come back to Vergennes.
- Survey the youth in Vergennes to see what they would answer to these questions.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- 3 things:
 1. there may be a need for a "third space."
 2. the idea of building trust and inviting youth back in was pretty powerful. Are there business opportunities around youth-facing businesses or retail?
 3. Do I have to accept the at-risk/low-income/in-need label in order to connect?
- A lot that you're doing well, and you're noticing things in other communities that they're doing well. Keep looking for examples that you can aspire to.
- 20-point difference in survey: how do you compare to other communities? Well!
- You do have a lot of things on your side. There are a lot of opportunities. There's a real need for better communication about what those opportunities are and how you can connect to them.
- How would you go about providing opportunities for youth to take the lead? Can you create an open space for youth to really be the leaders in the process?
- The focus on youth in this community is very strong. That's a really good place to start – knowing that something that connects youth and having things for youth to do is a good opportunity.
- Community service is a powerful way for kids to create connections.
- Really good things like the cadets, or the fire marshals' program, were very small programs. Where are the opportunities for the larger-scale engagement for kids?
- The community needs to be in the schools more.
- Theme of trust (or lack thereof) is an important one: youth liaisons for community clubs.
- Kids are spending their whole day within Vergennes, and their parents might not be. (Many parents work outside of the city.)
- Reflecting on what students said at the school visit: if you build a supervised space that is just for teens, they will avoid it. If you build an all-ages friendly space, then teens are more likely to embrace it.
- Focus on building communication and activities across generational and demographic lines. Right now there are activities for seniors, teens, adults, and kids, but what about crossing those divides?

Vergennes Community Center

Resource Team: Eddy Gale, Thomas Hark, Christopher Kaufman-Ilstrup, Daniel Keeney (scribe), Caitlin Lovegrove, Doug Racine (facilitator), Lars Torres

Scribe's Note: This was a session with an alternative format. Rather than focusing on the assets / strengths / opportunities / weaknesses, etc. of a particular aspect of the community, the facilitator Doug Racine allowed for community members, particularly those who had been part of the Community Visit steering committee, to introduce the topic.

Attendance: Community members present represented a broad spectrum of groups directly affected by a community center (child care administrators, operators, and employees; school administrators and teachers, boys & girls club director, parents) as well as many community members indirectly affected by a potential community center.

What was the genesis of this discussion?

- There is a general consensus that the city suffers from inadequate day care—and facilities for what care does exist—in several respects: afternoon / evening care for school age children, weekend and summer supervision for multiple ages. While the community does have evening community groups and library events, more activities and services with a physical recreation focus are needed.
- In earlier discussions, this problem had also extended to a lack of facilities for seniors, but that was before the senior meeting center in the new housing project was developed.
- The Boys & Girls Club is in need of a permanent home, with sufficient space and plumbing, HVAC etc. to serve an active group of young people.
- In considering the variety of programs, interested parties had discussed pooling resources and trying to find/develop a multi-use facility to meet multiple needs. A lot of services looking for permanent homes; some have been met (housing facility, eg) some have not; steering committee saw the persistent need.

What is the nature of the need?

- The Boys & Girls Club lost funding for some of its middle-school-aged programming recently. While they have tried to extend what services they are still offering to a larger age group, they are not adequately funded or staffed. The Club has been operational in the city from 1999 to the present and has never had a particularly stable program site. It started in armory but was pushed out after 9/11; for ten years, the present School Street space has been used.
- Boys & Girls Club is a really important resource for working parents (though perhaps taken for granted) and deserves community support. Kids can come in and out over the course of the afternoon and feel welcome.
- The Boys & Girls Club space has a great open rectangle play space that in many ways does accommodate the kids (typically 35-40 kids indoors) it only has limited small group activity space. The environmental controls are terrible in both winter and summer. Plumbing is substandard, and there is no real kitchen facility, hampering staff's ability to prepare snacks. Additionally the rent is high and ideally Boys & Girls Club would be an owner or co-owner of its facility.
- Several possible facilities or locations have been considered, with none standing out as ideal: St. Peters parish hall is a good space, but they want to remain available to others as well (acceptable on an occasional basis).
- Generally speaking there is a need for supervised social spaces for kids in the city, whether it is in the form of a community center or not. There is a perception that kids don't feel welcomed into a lot of the public spaces and venues in the city.
- On the one hand more programs are being through the school (assuming it gets its grant) which is great for school age children. Unfortunately the Mary Johnson Child Care summer program will be dislocated from the elementary school once those elementary school summer services begin; while potential temporary solutions exist for this particular crisis (they will probably go to the Christian School), it is another example of a lack of permanence for the city's child care programming.
- One registered home-operated child caregiver noted the lack of supply for daylong child care for infants and toddlers and the lack of afterschool and summer care for school age children in the private childcare marketplace. (Home-based caregivers may admit four school-age children above their daytime limit for afterschool care, but this addition doesn't apply to summer).
- There is a perception that a lot of children are spending unsupervised time at home because of a lack of affordable and available services.
- There was some in the group who felt that the need for a children's community center might be subjective. Moreover, the need is relative since there are needs EVERYWHERE, so we should focus on spaces that meet multiple needs.
- Obviously there are many needs, and while it's appealing to envision a space that serves all the needs, realistically this is a huge challenge and logistical hurdle. Day care ≠ After-school care ≠ the need for a space for teenagers. While the after-school need might be greatest, it will probably be solved by the elementary school plan (at least for those age groups)

How does Vergennes solve this problem?

- Senior citizens can provide interaction through voluntarism
- Ideally an after-school program would be free (with revenue coming from grant funding and the open meal site) but it may cost money in the end.
- A community space could incorporate a makers space for craft and trade professionals; this kind of arrangement would logically involve a lot of interface between the professionals and interested kids—workshops, multi-use crafting space.
- It's important that a project involve switching household attitudes from 'child care to cover our ass' to 'how are our kids being stimulated?' Make the environment attractive to a whole range of kids' interests; (and maybe where they overlap with adults' interest).

- It would be great if the space also served as an affordable rentable function space. (churches are booked) – this could be a supplementary revenue source for the space.
- There is a definite need, if Vergennes moves forward with this, to identify either an existing structure or site for a new structure.
 - For existing structures, the group discussed the old Hungry Bear space on Main Street (has a kitchen, but not a huge space and it's also near traffic); the old Kennedy Brothers factory/warehouse space (no longer inappropriately-zoned, but no one knew much about what it would take to renovate).
 - It was determined there's no additional space in the Senior Housing on Armory Lane—but it demonstrates there are clearly ways to renovate old structures for new uses.
- Ultimately, it's pretty unrealistic to think about working with existing structures because they can't easily meet the Boys & Girls Club need, given the budgetary constraints. Most people agree that renovating won't be cost effective to get an ideal facility.
- This evolved into the discussion of the Armory Lane lot, which was considered as the best of alternatives because a lot of costly site work has already been done.

Who would other community partners be?

- To raise capital for a project like this, corporate support will probably be necessary. UTC—which operates a major manufacturing center in Vergennes—could be a potential funding partner.
- Housing Vermont would not be an active partner, but it does own some lots of great interest to a potential project (on Armory Lane). At one time Housing Vermont had been talking about a second phase of development, but a child care center or another potential project would not have directly involved Housing Vermont.
- To attract partners, it would be good to tie the community center and its potential uses to professional needs, training resources, etc., and also to meet technology needs of all generations.
- Some felt that a thorough Design and Visioning phase of project development will attract participants, financial resources; the question “Should a formal visioning project move forward?” was posed.
- There is a lot of will for this in the community, among diverse partners. A dialogue is pre-existing among several parties, in terms of collaborating on grant writing to meet some of the city goals with shared resources from underwriters.

Conclusion: Problematics and steps forward

- The city manager wanted the goal to be more clearly defined, answering a lot of clarifying questions: What specifically would the ‘community center’ be? Who would it serve? How compatible are the needs of the diverse groups? Why would this be better than extended use of the school facility?
- Proponents countered that this discussion and a process of visioning can clarify the audience and purpose. They cited examples of places and instances where co-location of services for diverse audiences does work (McLure Center in Burlington, YMCAs there and elsewhere, etc.)
- The reality is that the High School is packed after school lets out. Sports and extracurricular activities expand space needs from the school day, when students are in a relatively concentrated area, so in fact the school accommodates fewer students after school. Also, students gaining freedom of choice at home are moving away from venues where they are closely supervised. From this natural process springs the need for a ‘third space’ for teenagers, even if they're spending small parts of their day there. This would be a place where they were given more autonomy, but still some guidance.
- The debate over how much of the need the school can meet continued. The KEYS program exists as one solution and an example of the school stepping forward, but the funding source is ending soon.
- For transition age groups, there is a great need to find a motivational focus early (a career plan, a passion, etc.), and with ongoing support from educational community and the community at large, such a focus can serve as a wonderful motivational tool through to adulthood (tech training, college, etc.).
- Some stop gap measures have worked but the impermanence of the solutions is wearing—something has got to give.
- The visiting team really admired the will to come up with a solution and their perseverance in trusting the city's kids to succeed such a small rural place. Others from the team reminded attendees not to lose the notion of including the whole community in whatever they moved forward. The notion of a makers space really resonated with a lot people for its integration of multi-generational purpose.
- Members of the visiting team remarked on the lack of a realistic discussion about the financing of such a project. There is a lot of passion directed towards the youth of Vergennes—and indeed a lot of goodwill converted to tangible action—it seemed like a great deal of capital building has to take place before this project can move forward.

Vergennes School Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held with Vergennes students

Notes of interest:

- You can't improve Vergennes without the input of the surrounding towns (students here from Waltham, Addison, Ferrisburgh and Vergennes).
- When asked how many people planned to stay in Vergennes (or surrounding area) after high school, or return to it later on, nobody raised their hand. (One student noted, "I think it's hard to know where you'll be in 10 years.")
- "Pretty much every friendship I've made is from activities and extra-curriculars offered by the school."
- Most students' parents don't work in the Addison supervisory union district area. They commute to further away.
- "Basin Harbor is a big employer."
- Most of the students raised their hands saying they have jobs (either part-time during the school year or during the summer).

What do you think is successful about the Vergennes community?

- It's a pretty place. The beauty of the land characterizes Vermont. Tourists come here to see the landscape.
- It's non-urban.
- I like the welcoming aspect of the Vergennes community. You walk down the street, you say hello, and even if you don't know each other you say hello. People have a sense of understanding and acceptance.
- The Education System: We have a good school. We communicate well. It's not very big so it stays friendly and community-oriented.
- The Opera House brings some culture to Vergennes. I do theater at the Opera House.
- It's a safe area to raise a family.
- There are some nice restaurants
- It's a close-knit community. Everyone knows each other and everyone seems to get along with each other pretty well.

What do you care about when you think about Vergennes/your community?

- Sustainability: the recent gas pipeline that was put in. As a city we are not as conscious of clean energy as other parts of the state. This student was referring more to affordable energy for the future, than to climate change as a whole.
- The new UTC is a major source of jobs in the city, and I don't know what would happen if that would ever go away.
- There is a New Dollar General is being debated to be put in right across from where I live, in the field. It's good to be industrialized and to create jobs, but it really changes the character of the land.
- Diversifying in terms of having a better and more stabilized economy is important. What a lot of people don't understand is the sheer number of dairy farms that we've lost. We should do a better job of understanding how we can better diversify our agriculture. Dairy was consolidated big time.
- Nobody who is young and wants to get into farming now can get into it.

What are the challenges/what do you worry about?

- There's not a lot of activities that involve teens in the city. There's no outlet or facility for us. High schoolers and middle schoolers aren't as inclined to go to the Boys and Girls Club.
- There's not really much for my age group at places like the Boys' and Girls' club.
- As a teenager if you don't have a car, it definitely limits you to what you can do, because you can't commute to anywhere else and there's nothing central.
- We have to drive pretty far to do anything.
- Drug Use:
 - I definitely hear more and more drugs. Collectively it's getting worse, and that's not good.
 - I think it's something that every community faces. I don't think you can go anywhere and see a drug-free community. But there has to be an outlet, or something that occupies time so that you're not just hanging out bored and tempted to take risks.
- Over the past few years I feel like drug use has gone down a little bit. Because of classes graduating.
- I think it's not just alcohol and marijuana. I think it's much more than that.
- I've heard about the Opera House a lot, and how they're using money.
- I think Vergennes should expand, but I don't think I'd be happy to see something in terms of what is happening in Milton (with lots of sprawl).
- I would be worried about people leaving and not enough people coming back, because there are people whose parents

have businesses, but if you leave, there isn't enough draw to come back besides that geographically it's Vermont and it's a beautiful place.

- It's expensive to live here. It's cheaper to leave, and go South and West (in the state).
- In looking at careers and job opportunities, the pay seems lower here and jobs seem harder to find.

What are the things Vergennes should do to remain vibrant?

- I think in 10 years it would be great if people in Vergennes weren't constantly worried about whether they would be holding the same job in a week or a month.
- I think it's either you go bigger businesses like UTC, or you get back into the smaller family-owned businesses that can be handed down from generations.
- I was looking at colleges and some of them were in Vermont and some of them were away, and I realized that moving away was still cheaper, even when I was paying out-of-state tuition.
- The main street of Vergennes is small. My family owns a restaurant in Winooski, and we were looking to open a second restaurant, potentially in Vergennes, but there was no place in downtown Vergennes.
- I think technology is a big component of this – access to internet services – so you can work remotely.
- Although our system of funding is arguably the most equitable (to the students) it's not doing us any favors, especially with those who have property on the waterfront.

What ideas do you have for practical action?

- There's the empty space in the bottom half of Kennedy Brothers, and there's the old movie theater on South Maple Street, so there are buildings that are empty and not being used, and it seems to be a great opportunity.
- When I was your age, Vergennes was the place to go on a first date, and there was a soda fountain, and there was an arcade.
- I would love to see the Skate Park, the Swimming Pool covered so they are year-round.
- A hockey rink near Vergennes, closer than Middlebury, would be great!
- I would kill for an indoor pool. I'm a swimmer and I can't commute to Mt. Abe every day during the winter.
- Or a roller skating rink. We have hockey players that commute to Middlebury.
- I'm not saying that we don't have anything here as a school – we do – but there is a large percentage of kids who don't take advantage of these activities, and they either go home or go to school.
- What about something like an open mic night at the Opera House?
- Ideally a café of some kind.
- Studio V does a lot of classes for younger kids, and I could see a community center having a room that's designated for art and that sort of idea.
- I would like to see dance classes go in, because we've tried to put them into the Opera House but they won't let us. I take tap dancing, others take ballet, but we all have to go somewhere else.
- We should get a gymnasium.
- I think we tend to look at sports because that's all that's offered here.
- We need to have a big Walmart right in the middle of the city. Along with a McDonalds.
- For fun, we go to the movies, go shopping, or go out to dinner, but we drive to Burlington and Rutland to do that.
- It would be great if entertainment opportunities were closer, so we didn't have to waste gallons of fuel going to Middlebury for fun.
- There was a period of time where there were movies at the Opera House, but it sort of died away. Perhaps young people could be a part of creating a list of movies to play at the Vergennes Opera House.
- More could be done around recreation in the summer. Middlebury has a great summer recreation program that we could copy.
- Kayak or bicycle rentals down at the river.
- I don't see very many people riding bicycles in the city. I feel like if Vergennes were more bike friendly, you'd see more people riding their bikes.
- There's the start of a bike/walking path, but it seems to have fizzled.
- I used to skate at open skate nights in Middlebury. My little brother used to go to that a lot but he doesn't anymore because we live so far away from that.
- Anything entertainment-wise: anything recreational. Sports, entertainment. There's a place in Bristol called "the Hub.:" <http://bristol skate park.com/>
- If you create an area where people to go, you might attract youth, but if you build a recreational center that is specifically for youth that is heavily supervised and structured, it would not be highly used.
- If there were a restaurant that had live music that teenagers would like, that would be good.

Are students involved in the community? Are there opportunities for students? Do they take leadership over issues they feel strongly about? (each student was asked to write a short note describing the best idea they heard during the discussion)

- One thing that comes to mind when you mention youth being involved in the community is the budget issue. When students heard that there was a proposed budget cut that would cut key school programs, a number of students rallied together and spoke at the school board meeting in favor of the programs. It resulted in a budget that avoided any cuts, that is being voted on today.
- The students helped to create Walden, an outdoor classroom. Around 15 kids take a bus into the woods and take a short hike, and “live like Thoreau”
- In School, students have organized against a ban on leggings, they started a school composting initiative, and they organize senior skip day. They also rallied around the school budget.
- Many students volunteer in areas that match their interests (such as therapeutic horse riding, or helping with summer programs for children at a local library.)

Written notes (transcribed as written):

I think the idea of having a multipurpose community space for various activities was a good idea so that classes such as dance, yoga, tai chi, all those types of things, could be offered as well as a space for people to gather for other activities.

It stuck with me:

- Walmart
- McDonalds
- McDonalds/movie theater
- Burger King?

Future of Vergennes:

- Sustainable small businesses.
- More job opportunities.
- maintain/improve availability of education
- “Central hub” of Vergennes with Scholastic, athletic and artistic options.
- Make Otter Creek/falls a tourist attraction.
- Attractions like a drive-in movie.
- I believe that entertainment, recreation and youth connection are among the most essential aspects of life in Vergennes that demand attention. I heard ideas of movie theater, a recreation center, a bowling alley, a multi-use facility (dance studio, rehearsal rooms, art rooms, etc.) As far as the economy goes, I oppose the construction of a McDonald’s in Ferrisburgh.
- I think it is incredibly important that everyone voting knows exactly what happens as a consequence for each option. They need to understand that saying no will lead to cuts at every school and saying yes will boost their taxes. So overall clarity is important for our society.
- What’s most important for Vergennes’ future? More jobs for young graduates and teens.
- I believe that the idea of a community center with multiple opportunities within it would provide an excellent way for new friendships to form between people with common interests. It may also create more interest in staying and hanging out in Vergennes.
- I enjoy the welcoming aspect of the Vergennes community and I would love to see an outlet where students can go to be constructive and creative with their free time. A community

center that offers recreation would offer great opportunities to the young, active body and minds at Vergennes and I personally could see myself putting good use to a center in the center of Vergennes.

- Vergennes staying small(ish) while also having more job opportunities for adults and teens. Also having a social hub for kids and older teens to go to to occupy some of their time after school so they don’t feel the need to take risks.
- Lack of recreation is a big problem. Vergennes needs a community center.
- Small office spaces.
- Music festivals on the green? Like [Pocock festival](#) in Bristol.
- Vergennes has a great foundation of a community, however we need to implement positive outlets for teens, the next generation. *Sustainability!* (Energy, jobs, education).
- Unsupervised entertainment center.
- Restaurants.
- No sprawl.
- Entertainment options; Shopping center, movie theater.

Give reasons for tourists to come, and things for teens to do
Promote many small businesses:

- Biking opportunities.
- Using the lake for activities for tourists: kayaking, etc.

Important to-do to make Vergennes a better place:

- Community center.
 - Bixby Library -> very important.
 - Christian School.
 - A place for a family to go out to dinner: family-friendly restaurant.
 - Café, maybe?
 - Small farms are important.
- What would you like Vergennes to have?

- Makers’ Space.
- Creative Class (Studio V).
- Lower the drug problem.
- The importance of small business.
- More public transportation available.

VII. Vergennes Community Visit Participants

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