

Vernon Community Visit

Report and Action Plan ~ September 2016





*Top, then left to right:
One of six focus forums on Community
Visit Day; Community members read
the opportunities list and then
participate in a dot-voting exercise on
Community Meeting Day to select their
top priorities for action; On Resource
Day, community members review the
Vernon vision survey.*

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I. Introduction

Vernon is a community on the move. In a time of change, residents are coming together to identify positive next steps and take action towards a prosperous and cohesive community and to maintain the quality of life in this rural Vermont town.

Nestled along the banks of the Connecticut River and surrounded by lush farmland, rolling green hills, forests, and trails, Vernon is the Southeastern Gateway to Vermont. A high quality school and an outstanding recreation department demonstrate this town's commitment to youth, while community events such as the Annual Town Picnic and Fire Department Muster showcase a community that values coming together and fostering connection. The Vernon Historians and history museum keep the town rooted in its rich heritage, while the dedicated Vernon Planning and Economic Development Commission and other community volunteers work hard toward a strong economic future.

Community Visits are designed to help communities come together, review major issues, develop priorities and line up for action, but the process also aims to engage more community members, build local leadership, and help to make connections to human, technical, and financial resources from lead agencies and organizations in the state. With over 100 local people participating in the process and over 40 volunteers now engaged in active Task Forces to advance priorities, it is clear that there is great energy in Vernon for forward momentum and progress. New connections and partnerships are being made between the Task Forces and key supporting partners such as the Windham Regional Commission, USDA Rural Development, Preservation Trust of Vermont, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation.

Vernon is facing a significant challenge as the community works to ensure a prosperous future in the face of the Vermont Yankee decommissioning. The Visiting Team was impressed and inspired by the community's willingness to identify and tackle next steps together and to move forward in a positive and unified way towards a collective vision for the future of the town.

It is not easy to choose priorities, and there are many other good ideas for action listed in the 'opportunities' section of this report that can inform the ongoing work of the Task Forces and be a foundation for work in town over time. In the end, Vernon selected solid priorities for action that set momentum toward the achievement of short and long-term goals that will lead to strong and vibrant community and economy. These initiatives set challenging but strategically achievable goals, and there is much work to do, but Vernon is a town that is ready to take action and has the capacity, drive, and dedication to succeed.

We look forward to working with the Vernon Task Forces as the priority projects identified in the process move forward efforts to:

- **Develop the Riverfront and Improve Trails and Outdoor Recreation**
- **Build a Community Store and Café**
- **Enhance the Village Center**

We also look forward to working with the Vernon Planning and Economic Development Commission as they advance key economic and business development initiatives including:

- **Develop a Business Incubator**
- **Improve Fiber Optic Networks**
- **Build a Utility Scale Energy Project**

The Task Forces working to advance these issues and the Vernon Planning Commission are already hard at work—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 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 Vernon as it moves forward and to provide follow up help to the Vernon Task Forces and Planning Commission as called upon. VCRD will also serve as an advocate for Vernon projects with appropriate agencies and organizations in Vermont. Call on us, and on Visiting Resource Team members, when we can be of help.

There are many people to thank for making this Community Visit effort possible.

We would like to thank Heather Frost and Bronna Zlochiver who were instrumental in connecting us initially with the Vernon community, and to the Vernon Select Board for inviting the process. We also deeply appreciate the work and leadership of the Steering Committee who helped guide the process from the beginning including: Tim Arsenault, Jessica Butterfield, Sarah Butterfield, Jean Carr, Mike Collier, Seth Deyo, Jessica Earp, Brad Ellis, Peggy Farabaugh, Peg Frost, Andrew Gantt, Bruce Gauld, Mike Hebert, Munson Hicks, Annette Kuusinen, Martin Langeveld, Art Miller, Barbara Moseley, Patty O'Donnell, Emily Vergobbe, and Bronna Zlochiver.

We are very thankful for the use of community spaces for the Community Visit meetings including Vernon Elementary School, The Seventh Day Adventist Church, and the Vernon Town Offices.

The Brattleboro Reformer, Brattleboro Community Television, The Commons, and WKVT Radio were great media partners in the Vernon Community Visit Process and the Vernon Newsletter and the unofficial Vernon website were critical in helping to spread the word about the process and meetings, and share the outcomes of each gathering.

Michael Moser and the UVM Center for Rural Studies are terrific allies in our efforts and we appreciate their help building a briefing profile for the VCRD Community Visit Team.

Thanks must also go to the Windham County Economic Development Program (WCEDP) who contributed financial support for the process.

VCRD calls state, federal and non-profit leaders to participate in Community Visit processes. We are proud of the partners we get to work with—and especially the Vernon Visiting Team—they are the best of Vermont's public servants.

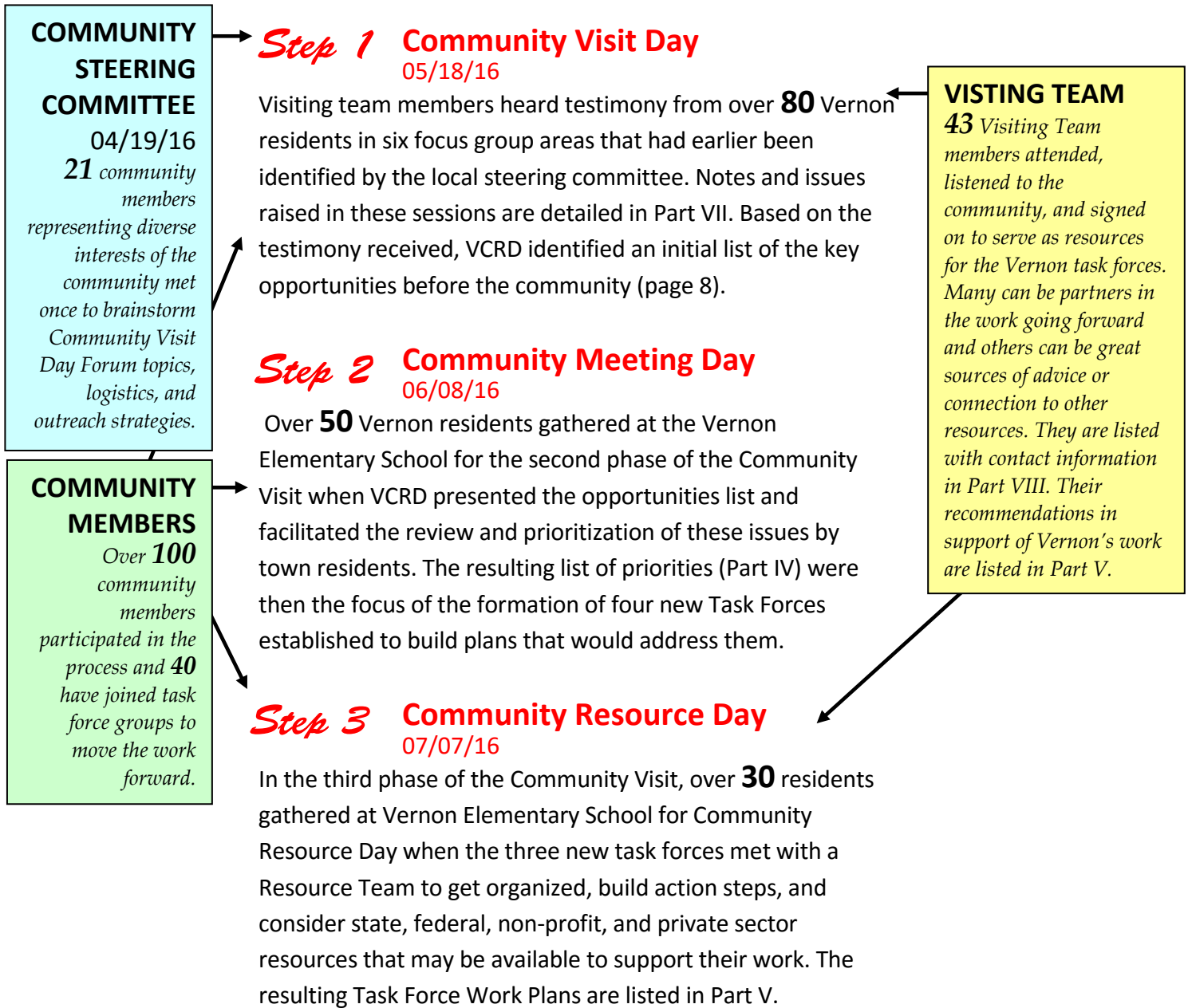
Getting things done is all about leadership, and all of Vernon should be grateful to those who have stepped up to serve as chairs of the task forces: Jeff Hardy: Enhance Village Center; Russell Rosinski: Develop the Riverfront and Improve Trails and Outdoor Recreation; Annette Roydon: Build a Community Store and Café. Thank you also to Bob Spencer, Chair of the Vernon Planning and Economic Development Commission for his leadership in moving forward key economic development initiatives.

VCRD especially wants to thank Art Miller for stepping up to lead this process as the Community Visit Chair. From the moment we met Art, we knew that he was the perfect fit to lead this process. As a longtime resident, a pastor, and farmer, Art has deep ties and connections to the Vernon community. When we asked folks of all ages, from all walks of life who would be the best fit for chair, Art's name came up consistently and we were told that we can't go wrong with Art! Art is a smart, kind, and encouraging leader, a strong speaker and listener, and, most of all, deeply cares about Vernon and is committed to the future success and prosperity of the town. We are confident in Art's ability to lead and coordinate the work ahead.

In the end, though, we are proud at VCRD that we work in a place where community is real and strong, and where local residents work together to get things done to make their communities the best they can possibly be. So we are grateful to all residents of Vernon, young and old, who stand up for the town and who are lined up for the common good and best future for this wonderful place. We are eager to continue following and supporting your success!

II. The Vernon Community Visit Process

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) 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 Vernon consisted of three phases depicted here:**



III. Vision for Vernon's Future

These points of vision were compiled from vision statements that were shared during the Community Meeting on June 8th and supported by the majority of participants at the July 7th Resource Meeting and an online survey. The statements represent broad hopes that the majority of responding residents have for the long term good of the Vernon community.

Vernon residents look to a future for the community where:

- ❖ Vernon residents create an environment that builds a positive reputation for the town, and people want to live here.
- ❖ Vernon is a safe place to live and raise a family.
- ❖ Vernon is a drug free community.
- ❖ Vernon has a strong and locally controlled school system.
- ❖ Vernon's youth find a reason to live and work here; they want to stay, or at least return here.
- ❖ Vernon is a town that takes charge of its own future. We figure out how to fix our own problems without depending on someone else to fix them, while also connecting to and taking advantage of resources from outside of the town and from regional partners.
- ❖ Vernon is economically stable and has a steady and predictable tax base. The economy is diverse and does not rely on just one business entity.
- ❖ Vernon develops the electrical grid and takes advantage of the resource to expand its economy.
- ❖ Vernon is a prosperous and financially secure community that can support community events and good ideas for the town and its economy.
- ❖ Vernon welcomes businesses to the town, and businesses want to invest in the community.
- ❖ There is a community-oriented store in town.
- ❖ Vernon takes a leadership role in the protection of natural resources and land and Vernon's farmland is protected and conserved
- ❖ Vernon maintains its rural character over time.
- ❖ Vernon has a strong and active social community.
- ❖ Vernon is a town that continues to thrive because community members help each other.
- ❖ Vernon embraces its history; we protect and incorporate the historical aspects of the town into the future.

IV. Vernon Priorities

Determined by Vernon residents at the VCRD Community Meeting, June 8, 2016

Proving that those who live, work and raise their families in a community are best qualified to understand its needs and potential, Vernon community members whittled down a list of 15 issues through discussion, reasoned arguments and thoughtful reflection. In the end, voting with red and blue stickers, over 50 participants chose three new issues that offer opportunities to enhance existing resources, and to strengthen the town through exciting new ventures. Residents concluded the June 8th meeting by signing up for Task Forces in the selected areas.

Vernon residents selected three priorities for future action:

✓ **Develop the Riverfront, Improve Trails, and Outdoor Recreation**

Vernon residents feel that the riverfront is an important, but underused community asset. A degraded boat launch area limits access to the river, and safety concerns deter many from kayaking, boating, swimming, and developing trails in the area. Residents are also proud of their many trail, wildlife habitat, forest, and recreation assets. Ample trail networks crisscross the town through the Town Forest, on logging roads through private land and farms, on VAST Snowmobile Trails, and by the town's pool and recreation area. Vernon could build a Conservation, Trails, and River Task Force to galvanize community volunteers to map and maintain existing trails, build new trails and improve access to trail networks, clean up the riverfront area, and plan longer-term strategic riverfront improvements. Vernon residents envision a rebuilt and accessible boat launch, a park with trails along the river, and boat access and a place to rent canoes and kayaks. The group could revisit past plans to develop the area, connect with area landowners such as the concrete company to explore purchase or partnering opportunities, identify potential funding sources, and define and lead a realistic step by step platform to advance a community vision for riverside revival and enjoyment. Additionally, the group could take on conservation initiatives to engage Vernon residents in protecting and learning about the natural resources in the town including offering naturalist programs and workshops, engaging in citizen science programs such as the annual bird count or amphibian crossing initiatives, or offering an "adopt a trail" program to engage residents in trail maintenance. This work could establish Vernon as a regional trail and recreation hub, offering ample opportunity for locals and drawing in visitors from around the state and region.

✓ **Open a Community Store and Café**

Vernon residents wish that there was a gathering place in town. Residents miss the sense of community and connection that were felt when the town had a small grocery store, and would like to come together to bring a grocery store with a deli and café back to the town. A task force could form to develop and implement a plan to set up and maintain a community-owned store and café. A local store would offer a local gathering place, create job or volunteer opportunities for local residents and youth, boost economic opportunity, and attract residents and visitors to town.

✓ **Enhance Village Center**

Vernon has several community assets that many towns across Vermont would love to have, including a high quality school, a great town office and library, a swimming pool, and a strong Recreation Department. However, many Vernon residents are concerned that the town lacks a

cohesive center point or “heart center” for the community. A task force could form to work with community members and planning experts to envision, plan, and design for the redevelopment over time of the area around the village green and gazebo as a focal point for the town, essentially building a small Vernon downtown. The group could identify funding sources for redevelopment as well as host a design competition to provide ideas toward a master plan for redevelopment. Once established, a redeveloped green and village center point would provide a visual draw and focal point for the town, a place for visitors to stop, as well as a location to host events and community gatherings such as a farmers market, concerts, and community potlucks and picnics.

Vernon residents also chose to support the ongoing economic development work of the Vernon Planning and Economic Development Commission (VPEDC):

Community members recognize the importance of the ongoing work of the VPEDC in attracting businesses to the region, exploring opportunities to build the tax base, and planning for Vernon’s economic future. As this work is already in progress, residents chose to recognize this work as a priority and set these initiatives aside from the voting process, but to ensure that the work moves forward:

✓ Develop a Business Incubator

Vernon residents are interested in continuing efforts to develop a business incubator in Vernon to incubate small and creative businesses in technology, the arts, manufacturing, and/or food products and services. By providing some common business infrastructure and shared space, the incubator could seed next-generation business development in town and attract young creative entrepreneurs to live in the community. The Governor Hunt House and the Vermont Yankee Office Complex have been identified as possible locations and other spaces may be available. Next steps could include determining the right location, studying market feasibility, and identifying funding sources to kick off implementation.

✓ Improve Fiber Optic Network

Improving fiber connection in Vernon could be a way to boost economic development in town and attract businesses that rely on high speed connections, as well as benefit residents. There are great high speed connections to the school and town offices that might be accessed. A Fiber Optic Subcommittee has been working towards accessing high speed fiber and is ready to take next steps to connect with providers and better gauge public interest and buy-in.

✓ Build a Utility Scale Energy Project

Many Vernon residents recognize the benefits that Vermont Yankee brought to the town and the importance of the strong relationship between the plant and the town. The closure of VY will bring about many changes, one of them being a decline in the tax base of the town. Bringing in a utility scale energy project could be a way to build the tax base and re-adapt some of the energy infrastructure that VY brought to the community. Ideas for a large scale project include a major Vernon solar array, a gas fired power plant, and a wood pellet powered plant. The group could further develop this idea, explore possibilities and how projects could best fit for the community, and work to identify and invite a utility scale project to town.

Other Key Opportunities identified by the community:

Along with the three chosen priorities and three VPEDC initiatives, the key opportunities listed below reflect other potential ideas for action that community members shared on Community Visit Day. Though these opportunities weren't chosen as priority projects through this process, community members may find the list useful as they look to expand on current projects or take on new ones.

Support Economic Development and Business Growth

Vernon is a town with many assets to attract businesses and new residents to town including a great location, access to the interstate, a great school, a strong Recreation Department, and more. Many residents would like to identify ways to better broadcast this story and share these assets with businesses and residents looking to establish themselves in the area. A Business Development Task Force could draw on community members and outside experts to develop strategies to attract and support new businesses and boost economic development in the town including implementing tax incentives for new businesses, connecting with the regional green economy innovation hub in and around Windham County, identifying ways to attract new investment, and exploring the opening of a satellite Vermont Tourism Office to provide information to visitors of the region.

Boost Vernon Agriculture and Local Food Production

Vernon residents are proud of their prime agricultural soils, flat farmland, and beautiful farming landscape and would like to better celebrate and showcase their agricultural heritage and local farms as well as boost agricultural development and local food production. A Vernon Agriculture Task Force could form to enhance local farms, value-added food production, agricultural diversification and marketing. The group could develop a Vernon Community Garden and work to bring a Community Supported Agriculture program to the town. The group could plan events to celebrate local agriculture such as regular Farmers Markets on the town green, a Harvest Festival open to all from around the region, regular community potlucks, local farm tours, and a revival of Vernon Farm Days to connect residents and the farm community and celebrate the town's agricultural roots.

Establish Vernon as a Regional Cycling Hub and Destination

The beautiful farmland and rolling hills in Vernon, as well as the location along the Connecticut River Byway, make the town an ideal destination for cyclists from around the region, as well as a great activity for locals. A group could come together to form a Vernon Bike Task Force to expand bike lanes and develop local bike maps to improve bike safety and attract bikers from around the state and region. The group could host an annual biking event to draw cyclists to the town, and could even identify ways to offer cycling amenities such as a food, water, or an ice cream cart. The group could also help Vernon to connect regionally, building connections with biking groups in Brattleboro, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, to connect to bike paths and events beyond the town's borders.

Build a Thriving Arts Community

Vernon residents are interested in building a more vibrant arts community in town, better connecting local artists, and showcasing the active but sometimes unrecognized and uncelebrated arts community that is already here. A Vernon Arts Task Force could come together to bring art and artists to the community including displaying art in public spaces such as the school, library and town office, integrating art into community events, and coordinating an Art in Action program with live art demos

in public spaces. Additionally, the group can work with artisans in the community to revive the Vernon Craft Fair and to continue and expand local Artisan Tours. Art displays and programming could be designed to showcase art and crafts of all kinds as well as artists of all skill levels, experience, and ages.

Expand Community Events

Vernon is a town that values the opportunity to come together as a community. An annual Town Picnic and Fire Department Muster is a well-attended and celebrated event, and the Vernon Recreation Department is often praised for the many community events and programs that they coordinate each year. However, many Vernon residents would like to expand on existing events and build more ways to engage people of all ages, celebrate the community and its many assets, and have fun together. A Community Events Task Force could form to build a series of annual events in collaboration with community partners including the Recreation Department, the Library, the Vernon Historians, local farms, and others. Events could include a community movie night, a Harvest Festival and bonfire, Contra Dances, a “float-in” movie at the town pool, regular community potlucks, concerts at the gazebo, and more. The group could create a neighborhood ambassador program to conduct outreach and surveys to connect with folks from all parts of town to make sure events are in line with community needs and to boost participation and engagement in local events.

Develop an Industrial Park

Vernon could assemble a task force of residents to develop an industrial park in Vernon to attract and grow businesses and manufacturers. The task force could work to identify an appropriate location for the Park, identify funding sources for implementation, and attract manufacturers and businesses. Some residents suggested that, in additions to other major manufacturers, Vernon could work to attract a wood pellet manufacturer or other forest products business to capitalize on and highlight Vernon’s forested landscape and history of forest product manufacturing and development.

Develop a Vernon “Community Center” Space

Vernon residents would like to see a gathering place in town to come together as a community and offer programming such as art classes, yoga, and other family programming. A task force could come together to build and implement a plan to create a community space for Vernon residents either through the renovation and repurposing of an existing building or space, or designing a new space for community gatherings.

Improve and Expand Youth Activities, Services, and Space

Vernon’s high quality elementary school, great educators, and thriving recreation department are incredible assets for local youth and families. However, residents of all ages are concerned that, while needs are met for kids from K-6th Grades, once students disperse to high schools outside of town, they lose connection to the community and to each other and don’t have many local opportunities for activities, service, or job skill development. A collaboration of adults and youth could come together to improve and expand on youth activities and services to ensure that youth of all ages have the support, engagement, and activities they need. The group could partner with local institutions such as Vernon Recreation, the library, churches, and others to organize events that bring together youth after they leave Vernon Elementary to maintain connection to their peers here in town. Events could include teen nights, pool parties, bonfires, or sporting events. A youth space could be created that is safe and staffed, but offers youth an opportunity to hang out in an unstructured environment. Educational activities such as speakers, leadership trainings, or tech/STEM skills could be another way to engage

youth in the community. Other services that could be improved or addressed by the group include extending local bus service to accommodate youth with connections to surrounding towns, and the creation of a hub for community service and internship opportunities in town. Central to the group would be the engagement of local youth in program and service development and leadership.

Additional Ideas for Action were added to the list by Vernon residents at the June 8th Community Meeting:

- **Develop a Waterpark in Vernon**
- **Make Vernon a Destination**



Vernon Community Visit Chair, Art Miller, welcomed community members to Community Meeting Day.

V. Task Force Action Plans

Resource Meeting, July 7, 2016

Vernon Task Forces are comprised of community members and an appointed chairperson. On Resource Day committee members worked closely with a facilitator and small visiting resource teams to develop step-by-step action plans and 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: Develop the Riverfront and Improve Trails and Outdoor Recreation

Chairperson: **Russell Rosinski**

Facilitator: **Jenna Koloski**, VCRD

Resource Leaders: **Jeff Nugent**, Windham Regional Commission, **Joan Weir**, Vermont Land Trust, **Craig Whipple**, VT Dept of Forest, Parks and Recreation

Vernon residents feel that the riverfront is an important, but underused community asset. A degraded boat launch area limits access to the river, and safety concerns deter many from kayaking, boating, swimming, and developing trails in the area. Residents are also proud of their many trail, wildlife habitat, forest, and recreation assets. Ample trail networks crisscross the town through the Town Forest, on logging roads through private land and farms, on VAST Snowmobile Trails, and by the town's pool and recreation area. Vernon could build a Conservation, Trails, and River Task Force to galvanize community volunteers to map and maintain existing trails, build new trails and improve access to trail networks, clean up the riverfront area, and plan longer-term strategic riverfront improvements. Vernon residents envision a rebuilt and accessible boat launch, a park with trails along the river, and boat access and a place to rent canoes and kayaks. The group could revisit past plans to develop the area, connect with area landowners such as the concrete company to explore purchase or partnering opportunities, identify potential funding sources, and define and lead a realistic step by step platform to advance a community vision for riverside revival and enjoyment. Additionally, the group could take on conservation initiatives to engage Vernon residents in protecting and learning about the natural resources in the town including offering naturalist programs and workshops, engaging in citizen science programs such as the annual bird count or amphibian crossing initiatives, or offering an "adopt a trail" program to engage residents in trail maintenance. This work could establish Vernon as a regional trail and recreation hub, offering ample opportunity for locals and drawing in visitors from around the state and region.

Priority Action Steps

1. Develop a strategic planning document and work breakdown structure for the group to frame out next steps and the scope of work to ensure success.
2. Perform a feasibility review of river development including feasibility of a riverfront trail (scale, fit, property ownership, etc.), the development of a riverfront park, and the development of boat and fishing access along the riverfront in Vernon.
3. Create a base map of all Vernon trails to review current trail status and use as a baseline in planning future trail access and development. Include trails within the VAST network, the Vernon Town Forest, Roaring Brook State Forest (consult with FP & R on trail use) and rec department trails.
4. Work with the Vernon Recreation Department to develop winter use of the recreational center.

Other Action Ideas

1. Develop a strategic planning document and work breakdown structure for the group to frame out next steps and the scope of work to ensure success.
2. Perform a feasibility review of river development including feasibility of a riverfront trail (scale, fit, property ownership, etc.), the development of a riverfront park, and the development of boat and fishing access along the riverfront in Vernon.
3. Create a base map of all Vernon trails to review current trail status and use as a baseline in planning future trail access and development. Include trails within the VAST network, the Vernon Town Forest, Roaring Brook State Forest (consult with FP & R on trail use) and rec department trails.
4. Work with the Vernon Recreation Department to develop winter use of the recreational center.

Resources

1. The Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA) would be a good resource to help with the development of a mountain bike trail network for Vernon and to share what other communities have done. There may be a local Brattleboro/Keene chapter to connect with.
2. Jeff Nugent with the Windham Regional Commission could be a resource to help with mapping of trails and the Riverfront feasibility work.
3. Vermont Land Trust.
4. Vermont Horse Council.
5. The Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife is the resource to connect with around boat and fishing access along the river. Michael Wichrowski, Facilities and Lands Administrator is the contact there.
6. Friends of the Scholl Bridge could be a group to connect with to discuss their current projects and how Vernon might link in.
7. TransCanada.
8. VASA
9. VAST is the group to connect with (through Don Rosinski) around year-round trail use in the area.
10. The group could connect with other towns that have improved or are working to improve their riverfront including Vergennes and Manchester. Adam Kane in St. Johnsbury is the chair of their recently formed River Redevelopment task force.
11. The group could connect with other towns that have done significant work on their trails and in their town forests including Hinesburg, Stowe, and Wilmington (Wilmington Valley Trail).
12. Foundations the group could look at for potential funding sources includes the Vermont Community Foundation and the Windham Foundation.
13. The group could connect with Entergy to discuss land ownership as well as a possible funding source.
14. Students from Brattleboro Union High School or Pioneer could be a resource for potential trail volunteers. They often have community service hours they need to fulfill.
15. The local Girl Scout troop or other youth groups could get involved.
16. The Vernon Recreation Department is a resource for engaging the community and volunteers and could work in partnership on some projects.
17. A grant through the Vermont Community Development program at the Agency of Commerce and Community Development could support work in this area.

18. The Vermont Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation could provide technical assistance in trail development initiatives and have several grant opportunities available for communities working on trails and outdoor recreation projects.
19. Vernon’s local contractors could be a resource as work proceeds.

Task Force Contacts

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Visiting Resource Team Recommendations for the “Develop the Riverfront and Improve Trails and Outdoor Recreation” Task Force

After Community Meeting Day, Resource Team members, representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, submitted their recommendations for other potential actions and resources the task force might consider as it moves forward. These recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community’s unique assets and needs.

Riverfront Development:

- The Task for should hold a visioning process with local residents around what they want to see on the Vernon Riverfront. Once a vision is in place, the Task Force could build a design charrette to create a master plan for the area(s) and develop a physical design scheme for what the Riverfront could look like. Share the vision with the community and key stakeholder groups to create buy-in, evaluate costs and viability for the vision (including zoning, possible environmental permitting considerations, transportation nodes and access), build a constituency of support, and raise funds locally and through grants.
- River frontage in Vernon is extensive. The Task Force may choose to begin on one section or one area of public access for improvement and then move on to further opportunities.
- Depending on the scale of the project, it would be good to first identify all potential stakeholders including land owners and abutters. Conservation partners including the Vermont Rivers Conservancy, Vermont Land Trust, and the Vt. Chapter of the Nature Conservancy could be convened to get their help and buy in for the creation of trails and development of the Riverfront.

- It could be beneficial to connect and/or partner with Connecticut River Byways (<http://ctriverbyways.org/>) and the Connecticut River Watershed Council (<http://www.ctriver.org/>). The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources River Management Program can provide info on stream management. Call 828-1535.
- Some of the planning and development of the riverfront area may take years; but some things can be done immediately. The Task Force could build a short list of things that could be immediately accomplished with volunteer labor and minimal resources, then invite the Vernon community to a riverfront 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. Each part of the work can be an opportunity for the Vernon community to work together and even celebrate together. A work day could end with a town picnic, for example.
- The Task Force could connect with and visit other communities who have been successful in or are working towards redeveloping their riverfront. These could include:
 - Adam and Andrea Kane, Co-Chairs of the Riverfront Redevelopment Task Force in St. Johnsbury akane@fairbanksmuseum.org
 - Mike Winslow, Chair of the Vergennes Task Force to Redevelop the Falls Basin and develop a River Walk mikekira@myfairpoint.net
 - Bill Laberge, Chair of the Manchester Task Force to Redevelop the Riverside bill@williamlaberge.com
 - The Rutland Creek Patch connects downtown to Pine Hill Park and Giorgetti Park where there are biking and hiking trails, ball fields, and a skating rink. Susan Schreiber of the Rutland Regional Planning Commission can describe how the team planned, funded and built the multiuse path. She can be reached at susan@rutlandrpc.org.
- Build publicity. The task force could ask local champions to write letters to the editor and/or Front Porch Forum posts to start the conversation and help residents to imagine the possibilities and potential for the space. Create a buzz in the community. Celebrate each success!
- The group could create a branded set of interpretive signs and wayfinding markers that share the stories of the riverfront and its immediate surroundings. These don't have to be elaborate, but would have to be durable and easy-to-spot. An artist or design team could be hired or local creative volunteers or students could help to shepherd this project along.
- Connect with established trail networks, including the Connecticut River Paddlers' Trail. <http://connecticutriverpaddlerstrail.org/>

Outdoor Recreation and Trails:

- It could be helpful to visit with other communities that have built various models of outdoor recreational programs, facilities, and trails to learn what has worked well. Some examples of communities that might be helpful include Hinesburg (Town Forest development), Swanton (Outdoor Recreation Task Force), East Burke (development of a network of mountain bike trails), and Waterbury (Waterbury Area Trails Alliance). A Task Force in Swanton has been successful in working with the regional planning commission to map trails and develop signage to highlight outdoor recreation assets in town. To learn more about their efforts contact co-chairs Betsy Fournier (betsy.fournier16@gmail.com) and Ron Kilburn (swanza@swantonvermont.org).

- The Vermont Recreation and Parks Association could be a resource for learning from other recreation programs around the state and connecting with other volunteers and professionals. Contact Betsy Terry at 802-878-2077 or info@vrpa.org.
- Tim Tierney from Burke's Kingdom Trails is the go to person in Vermont when it comes to trails and associated economic development. He can be reached at 802-626-0737 or tim@kingdomtrails.org.
- The Vermont Mountain Bike Association could be a great resource and partner in bike trail development. They can be reached at 802-342-7568.
- One way to proceed could be to create a map of all of the existing outdoor recreational opportunities to share with residents and visitors. The map could be used to do a quick assessment of both the trails that are currently available and where there might be needs for trail building, rebuilding, or maintenance. This could also help identify priority trails to maintain and promote for public access. The Windham Regional Planning Commission could be a partner in trail mapping and development. Contact Jeff Nugent at jnugent@windhamregional.org or 802-257-4547 x111.
- The Vermont Trail Finder project, run by the Upper Valley Trails Alliance, is a statewide promotional tool for Vermont trails and all the Vernon trails could be mapped and promoted through the Trail Finder. <https://www.trailfinder.info/>
- The community could promote recreation opportunities online. The group could connect with the Vernon website to see if there could be a space for recreation opportunities and to build this as a key feature of the town brand.
- Community events that visit and celebrate the natural resources in the community and Vernon's recreation assets could be a great way to engage residents in the effort. The group could consider organizing fun outings like the Halloween Bike Ride that Local Motion organizes each year in Burlington. Events could be educational-- or just for fun--and feature activities, music, and food.
- This would be a great project to connect with local schools and students. Local students could take on pieces of this work (trail development, signage, and others) as a community service project. Vermont Youth Conservation Corp and Northwoods Leadership Center both run youth development trail maintenance programs and could perhaps be tapped to provide crews to help get the trails and the boat launch back into shape. High schools around the state with alternative education programs take on trail and water restoration projects with some success.
- There are a number of exciting trail project underway in both Vermont and New Hampshire; Vernon's location could provide an opportunity for some interesting cross-state collaboration.
- A survey of residents could be a helpful way to determine how the community wants to use the trails and to determine trail use conflicts early on. A survey of landowners in the region could also be conducted to determine willingness to allow public use and possible available land.
- Connecting with conservation organizations would offer support in analyzing the need and implementing action steps. These could include the Vermont Land Trust (Joan Weir jweir@vlt.org or 802-246-1501) and Vermont River Conservancy (<http://www.vermontriverconservancy.org/>).
- The University of New Hampshire Extension office is doing some exciting work around trail development and usage (including phone apps that allow community members to map trails comprehensively online). Connect Extension Specialist Molly Donovan to find out more at 603-862-5046 or molly.donovan@unh.edu.

- The VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation is a great resource to contact with questions or technical support, and oversees grant programs that could be useful. They administer grant opportunities including the National Parks Service Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance. Contact Jessica Savage, Recreation Coordinator, at 802-828-1399 or Jessica.savage@vermont.gov or Craig Whipple, Director of State Parks at 802-828-1399 or craig.whipple@vermont.gov.
- The Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program provides technical assistance for towns that are protecting, maintaining, or acquiring community forests. Danielle Fitzko is the contact at 802-598-9992 or Danielle.fitzko@vermont.gov.
- Funding Sources for outdoor recreation projects could include:
 - Vermont Community Foundation Small and Inspiring Grants for community building and civic engagement projects (Christopher Kaufman-Ilstrup 802-388-3355)
 - Ben & Jerry’s Foundation Community Action Team Grants
 - New England Grassroots Environment Fund grants for environmental or community organizing (603-905-9915)
 - Vermont Housing and Conservation Board Public Outdoor Recreation Grants (802-828-3250)
 - Windham Foundation (802-843-2211)
 - The USDA Community Forest Program
<http://www.fs.fed.us/cooperativeforestry/programs/loa/cfp.shtml>
 - Building Communities Grant Program: Recreational Facilities Grant. Contact Judy Bruneau at 802-828-3519 or at judy.bruneau@vermont.gov.



Members of the Riverfront task group met on Resource Day to begin building an action plan.

✓ Task Force: **Open a Community Store and Café**

Chairperson: **Annette Roydon**

Facilitator: **Paul Costello**, VCRD

Resource Leaders: **Paul Bruhn**, Preservation Trust of Vermont, **Katie Buckley**, Town of Guildford and Friends of Algiers Village

Vernon residents wish that there was a gathering place in town. Residents miss the sense of community and connection that were felt when the town had a small grocery store, and would like to come together to bring a grocery store with a deli and café back to the town. A task force could form to develop and implement a plan to set up and maintain a community-owned store and café. A local store would offer a local gathering place, create job or volunteer opportunities for local residents and youth, boost economic opportunity, and attract residents and visitors to town.

Priority Action Steps

1. Evaluate existing store locations or potential sites and decide which place to concentrate on.
2. Evaluate what would be needed to make a store work financially (with help from VtSBDC, BDCC or the Windham Regional Commission).
3. Take a tour of General Stores that have been redeveloped in the last few years: Putney, North Shrewsbury, Guilford, Adamant, Barnard, and meet with operators, but also the organizers who led their renewal.
4. Do a survey of Vernon and regional folks about what they would like to see in a Vernon store through the town website, email, facebook, the newsletter, the library and maybe a Survey Monkee process.
5. Hold a series of neighborhood potluck block parties to talk about what people would like to see in a local store.
6. Develop a plan for a redeveloped or new store including all its features, design, and financing with professional assistance and a planning grant.
7. Develop a fund development plan and feasibility study for the store.
8. Decide whether it should be a coop, or if the facility would be leased to an entrepreneur.

Resources

1. VT Small Business Center
2. Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation
3. Windham Regional Commission
4. Preservation Trust: Could help set up tour or connect to organizers of other stores; Could connect to Mike Comeau an expert store developer who does pro bono work to help village stores in VT; Could advise on or help leverage funds from state, federal or philanthropic sources, including potential historic tax credits; Could include Vernon leaders in a retreat with others working on similar developments for peer learning.
5. All other redeveloped stores (many listed above) and their leaders, especially Sally Deinzer, organizer and manager of the North Shrewsbury store.
6. The entire Vernon community will need to be engaged to see this as their 'home store' and commit as active customers.

7. The Agency of Commerce Community Development Block Grant program for a potential planning grant.
8. The Vernon Town Administrator.
9. The Windham County Economic Development Program for potential seed funding.

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Visiting Resource Team Recommendations for the “Open a Community Store and Café” Task Force

After Community Meeting Day, Resource Team members, representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, submitted their recommendations for other potential actions and resources the task force might consider as it moves forward. These recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community’s unique assets and needs.

- The Task Force could conduct a survey to gather what residents would like in a community store and café. Use this data to plan for what the store will entail and as a market analysis. What is the competition? How far are other options? What do people want to buy and will they shop frequently?
- Creative ideas to drive traffic to a community store include: pizza nights (perhaps to coincide with movies or music on the green), ice cream (creemees are always a draw!), or community events.
- Preservation Trust is a key resource for community store development and has been involved in similar projects across the state. Preservation Trust has a strong history of supporting general store projects in historic village centers. They see stores as building community, creating momentum to preserve village cores in general, preventing sprawl and promoting smart growth. Contact Paul Bruhn at paul@ptvermont.org or at 802-658-6647.
- Talk to and visit area food cooperatives and other community stores for advice (and possibly even become involved in a satellite project). A get together could be hosted to bring people from these communities together with Preservation Trust of VT to find out lessons learned and tips for success. People who have led efforts in other towns include:
 - Lyssa Papazian and other members of the Putney General Store Task force (lyssa@lyssapapasian.com)

- Katie Buckley and other members of the Friends of Algiers Village (katiesbuckley@gmail.com)
- Robert DuGrenier of the West Townshend Store (robertdugrenier@me.com)
- Consider the most effective ownership/management structure. Does the community own the property? Does a group manage the store, or is there an entrepreneur excited to take the lead?
- It will be critical to engage the community so there is ownership and buy-in.
- The group could get the project placed in the Windham Region Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).
- Perhaps the store could plug in with local and regional local food efforts. Connect with the Vermont Farm to Plate network or Windham County-focused Food Connects to find out if there are ways to plug in to the regional food scene.
- Research “Community-Supported Enterprises” as an ownership model. Find information at: http://www.ptvermont.org/community_supported_enterprises/communitysupported.php.
- Review the Institute for Local Self-Reliance guidelines on how to open a community store. It offers some great case studies and a step by step process for engaging the public, securing funding, and opening the store. Find info and the downloadable resource here: <https://ilsr.org/how-to-launch-community-owned-store/>
- The Vermont Retail & Grocers’ Association could be helpful in finding a store owner/manager. Contact President Jim Harrison at 802-839-1928 Ext. 11.
- Potential Funding Sources for a Community Store may include:
 - Vermont Community Development Program Grants. Contact Grants Specialist Cindy Blondin at 802-828-5219 or cindy.blondin@vermont.gov
 - Building Communities Grant Programs Regional Economic Development Grant Program. Contact Judy Bruneau at 802-828-3519 or at judy.bruneau@vermont.gov.
 - Vermont Community Foundation may offer small amounts of funding through the Small and Inspiring Program, and Dunham-Mason and Crosby-Gannett Funds. NOTE – VCF supports programming and not capital expenses so call and speak to staff before applying for funding. Contact Emilye Pelow Corbett at 802-388-3355 ext. 230 or epelowcorbett@vermontcf.org
 - USDA Rural Development could potentially help through a Rural Business Development Grant (the town could serve as the applicant and the store as the benefiting business) to conduct a market analysis/feasibility study. Contact Business Programs Specialist Susan Poland at 802-828-6002 susan.poland@vt.usda.gov.
 - Paul Bruhn at Preservation Trust can be an invaluable advisor on fund development: 343-0595.
- Vermont Small Business Development Center is a potential resource for business assistance. State Director Linda Rossi is a good contact (802-728-9101 lrossi@vtsbdc.org) as is the regional representative Debra Boudrieau (802-257-7731 dboudrieau@vtsbdc.org).

✓ Task Force: Enhance the Village Center

Chairperson: **Jeff Hardy**

Facilitator: **Ben Doyle**, USDA Rural Development

Resource Leaders: **Kate Ash**, Office of Senator Patrick Leahy; **Susan McMahon**, Windham Regional Commission; **Patrick Olstad**, Landworks VT; **Nancy Owens**, Housing Vermont

Vernon has several community assets that many towns across Vermont would love to have, including a high quality school, a great town office and library, a swimming pool, and a strong Recreation Department. However, many Vernon residents are concerned that the town lacks a cohesive center point or “heart center” for the community. A task force could form to work with community members and planning experts to envision, plan, and design for the redevelopment over time of the area around the village green and gazebo as a focal point for the town, essentially building a small Vernon downtown. The group could identify funding sources for redevelopment as well as host a design competition to provide ideas toward a master plan for redevelopment. Once established, a redeveloped green and village center point would provide a visual draw and focal point for the town, a place for visitors to stop, as well as a location to host events and community gatherings such as a farmers market, concerts, and community potlucks and picnics.

Priority Action Steps

1. Work with the Planning Committee to engage Entergy and determine the company’s land use plans (including for the Governor Hunt House and land along Governor Hunt Road)—this will inform siting decisions for community gathering spaces and future development. Similarly, identify the current uses and availability of town-owned land that could be utilized to enhance a village center.
2. Add a “Welcome to Vernon” sign and other aesthetic features that more clearly define the village space so people will know when they have actually arrived in Vernon.
3. Take a tour of other communities (possibly in conjunction with the community store taskforce) that have successfully (re)defined a village center.
4. Plan a workshop/charrette with planners/architects to advance community planning for village center. This would include reimaging currently used spaces to make them more user friendly and utilizing creative peacemaking techniques.
5. Form a social engagement committee that helps coordinate various community events, welcomes people to the community, and fosters greater communication and engagement.

Other Action Ideas

1. Consider the Post Office as a “hub” and a center of community services.
2. Enhance Governor Hunt House as a resource and investigate including it on the National Register for Historic Places.
3. Better connect community via walkable/bikeable roads. Integration of trail systems into village center is important.
4. Leverage school as a multigenerational meeting space. Host regular dinners that foster a sense of community.
5. Consider eateries as possible assets.
6. Enhance directions (both online and signage) so that visitors can successfully find their way around.
7. Assess fiber optic networks to leverage current use and need for expansion.

8. Create “gateways” at either end of town so people know they are entering a special place. In addition, undertake sustainable beautification projects so the community feels cared for.
9. Develop transportation plan that will support village center (includes considering MPH limit).
10. Develop short/long-term housing plan for Vermont.
11. Build community self-esteem through story-telling (StoryCorps).
12. Identify the new Vernon “Identity” so it can inform future planning.
13. Consider communication methods for the community. What would work best in Vernon (newsletter, FPF, signs)?

Resources

1. The Windham Regional Commission (and Visiting Team Member Susan McMahon) has extensive expertise in helping communities plan and realize their visions for the future. The Commission also has expertise in grant writing and access to funding sources that can support the community’s efforts.
2. The Vermont Arts Council can provide technical assistance in creative placemaking and help communities integrate the arts into community development plans. Check out the VAC’s Animating infrastructure grant program.
3. Look into a National Endowment for the Arts Our Town Grant that can be used for creative placemaking. Brattleboro has successfully utilized this program.
4. The Preservation Trust of Vermont is a great resource for helping communities enhance their village spaces.
5. Vermont Department Housing and Community Development staff. Richard Amore, Village Centers Coordinator, will be an important ally in this work and can provide technical assistance.
6. Stay in contact with the Congressional Delegation so they can help when needed.
7. Include project in the Southern VT Regional Economic Development Plan
8. USDA Rural Development

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Visiting Resource Team Recommendations for the “Enhance the Village Center” Task Force

After Community Meeting Day, Resource Team members, representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, submitted their recommendations for other potential actions and resources the task force might consider as it moves forward. These recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community’s unique assets and needs.

- Members of the task force could visit similarly sized communities in Vermont who have undergone community and economic revitalization efforts over the past 10-15 years, and meet with the key people in those communities who could explain how they accomplished what they have.
- One way to start would be to hold a community meeting with potluck desserts to discuss the community’s vision for a Village Center, and also survey residents to see what the village center should include.
- One approach could be to plan a workshop and charrette with planners and architects to advance community planning for the Village Center. This would include reimagining currently used spaces to make them more user friendly and utilizing creative placemaking techniques. Prior to the workshop, local experts such as the Windham Regional Commission could help develop a village base map and inventory of existing conditions to serve future planning efforts. The workshop could be a fun and interactive event that might include an outdoor component and indoor drawing session. This process could be used to identify the priorities that are most in need of further development and that require the services of planning and design professionals.
 - The Windham Regional Commission will be a key resource for planning and implementation, including connecting with and assisting in grant applications. Contact Susan McMahon at 802-257-4547 Ext. 114 or susan@windhamregional.org.
 - LandWorks has prepared numerous planning studies similar to what might be anticipated for Vernon. This work typically includes developing visual identities for towns, often in conjunction with wayfinding signage and custom “gateway” structure design. See www.landworksvt.com for more information and project examples.
- A speaker could be brought in to talk about what makes a great gathering space. One speaker that discusses “tactical place-making” is Ward Joyce who can be reached at wardjoyce1@hotmail.com or 802-522-0150. He has led place-making efforts including the “pocket park” and Langdon Street Alive in downtown Montpelier.
- Private sector consultants could be invaluable in sharing design ideas or even producing charrettes. Bob Stevens of Stevens Associates of Brattleboro has led community redesign efforts in several places in New England (257-9329) and David Raphael of Landworks has led important redesign efforts with Danville, Middlebury and other communities (388-3011).
- Bring in an artist to sketch ideas at a community event. Have initial sketches on display at the library and other community spaces. Use sketches and ideas to design an aesthetically relevant center at the “heart” of Vernon. A more developed/involved design could include solutions that deal with power and water to a gazebo for performances and gatherings and space for community supper, picnics, holiday celebrations, farmers markets, and more.
- The task force could create a clear vision of what the Vernon Village Center could look like in 10 years. What types of businesses are there? What jobs are available? What are the pedestrian

elements in the town, and what does the riverfront look like? This sketch could be used to then determine the strategies and tasks that would need to occur to reach that vision. A budget could be developed for the level of investment needed for each aspect of this vision which would serve as the foundation for a funding strategy. It will be important to work with the Planning Commission to include points of vision in the town plan.

- The Task Force could hold a panel discussion open to the public with local experts on village revitalization and what makes a great village. Bring in design and landscape architect experts, but also leaders from other communities that have successfully revitalized their villages and downtowns.
- Once a vision is in place, the town could continue to work with the Windham Regional Planning Commission to explore grant opportunities. With adequate funding, a Request for Proposals could be developed for planning and design services.
- Consider engaging 5th and 6th grade students from the local school to prepare photo inventories, record observations, and share ideas.
- A market study could help to determine the need for housing, commercial, and other services in potential village center and incorporate study into the plans.
- Consider gateways, “placemaking,” streetscape enhancements, and wayfinding (directional signage) to enhance the Village Center and draw attention to the town as folks pass through.
- The group’s action plan could include both short-term and relatively low-cost improvements as well as longer term enhancements that may require more substantial investment funding to show immediate improvement, action, and momentum as you work towards larger goals.
- Visit other communities to assess their village centers. Some good places to visit as excellent examples include Bristol, Guilford, and Brandon.
- Think about climate impacts of focusing on creating a strong village center – perhaps a town energy committee could work on action items that encourage people to gather in the village rather than traveling away or shopping in sprawl areas.
- Start with activities and not buildings. Build the social capital in the existing spaces that can then be the reason for enhancing the center.
- Host an inaugural potluck or picnic at the site to kick off discussion about next steps.
- Consider connecting with Richard Amore, the coordinator of the Village Center designation program who knows communities around the state focused on village center enhancement. Windham Regional Commission could co-sponsor the event. Contact Richard Amore at 802-828-5229 or Richard.amore@vermont.gov.
- Developing ways for the entire community to contribute to town transformation could be powerful. Some ideas include volunteer work days to clean up the river front or small community fundraisers to restore or improve downtown green with new plantings, benches, or picnic tables.
- Consider how to use meals as a community gathering opportunity. In some communities (i.e. Milton), schools and/or town halls provide monthly meals, which if hosted by the local school, may provide a revenue opportunity with support from federal nutrition programs. Such events may also provide an opportunity to enhance the multi-generational relationships in the community. For

information on the federal nutrition programs contact Anore Horton at Hunger Free Vermont at ahorton@hungerfreevt.org or 802-865-0255.

- The group could reach out to the Orton Family Foundation about a Heart and Soul process to reconnect people with what they love most about their town and then translate those personal and emotional connections into a blueprint that serves as the foundation for future community decisions. www.orton.org.
- Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation staff can assist with business development. Contact R.T Hamilton Brown at 802-257-7731 Ext. 221 or rbrown@brattleborodevelopment.com.
- Potential funding sources may include:
 - The Citizen Institute for Rural Design offers annual technical assistance grants for a three-day design workshop meant to involve/engage the whole community. Windham Regional Commission can assist with the application.
 - The Vermont Arts Council Animating Infrastructure supports community projects that integrate art with infrastructure improvements. Contact Michele Bailey at 802-828-3294 or mbailey@vermontartscouncil.org.
 - Contact Richard Amore to learn about the Vermont's Village Greens Initiative funding opportunities at Richard.amore@vermont.gov or 802-828-5229.
 - CDBG Planning Grants are available through the Vermont Community Development Program. Contact Cindy Blondin, Grants Specialist, at 802-828-5219 or cindy.blondin@vermont.gov.
 - Arts Impact Grant from Vermont Arts Council. These grants support organizations, municipalities, and schools in their efforts to create a more vibrant quality of life by providing equal and abundant access to the arts. The lead contact there is Sarah Mutrux, Artist and Community Programs Manager. Contact her at 802-828-5425 or smutrux@vermontartscouncil.org.
 - The ACCD Funding Directory offers information on funding options including grant timelines, funding specifics, and general eligibility: www.accd.vermont.gov. ACCD can help to navigate grant options and develop a planning needs list.
 - Municipal Planning Grants are available for a Downtown Master Plan or other implementation plan to help support town capital improvement plans and other future planning goals. Contact Annina Seiler for more information at annina.seiler@vermont.gov or 802-828-1848.
 - Potential investment sources could include: Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA) or the Vermont Community Loan Fund.
 - Vermont Community Foundation's Small and Inspiring Program. Contact Christopher Kaufman-Ilstrup at 802-388-3355 or cilstrup@vermontcf.org.
 - The Strong Communities Better Connections Program could fund transportation investments that build community resilience. Contact Jacki Cassino at VTrans at Jackie.cassino@vermont.gov or at 802-272-2368.
 - VTrans offers a Transportation Alternative Program to help fund scoping studies and design and implementation for bicycle and pedestrian construction projects. Contact Scott Robertson at scott.robertson@vermont.gov or 802-828-5799.
 - VTrans also offers a Bicycle and Pedestrian Program that can help support scoping studies and design and implementation of bicycle and pedestrian construction projects. Contact Jon Kaplan at jon.kaplan@vermont.gov or 802-828-0059.

- The Vermont State Infrastructure Bank program, operated by the VT Economic Development Authority in conjunction with the VT Agency of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, is available to assist in the construction or reconstruction of highways, roads, and bridges. Contact VEDA at 802-828-5627.
- Efficiency Vermont Municipal Street Lighting Program.
- AARP has a “complete streets” program that helps communities make neighborhoods and village centers more accessible and pedestrian friendly. Contact Kelly Stoddard Poor at 802-951-1313 or at kstoddardpoor@aarp.org.
- Local Motion is a statewide organization with an interest in making village centers more bike and pedestrian friendly, and by extension promoting stronger downtown cores with fewer opportunities for sprawl. You can connect with Local Motion for both technical assistance and financial advice. Contact Katelin Brewer-Colie, the Director of the Complete Streets Program at katelin@localmotion.org or 802-861-2700 ext. 104.
- Strengthening Southern Vermont (<https://strengtheningsouthernvt.wordpress.com/>) provides a toolkit of information and resources to assist in revitalizing their village and downtowns
- State of Vermont Tourism and Marketing could be a partner in discussing ways to market Vernon as a destination. Their online itineraries could be an opportunity to look into. Contact Steven Cook at steven.cook@vermont.gov or 802-522-2896.



Mural in the Vernon Elementary School.

VI. VPEDC Initiative Action Plans

On Community Meeting Day, recognizing that three of the presented opportunities fit within the economic development work the Vernon Planning and Economic Development Commission (VPEDC) is already pursuing, Vernon residents chose to set them aside from the voting process, and instead to support the ongoing efforts of the VPEDC to move each of the three opportunities forward.

✓ VPEDC Initiative: **Develop a Business Incubator**

Vernon residents are interested in continuing efforts to develop a business incubator in Vernon to incubate small and creative businesses in technology, the arts, manufacturing, and/or food products and services. By providing some common business infrastructure and shared space, the incubator could seed next-generation business development in town and attract young creative entrepreneurs to live in the community. The Governor Hunt House and the Vermont Yankee Office Complex have been identified as possible locations and other spaces may be available.

On August 29, 2016, VCRD facilitated a session with the VPEDC and invited guests to help strategize and brainstorm actions for moving the work forward. Resource team members attending included:

Chris Campany, Executive Director, Windham Regional Commission

Joan Goldstein, Commissioner, Vermont Department of Economic Development

R.T Hamilton Brown, WCEDP Project Manager, Brattleboro Development Credit Corp

Lars Hasselblad Torres, Executive Director, Generator

Jon-Michael Muise, Area Director, USDA Rural Development

Jim Porter, Director of Telecommunications and Connectivity, VT Dept. of Public Service

Chris Saunders, Field Representative, Office of Senator Patrick Leahy

Initiative Action Steps

1. Convene potential clients/incubator users to assess interest, need, and preferred location for an incubator or shared office space. Invite local business owners (identified through list of existing businesses) as well as those that were identified as former VY employees who had previously expressed interest or gone on to start businesses.
2. Meet with Entergy to discuss opportunities, available properties, and how they might be willing to partner on next steps to develop a business node of some sort in Vernon.
3. Conduct a feasibility analysis to identify need, potential ownership models, demand in the region, available real estate, review the possibility of focus around energy development, and to develop a business case for a future proposal.
4. Develop an asset map to identify economic and business assets including businesses in Vernon, people working at home, available land, available resources, etc.
5. Plug in with regional economic planning to include project in SEVEDs and CEDs plans. BDCC will open up submission for inclusion in the CEDs plan at the end of the month.
6. Connect with the green cluster development in Brattleboro and make sure that activities and next steps are articulated and reported back to Vernon.
7. Identify an anchor tenant.

8. Explore the possibility of framing the new business development center around a key theme of energy development and build partnerships (with UMass and other potential partners) to attract energy companies and startups.

Initiative Resources:

1. Windham Regional Commission and BDCC can help with an asset mapping exercise at a future commission meeting. At Windham Regional Commission contact Chris Campany at campany@windhamregional.org or 257-4547. At BDCC contact R.T Hamilton Brown at rbrown@brattleborodevelopment.com or 257-7731 x221.
2. USDA Rural Development could be a funding resource. The Commission can sign up for emails at www.rd.usda.gov/vt for notifications of funding availability, or Contact Jon Muise at jon.muise@vt.usda.gov or 689-3026.
3. There is a municipal planning grant available to the town. The Planning Commission will need to decide on concept by October meeting. Money would be available starting in December. This could potentially be used to fund a feasibility study.
4. A Community Development Block Grant planning grant would be a project specific source of funding for a feasibility or planning study. Windham Regional Commission can help develop those applications. This could also act as match for an EDA planning feasibility study. For more on the CDBG program contact Cindy Blondin, Grants Specialist at the VT Community Development Program at 828-5219 or cindy.blondin@vermont.gov.
5. R.T. Hamilton Brown/BDCC is willing to help in any way they can around asset mapping, feasibility study, or help implementing next steps. contact R.T Hamilton Brown at rbrown@brattleborodevelopment.com or 257-7731 x221.
6. Joan Goldstein/ACCD is willing to be a connection if there is a list of businesses that Vernon is working on inviting to the town. Contact the Commissioner at joan.goldstein@vermont.gov or 272-2399.
7. Having town money pledged to match would significantly raise likelihood of accessing funding.
8. The Windham County Economic Development Program could be used for potential seed funding.

Visiting Resource Team Recommendations for the “VPEDC Initiative: Develop a Business Incubator”

After Community Meeting Day, Resource Team members, representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, submitted their recommendations for other potential actions and resources the task force might consider as it moves forward. These recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community’s unique assets and needs.

- Work with BDCC to determine where the need is and what they are doing in the region. BDCC has a business accelerator in the works. How might Vernon fill in any gaps? Is there a need for more business incubator space in the region? Contact Adam Grinold at 802-780-7828 or agrinold@brattleborodevelopment.com. The Windham Regional Commission is also a key partner. Contact Chris Campany at 802-257-4547 or ccampany@windhamregional.org.
- Determine what Vernon can offer new businesses of all sizes. If a new business wanted to start, where could they locate? Are there any restrictions to home occupations or folks adding on to their house to support a new business? It may be useful to talk to Entergy about their various buildings to

identify whether they will they sell or lease. Identify whether there is land a new business could build on and how water and sewer would get to that site. BDCC could help with this.

- Consider hosting small business pitch sessions focused on startups. Let people know that Vernon is open for business and find ways to attract folks that ultimately would make a potential incubator successful.
- Consider connecting with Strolling of the Heifers, which has been running a local food and farm business plan competition for the last several years.
- Consider a co-working space in the Town office or other available space for folks in Vernon who work at home, but need high speed internet to do their work. Consider a community survey to find out who these people are.
- Visit and talk with others who have done incubators like BDCC, Generator in Burlington, and The Lightening Jar in Bennington.
- Recommended steps specific to seeking funding through the Windham County Economic Development Program (VY) for any economic development projects:
 - Coordinate all economic development efforts with regional organizations.
 - Develop details of projects and get them included in the CEDS.
 - Identify and cultivate partnerships with local, regional, and state organizations that can help plan and implement projects.
 - Identify and apply for funding through multiple/complimentary resources.
 - Seek approval from WCEDP Advisory Council to include the type of project contemplated in the annual competitive grant RFP.
- The National Business Incubator Association (NBIA) is an excellent resource on the current state and success of incubators: www.nbia.org. There are many ways to structure an incubator, private, public, non-profit, for profit, university partner or not, NBIA is a great resource to start reading and learning.
- The Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development can be an Economic Development Resource. Commissioner of the Department of Economic Development Joan Goldstein can be contacted at 802-272-2399 or joan.goldstein@vermont.gov.
- The Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA) is the Vermont statewide economic development finance lender. www.veda.org
- The Vermont Small Business Development Center could be a resource for business development. Contact Linda Rossi at 802-728-9101 or lrossi@vtsbdc.org.
- The Vermont Community Development Program is a source for a planning grant to assist with the feasibility of establishing an incubator. Contact Cindy Blondin at 802-828-5219 or cindy.blondin@vermont.gov.
- The Windham County Economic Development Program (WCEDP) is a potential source of funding for planning and/or building a co-working or incubator space. The last two rounds of RFP's for Windham County Economic Development Program (WCEDP) funds have included a request for proposals for a co-working space in Windham County. The committee should review the reasons for declining the last proposal and correct to reapply. For support contact R.T Hamilton Brown (rbrown@brattleborodevelopment.com) or Fred Kenney at 802-777-8192 or fred.kenney@vermont.gov.

- USDA-Rural Development has small grants that could be helpful. Contact Business Programs Specialist Susan Poland at 802-828-6002 susan.poland@vt.usda.gov
- VEDA is a finance resource for an incubator if one is deemed feasible. VEDA has direct lending programs for businesses, so if an incubator was being established by a private developer, he/she could borrow from VEDA. But they also have a special program for local and regional development corporations. The Town may wish to start a local development corporation for this purpose. Contact VEDA at 802-828-5627.
- Access Co-working in Vermont: A Started Guide published by VCET and Local64. Find it here: <https://crowdfundingpr.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/coworking-in-vermont-a-starter-guide.pdf> or contact Lars Hasselblad Torres, Executive Director of Generator and Local64 at 802-595-0605 or director@generatorvt.com.
- Staff from the federal delegation, including Senator Patrick Leahy's office, are skilled in understanding a wide range of federal grant and loan opportunities for community development, conservation, energy, housing and social service projects. Consider contacting staff to discuss these initiatives and how they may be able to provide support.
 - Office of Senator Sanders: Jenny Nelson 802-748-9269 jenny_nelson@sanders.senate.gov.
 - Office of Senator Leahy: John Tracy 802-863-2525 john_tracy@leahy.senate.gov.
 - Office of Congressman Welch: George Twigg 802-652-2450 george.twigg@mail.house.gov.

✓ VPEDC Initiative: Improve Fiber Optic Networks

Improving fiber connection in Vernon could be a way to boost economic development in town and attract businesses that rely on high speed connections, as well as benefit residents. There are great high speed connections to the school and town offices that might be accessed. A Fiber Optic Subcommittee has been working towards accessing high speed fiber and is ready to take next steps to connect with providers and better gauge public interest and buy-in.

On August 29, 2016, VCRD facilitated a session with the VPEDC and invited guests to help strategize and brainstorm actions for moving the work forward. Resource team members attending included:

Chris Campany, Executive Director, Windham Regional Commission

Joan Goldstein, Commissioner, Vermont Department of Economic Development

R.T Hamilton Brown, WCEDP Project Manager, Brattleboro Development Credit Corp

Lars Hasselblad Torres, Executive Director, Generator

Jon-Michael Muise, Area Director, USDA Rural Development

Jim Porter, Director of Telecommunications and Connectivity, VT Dept. of Public Service

Chris Saunders, Field Representative, Office of Senator Patrick Leahy

Initiative Action Steps:

1. The Fiber Optic Subcommittee will send a request for information to the 4 broadband providers to identify intentions in accomplishing the state's goals of 100/100 symmetrical service.
2. Survey the community about their demand and interest in 1G services. Share economics/proposal with the community and survey residents to identify need/demand/interest.

3. Conduct a feasibility analysis on the goal of 1G coverage and what it would take to get there to develop a business case and the economics of the proposal.
4. Further explore the economic development case for fiber. Unpack the needs and benefits of fiber to the home and fiber to the business to answer whether fiber will bring the development wanted, if the investment should be made elsewhere, or if it is a combination of fiber and other strategies that will attract the businesses and residents to meet Vernon's development goals.
5. Explore wireless opportunities. Identify whether there are there interim steps of taking fiber already coming in and deploying it in a signal.
6. Regardless of whether a full scale network is developed, include high speed broadband in any incubation project.
7. Follow Burlington's progress as part of the "Ignite" marketing effort. It will be interesting to see how towns market availability of fiber and where that leads.
8. Following letter requesting info and survey completion, bring the goal/proposal to the Town for voting to move forward.
9. The Planning Commission will amend the town plan this fall to include a statement about a goal to increase high speed fiber in Vernon.

Initiative Resources:

1. Windham Regional Commission is willing to help convene and to help in any way identified by the Fiber Optic team. Contact Chris Campany at ccampany@windhamregional.org or 257-4547.
2. DPS can bring expertise and Jim Porter is available to answer questions and assist as the town takes next steps. Contact Jim at james.porter@vermont.gov or 828-4003.
3. There are grants out there to help with this work (CBDG Planning grants, USDA RD, EDA) but the case will have to be made to demonstrate need, which can be a challenge with existing coverage. However, the town does have funding to offer a match if the community decides to pursue, which is significant.

Visiting Resource Team Recommendations for the "VPEDC Initiative: Improve Fiber Optic Networks"

After Community Meeting Day, Resource Team members, representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, submitted their recommendations for other potential actions and resources the task force might consider as it moves forward. These recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community's unique assets and needs.

- Work with the Division for Connectivity at the Dept. of Public Service to identify possible funding sources and recommendations for next steps. The Department could also meet with the committee to share their map of local services.
- Jim Porter is the Director of Telecommunications and Connectivity at the Department of Public Service. He could be a key resource in developing an action plan and mapping current access. Contact him at james.porter@vermont.gov or 802-828-4003.
- It may be helpful to learn more about Putney's experience. The community there was successful in obtaining a business district for improving its internet service to serve the rural community, including those working from home.

✓ VPEDC Initiative: **Build a Utility Scale Energy Project**

Many Vernon residents recognize the benefits that Vermont Yankee brought to the town and the importance of the strong relationship between the plant and the town. The closure of VY will bring about many changes, one of them being a decline in the tax base of the town. Bringing in a utility scale energy project could be a way to build the tax base and re-adapt some of the energy infrastructure that VY brought to the community. Ideas for a large scale project include a major Vernon solar array, a gas fired power plant, and a wood pellet powered plant. The group could work to further develop this idea, explore possibilities and how projects could best fit for the community, and identify and invite a utility scale project to town.

On September 12, VCRD facilitated a session with the VPEDC and invited guests and experts to help develop actions for moving the work forward. Resource team members attending included:

Tom Berry, *Field Representative*, Office of Senator Patrick Leahy

Josh Castonguay, *Chief Innovation Executive*, Green Mountain Power

Kerrick Johnson, *VP External Affairs*, VELCO

Brian Otley, *SVP, Chief Operating Officer*, Green Mountain Power

Chris Recchia, *Commissioner*, VT Dept. of Public Service

Laura Sibilgia, *Director of Economic Development*, Brattleboro Development Credit Corp.

Paul Costello, *Executive Director*, Vermont Council on Rural Development

Jenna Koloski, *Community and Policy Manager*, Vermont Council on Rural Development

Initiative Action Steps:

1. VPEDC will continue to explore options for energy development including a Vernon microgrid, development of battery storage, models of combustion generation, solar, hydro, or an energy hub and research center. The group is interested in framing next steps of action to position Vernon as a leader and prototype of rural renewal and 21st century energy transformation.
2. Meet with Entergy to continue discussions around property and the potential for acquiring structures for town.
3. Work with the Department of Public Service to find out what the designation of the land will be once the fence comes back to determine whether it will have brownfield status.
4. Work with the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation to frame the end goal and develop a concrete and comprehensive plan for how much the tax base is built and how many jobs are created. This will help in connecting with key partners and applying for financial resources. The group will better develop the story and packaging of Vernon as a model for rural renewable and cutting edge energy development in the 21st century.
5. Draft a letter to Commissioner Recchia outlining interests in the future of the dam. Senator Leahy's office will be copied to keep them in the loop. Both will advocate with new owners.
6. Draft a CEDs project proposal for inclusion in the regional plan to create an energy innovation/research center around renewables with a "leading generation partner."
7. Acquire a map of the VY property to show where land might be available for energy/economic development. This will be shared with GMP who will evaluate solar potential and connect the community to potential developers.

8. The Fiber Optic Subcommittee will connect with VELCO to discuss the potential to use existing VELCO fiber for high speed connectivity in the energy center/incubator or more broadly as a foundation for service in the community.
9. Develop a comprehensive analysis/survey of energy use in Vernon. The group will look at GMP's survey model being used in Panton as well as the Energy Action Network community energy dashboard tool as potential models and could work in concert with broadband surveying.
10. Obtain state and federal planning grants to study available land at the Plant and investigate the possibility/impact of creating an industrial zone to attract manufacturing/business. Other funding may be needed for evaluating the feasibility of the energy research and business incubation center and other goals identified in the Community Visit process.
11. Identify and articulate overarching goals around energy development and how they would be implemented then find the best examples of similar developments to visit, tour, and learn how to implement them in Vernon. Examples may include other microgrid communities or energy innovation and research centers.

Initiative Resources:

1. VELCO can be a resource to discuss what might be feasible and can help connect to decision-makers/regulators, help leverage relationship with UVM to explore research facility possibilities, and work with the community to determine whether there are opportunities to plug in to the existing fiber network. Contact Kerrick Johnson at 770-6166 or kjohnson@velco.com.
2. DPS can be helpful and partner in looking at Entergy property and structures. It also has some planning grant resources and is ready to advocate to support Vernon projects. Contact Commissioner Chris Recchia at 828-4071 or chris.recchia@vermont.gov.
3. BDCC will work with the committee to better flesh out and clarify end goals around jobs and improving the tax base. Contact Laura Sibilia lsibilia@brattleborodevelopment.com or R.T Hamilton Brown at rbrown@brattleborodevelopment.com or call 257-7731.
4. EDA funding could come along as a resource if the project is connected to the CEDs plan. EDA is often interested in investing in planning around a vision and then in implementation.
5. VCRD is 100% behind Vernon as an advocate for anything the town wants to put forward. Contact Jenna Koloski at jenna@vtrural.org or 225-6091.
6. GMP can help to determine solar potential and scale on the VY property. Contact Josh Castonguay at castonguay@gmpvt.com or 655-8754.
7. State and federal planning dollars are available to clarify a plan and look at feasibility of the different options for action. BDCC and Senator Leahy's office can help in grant development. Contact R.T Hamilton Brown at BDCC or Tom Berry at Senator Leahy's office at Tom_Berry@leahy.senate.gov or 279-0569.
8. Windham Regional Commission is doing town by town energy planning. This could provide some baseline info for a Vernon energy analysis. Contact Chris Campany at ccampany@windhamregional.org or 257-4547.
9. Windham energy committee has a microgrid subcommittee.

Visiting Resource Team Recommendations for the “VPEDC Initiative: Build a Utility Scale Energy Project”

After Community Meeting Day, Resource Team members, representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, submitted their recommendations for other potential actions and resources the task force might consider as it moves forward. These recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community’s unique assets and needs.

- First learn what will be authorized to happen within what distance from the dry cask storage which will be on site for the next 60+ years. NRC may have strict regulations that restrict certain activities within a distance from those casks. That will inform what type of utility scale project could occur on that site or non-Entergy owned land neighboring the site.
- Contact the Department of Public Service to determine what they feel would be approved through the PSB. Contact Jon Copans at the Department of Public Service at jon.copans@vermont.gov or 802-828-3088.
- Determine what interest Entergy has in having such an activity on their site, if any. If they are interested, how much land would they sell or lease for such an activity?
- Ask Entergy’s support in approaching developers of these projects. Entergy is an energy company, they are well connected in the field and may be able to make introductions or provide leads.
- Look into how Vernon might get involved with the EDA-funded Green Development Cluster project led by BDCC and get involved with the EDA-funded Green Economic Innovation Hub: <http://brattleborodevelopment.com/greeneconomy/>.
- Renewable Energy Vermont could be a resource if there is interest in renewable energy development Contact Executive Director Olivia Campbell Andersen at olivia@revermont.org.
- The task force could coordinate development with VELCO and Green Mountain Power. A good contact at VELCO is Kerrick Johnson (kjohnson@velco.com or 802-770-6166) and at GMP, contact Brian Otley (brian.otley@greenmountainpower.com or 802-881-4679).
- The Vermont Energy Investment Corporation could be a resource and partner. VEIC is a national leader in energy efficiency and renewable energy innovation and expertise. Contact Scott Johnstone at sjohnstone@veic.org or 802-658-6060 ext.7649.
- Consider USDA grants, including the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), for smaller scale renewable projects.
- Look into Community Development Program funding for a utility scale energy project. Contact Cindy Blondin at cindy.blondin@vermont.gov or 802-828-5219.

VII. The Town Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held with over 100 Vernon residents and the VCRD Visiting Team on May 18 2016

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.

Community Events: Arts, Culture & Multi-Generational Activities

Visiting Team: Alex Aldrich, Ben Doyle, Michael Moser, Haley Pero, James Richmond (scribe), John Tracy, Joan Weir, Jenna Koloski (facilitator)

What are the Assets in this Area?

- We have a Vernon Village Tag Sale with 32 homes involved in the community-wide sale.
- We did an Artisans' Market and Studio tour with 10 artists displaying. It is coming up again in December
- We have an Artist in Residence program at the school with circus arts, book binding, painting, etc. The artist is connected for 6 weeks, and the program ends with an arts night showcase for Youth and teachers with examples of work on display at the school.
- The Library provides children's programs, computers for internet access, books for the community. They are also beginning to organize fundraisers like the upcoming plant swap.
- The Rec Department is very active as both a location for gathering and a resource to expand upon the arts.
- The History Museum is open from June through September. They offer courses and events on a variety of topics relating to Vernon and Vermont. The town bus used for historical tours.
- Seniors have activities. The town-owned bus is used to travel to activities locally, and also regionally/locally.
- A Memorial Day Program is held by the historical society.
- The Town Picnic is an asset, but it may not be held due to funding. This event is not a part of the selectboard budget and VY used to fund a fireworks display, but that is no longer available.
- The Library brought in wildlife professionals to offer programming.
- There is now an annual Fire Department Muster where a team of 4-5 firefighters from different towns compete in various event while in gear.
- Sporting events for kids are popular town events. There is strong support, both in Vernon and away.
- The Millers are having a 100-year anniversary celebration for their farm this year.
- In the past there has been a camp for kids.
- There are occasional concerts and recitals in churches. They are not well advertised or well attended.
- There is a desire to develop trails and river use.
- River access is "almost non-existent."
- We have a large pool with diving boards.
- We have Tennis courts.
- The Pavilion is an asset. There is a charcoal grill, playground, and trails.
- We have a T-ball field, baseball/softball field.
- Town forest.
- There are Aerobics programs and swim lessons.
- We have a Lifeguard training program.
- The state-owned Hatchery pond is an asset.
- There is a small Theater space at the school.
- We have an Unofficial town website where info is shared.
- Vernon has a tree lighting in December.

What are the Challenges?

- There is too much division among "siloed" groups in town.
- There are groups that are active but are not crossing paths (youth, library, school, seniors, and others)
- Some siloed groups do not get along.
- We have an "Unofficial" town website due to town rule dealing with the posting of meeting minutes.
- There are communication issues. It is hard to communicate events and what's going on in town.
- Flyers have been seen as "divisive" so they are often ignored.
- We have had no town center since the 50s.
- Vernon doesn't have a physical heart center.
- The town is long and thin. There is no east-west communication – from one end of town to the other.
- Not many know of Front Porch Forum.
- We are surrounded by towns with "vibrant" arts communities, so it has been hard to establish an arts identity of niche in Vernon. There is a lack of energy to do so.
- We are a tired and "brow-beaten" community.

- There is a stigma against VY and the Vernon community due to VY. When residents go to events or conferences outside of Vernon this stigma is noticeable.
- We have forgotten how to “do for ourselves” due to our reliance on VY. We even outsourced the community dinner for this event. We should have rallied together to put on the dinner as a community.
- The community Identity doesn’t appear unified.
- There is no place for teens to hang out.
- School choice disperses the towns youth to other schools, and doesn’t create a solid community for them in Vernon. We pay to educate our students through 6th grade and then we pay to send them away.
- VY became the town’s identity, and now it is gone.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- We could build a community garden space and tie it in with a farmers’ market.
- We should display public art done by students and other residents. Art could be displayed at the town office and library.
- We should organize a Fall Harvest Festival and invite neighboring towns to join in. Make it free. Make it Vernon’s signature event.
- We should host Contra dances.
- “Invite the arts” into our town.
- Bring in other cultures.
- Host bands, concerts in gazebo.
- We need to work together to bridge the silos.
- Communicate the idea that things are going that are for the benefit of all the people.
- Ask what other silos are interested in.
- We should conduct personal outreach to find out what is wanted, and also to invite residents out to events.
- Increase transparency, involve all in the decision making.
- We could conduct a survey to determine what events are wanted and what will be well-attended.
- We should create a neighborhood ambassador program where individuals would be designated to be the spokesperson and ambassador for certain parts of town, to make personal invitations and organize events.
- A town brochure is in progress.
- We should shake-up the “normal” ways of doing things; Give ourselves permission to be open minded and allow for new ideas that are different from the way things have been done.
- We should work together to engage more people and prevent burnout.
- Entice new participants.
- Be welcome to outsiders and their ideas.
- We could develop an Art in Action program to have artists doing their work in public spaces – either in the school or the town office. This would show kids that there is more beyond the classroom and show the community that there is more beyond themselves.
- Everyone could donate money to reopen the store.
- We could host food and drink carts in town.
- There is a movement nationally around Tiny houses. Let’s be the first town to have a Tiny market!
- We could have an Ice cream cart.
- The Governor Hunt house is a space that could have potential for community use and development. It could be used as a potential incubator as well as a potential community center.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- The town of Vernon could make a “virtual” town center out of what is already here to bring people together.
- It could be doable to build a store that isn’t open every day, but may be open part-time.
- Pop-up events in the village could be a positive way to bring people together.
- It feels like it’s time to flip the switch on the town narrative and to start to tell a new story of Vernon.
- It is really critical to involve young people. Not just plan programming for them, but with them – involve them from the ground up. You could have students become involved in community surveys, arts events, or other projects.
- Give yourself permission to be patient. Building self-confidence and building community can happen, and the town is up to the challenge, but it is a long process and won’t happen overnight.
- Neighborhood ambassadors can be a mixture of the silos – can be pulled from all parts of the community.
- It sounds like there are several big annual events. What about holding them more often to build community? What about trying monthly dinners to bring folks together more often?
- “You don’t need fireworks” to have a community. Maybe it’s time to think about what is doable with the resources available, and how the town can adjust to the changes.
- Think of out-of-the-box ways to really flip the narrative. In Cambridge, residents are painting murals on barn silos. What about painting the towers on the VY plant?

Village Center & Gathering Place

Visiting Team: Roger Allbee, Greg Brown, Chris Company, Paul Costello (facilitator), Chelsea Gazillo (scribe), Andrew Graham, Adam Grinold, Fred Kenney, Ryan McLaren, Pat Moulton, Buzz Schmidt, Fred Schmidt

What are the Assets in this Area?

- We see this area we are in as village center, between here and the school is where day to day stuff goes on. This is where we are concentrated all the time.
- Route 142 is the main thoroughfare in the town.
- One of the things I would like to see incorporated is the Governor Hunt House. Governor Hunt House is an historic structure that could be used for a gathering place or business incubator. It is near entrance of Vermont Yankee and belongs to Entergy but could become available.
- Just to the north of here, is a one room original school house that is just used for storage or activities. This could be part of our past and part of our future.
- We have high speed internet that comes into the municipal building as well as into the school. It comes downtown and it stops here. It could be extended if there were more village here.
- There is a committee working on seeing if fiber can go to the rest of town.
- The town pool is an amazing facility with a great park. The town pool is right across the road from an 1860 chapel in which evangelist Dwight Moody spoke here.
- We have level land outside of a floodplain.
- The Post office is down near George's Mill.
- There is a senior housing complex down near the swimming pool.
- We have a cemetery committee; we have a lot of cemeteries. We have done a great job keeping them up.
- Last year, we had one group that put on a community potluck dinner at the firehouse. Many of the same people came, but a few new people I had not seen in a while.
- You are not going to compete for that metro experience. What does it mean to have a village center in this community?
- Everyone has some important points. I think of Guilford, when they redid the Guilford general store. It's on route 5 which is important, but it made it more of a village of the location.
- Friends of Algiers Village really led there. They brought housing. They have way more challenges in terms of the special relationship and physical location. We have the beginning of a good skeleton here; it is like adding flesh to bone. We are right on a river but are well above it. We are super close to Brattleboro. Putney benefits from proximity to Brattleboro. Vernon could offer a similar experience, but we don't have an organization to lead.
- The town historical society is an asset. They are at the old schoolhouse in south Vernon. That is a significant historical location, it houses a lot of town memorabilia.
- There is a considerable amount of cash in the bank. Not a lot of towns have it. It is earmarked for many things, but this could be changed. Also there is no debt.
- There is no zoning in Vernon. Currently our town plan has a lot of flexibility. Within line of site, we have an organic dairy farm, nuclear power point, a village pub, residential area, a school, EOS town emergency operation center.
- Nesbit's Portside Tavern, the pub in town, is an asset.
- There used to be a store, but they shut down and are now selling gas.
- For young people, the school has always been a gathering place. We used to know everyone in town. Regularly we had events we were involved in. Once your kids are out of school there is a void. There are recreational opportunities. Some of us stay connected, so that is nice we have that contact.
- People often convene in the library or in the town office.
- There is a gathering space in the lobby of the town office, but people don't seem to use it for anything.
- You can grab a cup of coffee in the library and sit outside and talk. This is a nice gathering place, but it doesn't have any windows.
- We have a Town picnic committee to organize an annual town picnic event.
- Historians do a great job with the Memorial day celebration, plant sales, and goodies for elections.
- There is a woodworking place. Vermont Work Studios, Vermont Working Lands grant recipient. They do online sales and pull people into the showroom here.

What are the Challenges?

- It is a challenge to get a community to buy in to one place. There is no consensus on where people want to gather.
- You can't get out of your car and walk to each place. You have to drive.
- Everyone has such a busy schedule. We need leadership to keep things organized.
- One of the biggest drawbacks we have seen is the lack of water and the lack of septic in new development.
- When you think about a village center, you think of all in one place. All of those things are kind of helter skelter around town.
- To get to Vernon you go through the least attractive part of Brattleboro. Once you get past Marlboro College, it is not pretty. 142.
- There is not a purpose to draw you in. There is nothing going on that draws everyone in to Vernon.
- There is no coffee shop, no cafe, no farmers market, no place to get ice cream.

- Many years ago when post office left grange, there was a possibility of it going across the street where families go to drop off or pick up kids. We used to have the Whistle Stop or the grange. I don't know what the rental needs would be, but maybe there could be another grocery store.
- We don't have a central location that has a variety of services that is able to bring people together for a purpose. It would be nice to have a place that is comfortable to chat with friends, have a meeting, have coffee.
- There was a little hot dog cart which was a gathering spot for mostly men. They had coffee.
- Vernon is a long town. It has a north, a south and a middle. People will come out and generally turn left. My dad had a small store and you end up paying more. People went by Whistle Stop to and from work. The store on the other side of town was out of the way. Many people are acclimated to Brattleboro. The grocery business is a hard business to be in.
- We are on CT River Byway. A lot of people from MA will eventually use it. We do not have anything here for people to stop and see.
- There is no boat house now that is kept up, where you can access the river and rent a boat.
- Fort Sartwell is a fort in the middle of the pond. If we had it organized right, that would get people to stop. There is also Fort Bridgman.
- The grocery store has been sitting empty for over 2 years. The owner is asking so much money for it, no one will buy it.
- Our agriculture is quite narrowly focused so there is limited local produce available. There is a farm stand on the south side of town. There is one on the honor system, but he often sells out. There is just bulk milk production. No one is doing value added milk or diversified agricultural development, but we have some of the best soils in VT.
- My son is starting to developing cattle for beef. We need a place to sell and will be leaving the area to do it.
- There is a lack of communication. Even if you develop something, you need to get it out there. You do not hear about what's going on.
- We have a Newspaper. Nobody knows about it.
- In other towns, historical buildings become the center of town and tie it together. I am sure there are historical buildings I am not aware of. An important part of developing or maintaining a village center would be preserving or maintaining the buildings that do exist. There used to be 3 hotels in Vernon. It looked a lot different a while back. I think in recent years there has been a trend to ignore that value of historical buildings.
- People pay for saturated mailing for our houses to get the word out about local happenings.
- When our children were in the school, we got a lot of information. When you have children you get information, but when you don't you're more disconnected.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- We have people that are leaving VY for one reason or another, let's set up an incubator that will help them start new creative enterprises. It was a disappointment to the town that we did not succeed in accessing funding for that project last year from the VY fund managed at the Agency of Commerce.
- A fiber optic network for the town makes an incubator or shared working space plausible.
- There is internet coming into the town office. Why can't we set up a cubicle for people to stop and set up a business here in this building?
- We should do a market analysis to determine the feasibility of a grocery store business.
- We could develop a community store. It would be better if a private investor did it, but communities can do it.
- We could have a design competition. We could designate a certain amount of land here near the green and publicize that we are looking to develop a village. This would give us a master plan. Then, we can find developers to invest. I would love to live in a village culture.
- There is a designation for Village Centers, Designated downtown, new town centers. We have planning funds that can make these things happen.
- I don't think the town should be a landlord. BDCC could buy half of an incubator space and this could allow entrepreneurs to get off the ground.
- We could use a Community Supported Enterprise model (CSE) to purchase an incubator space or grocery business.
- I travel and go to farms that are CSAs. Last year I paid \$600 to be part of a farm in Massachusetts. We do not have one here. There is one in Newfane. Could we develop a CSA farm in Vernon?
- There is an idea to sponsor a CSA as a buy in club.
- One time there was a talk of a boat launch. We have a beach that is below the dam. It is an access that people use now. This would make a great place for Kayak Rentals. It needs work. We could work to develop that space
- Windhall had to move their town hall. They bought a \$750,000 house and added onto it. The town hall was created into a community center. Arts, yoga for families. This is privately run and lease free. There is no burden in that way. This has become an epicenter for the community in a community that had none. Maybe Vernon could develop a community center.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- After hearing the conversation, it seems that you already have a community center and now you need to build around it. Most towns in VT have a store or a church or a grange. You already have it; you just need to build it out.
- You are going through a town planning process. Use your planning commission. You really can with gathering places, it could be a farmer's market or food trucks. Think about low hanging fruit where you can start bringing people together.
- The one thing that struck me, Vernon is much like the rest of VT. Coordination and communication is a huge issue. There is no vehicle for leadership to coordinate the activity or communicate what is going on.
- This is a solution looking for a problem. Think creatively to bring in economic activity.
- I like the idea of developing a plan of what you want your downtown area to look like. What is the availability of that? I think the incubator idea should not be dead. You already have a nucleus of businesses; how do you expand that? A market assessment could help. There is a lot of leg work, the regional commission or the planning office could do that type of work.
- I am thinking about my experience in small villages. The central piece of that village was the general store, that is a symptom, but not an anchor. You could build out your community center around your values here. There is a lot of agriculture here. There may be a lot more than you realize. This might be a good thing to build around.
- Build identity by creating a central village. I like the idea of a design competition. You could also have a village green between the town offices and school. This could be part of this design. Connecting into the CT River Byway.
- This town office and green seems to already be the center. You can incorporate some of those ideas as part of the village green. I think this could be a successful approach.
- Vernon is on the CT River Byway. What captures people when they are coming through a town? What will make you stop? Maybe a Thrift store? What would get people to stop here.
- If you are going to have a village center, you are going to have new people. Is that something you want to have? This is one of the conversations you are going to have. Is this something you want to do? Don't forget about using your planning commission.
- Your regional planners could be a critical resource. You have an impressive asset list. You are in the press. You have a lot of smart people here who are drawn by the plant. You have strong churches, you have great infrastructure, money in the bank, ton of good ideas. A town can build a list of problems and can be paralyzed by it...you want to go from problem to answer to next steps. Think about downtown development to long term and then what steps need to happen now for particular parts of that development.
- We are working with St. Johnsbury. It is a big town with lots of challenges. They have a postindustrial riverside with lots of landowners. They are working with support from non-profits, business, and state and federal grants to think about how to improve access and turn it around. Vernon's riverside is an amazing asset and opportunity.

Recreation, Trails & The River

Visiting Team: Alex Aldrich, Ben Doyle, Michael Moser, Haley Pero, James Richmond (scribe), John Tracy, Joan Weir, Jenna Koloski (facilitator)

What are the Assets in this Area?

- The town forest and trails are an asset.
- The Town pool and picnic area.
- The river.
- We have two tennis courts with lights.
- There are two baseball fields with great & safe parking.
- There is ample space for soccer fields.
- Vernon has a Trout hatchery.
- Lily pond.
- There is an extensive network of VAST trails for snowmobiles.
- In my backyard, there is a nice Vernal pool w/ ducks and frogs. We have a lot of wonderful wildlife and habitat here.
- We have three large dairy farms.
- The Elementary School has an incredible gym.
- We have many logging trails that people use to hike and bike on.
- There are trail networks "crisscrossing everywhere."
- Most of the land in Vernon is open for recreation, and there is not much posted land.
- The Town library.
- We have the Vernon Dam with an area below that was used for swimming, kayaking, and other activities. The land is now for sale.
- There are many road-biking opportunities.
- The people and the sense of community is an asset.
- There is some opportunity for walking in Vernon off of the main road.
- We have an experienced and committed recreation staff.
- There is a boat ramp in Northfield MA that Vernon residents can use that makes southern part of the river more accessible.
- We have an Historical museum that offers workshops and programming.
- There are 30-35 year-round sports and programs through the rec department for a variety of age groups.
- The churches offer programming and events such as local concerns.
- There is a local exercise group on Friday morning.

What are the Challenges?

- The river access is degraded.
- The boat launch is blocked off because it was in bad shape and because it was being used as a dump. There is parking but the access has been blocked.
- There are strong and unpredictable currents caused by the dam which can be very dangerous for boaters. There is no announcements or warnings for releases.
- A long time ago, a trail study was done to identify hiking and walking trail opportunities along the river. The plan was abandoned amid safety concerns and due to challenges of acquiring private property for public use.
- There is a lack of bike lanes or consistent shoulder for biker safety.
- Route 142 is busy with car and truck traffic making it dangerous to walk or bike which can lead to alienation from community resources due to safety concerns.
- The Town forest trail markings need updating. It is not well mapped and difficult to know where to hike.
- Hunting is allowed in the town forest which causes a safety concern for some.
- The Town Forest is not easy to access.
- There is no clarity around different types of use in the town forest (ie snowmobiles, snowshoeing, walking, hunting, etc).
- The trails behind the rec department aren't managed by rec staff and are not marked.
- There is no active Scout troop.
- Community events like this don't happen often enough so there haven't been an opportunity to have a discussion about the use of the town forest or the development of trails.
- Residents are not adequately informed about resources available in the town for recreation. There is no central place to find information.
- Snowmobile trail is allowed to exist due to the generosity of many landowners. The Snowmobile club maintains certain parts in the winter, but there is not much summer use due to bad examples set by ATV users in the past.
- There is nowhere to stay for people that visit Vernon.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Meet with Southern Vermont Trailriders Club to discuss ways to improve summer use of the VAST trail networks.
- Build bike paths to bypass Rt. 142.
- Get in contact with the group working on the Shell Bridge project to build connection to Vernon.
- Build a park on the river with trails up and down the river.
- Identify Vernon "Rangers" who can educate about paths and trails as well as flora and fauna.
- Improve safety for bikers and walkers.
- Contact the concrete company about land that they own to purchase and improve boat launch and potential nature preserve/park (the area used to be used for birding and research).
- Create a Vernon Town Forest committee.
- Create a Vernon Conservation Commission.
- Meet with Brattleboro to identify ways to connect to their trails and biking efforts.
- Develop an adopt the trail program for residents to maintain parts of the town forest or other trails.
- Develop citizen science programs to engage residents in conservation such as amphibian counts, bird census, invasive species identification, or other projects.
- Create a citizen group to update and maintain trail maps.
- Create new trail maps.
- Facilitate a community conversation regarding how forest can be better signed and better maintained.
- Come up with marketing piece that sells Vernon recreation. Tell a story that showcases Vernon's assets
- Host a community movie night for Vernon families.
- Hold more community events such as a community bonfire or a "float-in" at the pool.
- Reach outside of Vernon to learn how to confront problems. Learn what other towns have done around the state to improve their trail networks and trail access.
- Hold a regular community potluck.
- Gather recreation groups who use the trails in order to best synthesize solutions. Bring together the ATV riders, the snowmobile folks, the bikers, and others.
- The Town forest can be linked with other parks (Satan's Kingdom & MA State Forest). There is a lot of land to connect in Vernon.
- Get together riverfront landowners to discuss improving public access.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- There is a lot of enthusiasm amidst a lot of unknowns. It sounds like a great place to start is to learn more – about the river, about the available trails, about public use, and then move forward from there.
- It sounds like there is a desire to serve residents as well as visitors. Are there any rental services? Maybe an opportunity for kayak or bike rental would be a draw.
- Boat access and improving a public space along the river is an area that definitely could lead to more opportunities. It is a very visual and concrete success.
- Trails are an opportunity to engage students in their community with what they are learning at school. It allows for them to be taught about the trails, and gets them involved in their community.

- Involvement and engagement is one way to increase public investment on the land.
- Look toward other examples in Vermont. There are many examples, like in Burke for example or Barre, where trails have led to a renaissance for the community.
- Airbnb could be a solution to issue of rentals. There may be ways to think outside of the box.
- There are resources, such as Trail Finder, that can be helpful to a community looking to map resources and get involved with trail development.
- The Rec Dept is clearly seen as a point of pride. They could really act as the hub for the development of these activities.
- A Farmer's market with live music that goes from the day into the night could be a great opportunity for community gathering and engagement. Perhaps it would end on the bonfire.
- There are many opportunities here to engage residents. Perhaps you could circulate signups to help clean the boat launch or get people on the trails.

Economic Development

Visiting Team: Roger Allbee, Greg Brown, Chris Company, Paul Costello (facilitator), Chelsea Gazillo (scribe), Andrew Graham, Adam Grinold, Fred Kenney, Ryan McLaren, Pat Moulton, Buzz Schmidt, Fred Schmidt

What are the Assets in this Area?

- We have great farm land.
- We have beautiful soil.
- Vernon is a town of people who will just not give up and will help their neighbors.
- We have a diversity of types of business that are here including VY, hydropower stations, home offices.
- Vernon is more accommodating and welcoming than many other communities.
- We had a good relationship with Vermont Yankee, even though many were opposed initially.
- A Hydro plant would destroy the salmon fishery, but it was already destroyed by the dam in Turners Falls.
- We are a town willing to work with and welcome potential new businesses.
- We have the railroad, good roads, and abundant electricity. We have an airport 20 minutes away that will accommodate small jets. We have infrastructure for both small business and residential.
- We are close to Connecticut River. One of the reasons we moved to Vernon was because I was attracted to the scenic and recreational benefits.
- We don't have zoning, which is an asset for flexibility.
- We have an energy hub. We can generate power and connect it to the grid.
- We have the river, rail, switching station. All of this can be used to create a larger energy hub.
- More land will become available as the fence shrinks around Vermont Yankee. There is a schedule for this, and it may happen in the next few years.
- We have abundant clean air; we don't have manufacturing that is turning out pollution. We had a nuclear power plant that did not pollute.
- In the context of being a rural area, we have easy access both up and down 91 to a lot of population and markets.
- We have a nice swimming pool and town recreational area.
- We have the largest and most successful timber company in the state and the largest lumber drying kiln east of the Mississippi.
- We have a highly skilled work force with access to at least 4 colleges in the area. Marlboro College, Keene State College, Southern Vermont College, and Antioch University.
- There are small businesses tucked away. All of the businesses are listed on the unofficial Vernon website.
- Some folks move up from Boston or New York and can work at a distance. The reason they come here is because it is VT. There is a VT brand that is attractive.
- We have high speed internet and excellent cell coverage. There is fiber optic to town office and to the school. There is an opportunity in this.
- I think we have a lot of really nice houses that are waiting to be sold.
- The housing stock is nice because average pay at VY was \$108,000 a year.
- There is a building on VY property. We were looking to start an incubator to start a small business office building. VY offered to leave it to the town, it has high speed fiber optic. We applied for a grant for 200,000 to start this with VY. They had a year retention bonus to get a business going. The building is still really nice and I am sure they would not just give it to anyone.
- The region is covered by a regional economic development strategy and we have money in bank that could be matched. There is no debt. Vernon has \$4 million in the bank.
- Because of the way power moves through here, we are an energy generator and not an energy consumer—but it could work both ways if we had a major manufacturer.
- We could attract a major manufacturer. There may be spaces open at the George's Mills complex. I know that VT Woodworking does rent some of the floor there.
- Whistle Stop store was turned into apartments.
- George's Mill is near the post office.
- We have lot of relatively level land.
- Vernon Green is an asset.
- We have a beautiful school.
- The school is also a fitness asset as we run all our rec programs here and they are terrific.
- There is room to grow.

What are the Challenges?

- We have a declining tax base.
 - This is a very small town. It is a challenge to make it a place people want to live and to stay.
 - Higher property taxes on a sliding scale.
 - This is not only affecting municipal taxes, this is affecting our school taxes.
 - Now that VT Yankee is closing, taxes are going to continue to increase in the next few years.
 - Currently, the political will does not exist to cut spending. 40 years ago, before VY this was an agricultural community. People helped each other out. This is a challenge. We have no other alternative, our opportunities are gone. We have to reinvent ourselves and hopefully that will be part of our discussion.
 - Before VY was here, Vernon struggled. Now we have had the privilege from benefiting for VY, we have built up such an infrastructure, it is scary to think about how we are going to sustain this. Younger people expect to maintain the same type of work we have become accustomed to, but that is hard.
 - We have a great police department, road crews, rec department etc. This is scary to think of how small property owners will sustain this by ourselves.
 - You have to have a good school if we want people to move here. We don't want the school or services to go decline.
 - ACT 46 is a challenge. All the money we have set aside to maintain a high quality school will be gone. Eventually a district merger will happen. The legislation does not have an
- out. Our school is going to be out of our control. School choice used to be a reason to draw people and we could lose it.
- This school is used for the community by the recreation department for programs for all people.
 - We do not have town water and sewer. For building new single family houses. The VY plant has a water system but not for community use.
 - The best site we had for an industrial park was already established in Vermont Yankee. We have tried to get google in here. We need to have a lot a lot of cheap energy. Also NE is concerned with the lack of power that is on that grid.
 - Good flat developable land is agricultural land. While there may not be zoning, there is Act 250.
 - The elephant in the room is the heroin problem.
 - Things are really tight in the dairy economy. Prices are down, environmental regulations are up, and cost has gone up. This is some of the best soil in the whole state and some of the most productive on the east coast.
 - Vernon has the largest production of hard woods. We have White Pines like you would not believe.
 - The vast majority of farm land is dairy; that is not a good thing. We need to diversify. Vernon's farm land has not always been for dairy farms.
 - Land is being operated by dairy farms, which helps with the soil productivity, but we haven't developed the entrepreneurship of the Ag Renaissance happening elsewhere.
 - One challenge, we have not discussed is access to the highway. Through Mass, the access is very good

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Because of where we are, we still do have economic abilities that maybe some other towns do not have.
 - We could put off some present day for future day gains and offer a tax incentive. Lower taxes for the first few years for new businesses, and then build them up.
 - We should focus on taking fiber optics to the next level. While it is true we are well served with access better than other places, the commercial companies are not going to serve to bring us up to one gigabyte. From everything we can see that would be a small spur, it would be doable through a private public group. For 2 million dollars we could wire the town and be leaders.
 - The Regional CEDS (economic strategic plan) includes a regional strategy that is to develop a cluster of business around green building technology. There are some interesting green business. Vernon should look at how it can connect.
 - We should act regionally.
 - A lot of the economic development here already does and could revolve around the woodland asset we have.
 - We could plug in with the multi-state Green Economy Innovation hub which involves Franklin County, Windham County, Cheshire County and Bennington County.
- We are looking toward some energy related asset and have not given up on the idea of a gas-fired electric generation facility.
 - There are issues with sighting something like a wood pellet producer. It is a huge investment in equipment to invest in the resources.
 - In Maine they are actually closing the pellet plants and liquidating. There may be another part of that discussion. Wet chip and dry chip, chips for other types of other applications.
 - There is progress in pellet manufacturing in VT. There is a model that is not about shipping your biomass to China or Asia, it's about keeping it here.
 - There could be a rural economic development grant collaboration.
 - I don't know if any of the dairy farmers are looking to diversify. What we do is all we can do. We are not trying to add any additional enterprise. We don't make maple syrup in late winter even though people ask, we concentrate on one thing.
 - Vermont Yankee was a nice neat package.
 - I would assume that people come up to see the VT Wood Studio. Where do they go after they go up to the beautiful show room?

- Wood Studio: We get people from all over the place. People are looking for something. We did not want the tire kicking foot traffic of a down town location. We are toying around with all types of ideas. We cannot get away from our core business.
- We could have a satellite Vermont tourist office. We can send them all over the state. I think there is an opportunity to link co-innovator and incubator opportunities.
- I don't like having the eggs all in one basket. You have one thing, draw more. Something that comes and maybe it will draw something else, we should keep it vibrant.
- The store was vibrant because of Vermont Yankee. We have to pay more for the food, I am not going to go there to buy my groceries. It is very difficult to survive, unless they do not have a lot of overhead.
- What about using our high quality of soil to grow corn for an ethanol plant?
- We need a vision of what we want. Maybe we are just a nice place to live and we develop housing and get people to live here. What is the value of being a bedroom community for people to live?
- We can't draw people here if they cannot find jobs. People can't come here if they don't have work.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- The proximity to the river is an asset. Before VY it was the soils and natural assets that attracted farms and small businesses.
- Vernon should be intentional about trying to leverage assets. School choice and the amount of housing are great parts of the opportunity story. This about workforce housing and people coming here.
- Has a food hub been examined? Strolling of the Heifers is developing a food business "Hatchery" in Brattleboro.
- Are you looking for small businesses to come and build from the grass roots or are you looking for a replacement for Vermont Yankee? It is important to answer this as a community.
- If you are interested in an incubator, you could start with a few spaces to see if there is a demand. You could think about starting events to get people together like farmers' markets. Think about non-traditional incubators.
- Waiting for the silver bullet is going to take a while, monopolize on the next best thing. Marketing the community as a great place to live makes a lot of sense. A majority of your folks commute out of town to go to work anyways. Don't take no from the state about incubator funding as a final answer.
- Solar development sounds like a promising idea. I also want to echo the idea of the brewery and waterfront development.
- There is a strong natural resource base, we are at the confluence of corridors here. The river is a natural resource.
- The town's economic resources stand out in my mind.
- Vernon is a great place to live, with or without Vermont Yankee. I think you have already identified that assets you have moving forward.
- Great opportunities that take advantage of your assets. Composting could be one area to explore.
- Connecting with the Green Economy Innovation Hub is a great idea. There is a grid scale energy storage opportunity here.
- It might be good to conduct a market analysis of what the future market would have. This site meets those needs. In addition to that one aspect- there are additional business opportunities for the region have been identified. A lot of these Innovation Hub opportunities have been identified.
- The people I am friends with come here, eat our food because it is grown down the street, drink amazing beer. The Vermont brand. That draws people here, if you can do it well

Youth

Visiting Team: Alex Aldrich, Ben Doyle (facilitator), Michael Moser, Haley Pero, James Richmond, John Tracy, Joan Weir, Jenna Koloski (scribe)

What are the Assets in this Area

- We have a great school and teachers, especially for a town of this size. The school facility is very nice and people always comment on how great it is.
- We have a fantastic Vernon Recreation Department.
- We have a community that is very supportive. If any organization or program needs leaders, we find them. People step forward and that's why we have such successful programs for young people. We have a culture of people stepping up.
- We have a Girls on the Run program and 25 girls participate.
- The Parent teacher community spirit club is active and organizes great community and school events.
- The Vernon pool is an asset.
- The pool and rec department are great first job opportunities. The majority of the staff are from Vernon. Great for developing job skills.
- There is a Snack bar at the pool.
- There is a youth program through the church on Sunday evenings.
- There are Girls scouts but no cub scouts and no boy scouts for a few years now.
- 4-H activities.
- Horseback Riding schools.
- We have a lot of new students due to cheap houses and a nice community. Many young families have moved here in the last few years. They are drawn to the good school and the rec department.

What are the Challenges?

- After you leave 6th grade, there is nothing in Vernon for youth.
- Summer camp is available up until 6th grade, but after they are out of that, there's no summer camp. If parents leave to work, there isn't a solution for where kids can go.
- There is no transportation to the pool if they don't have a parent to bring them. If it's bad weather, the pool isn't the solution.
- If you can't drive, it is really hard to get someone to come get you in Vernon.
- Once kids get out of 6th grade, they disperse to different schools, and some even go to MA.
- Friends of Vernon youth live far away. Putney is 45 minutes away, but attend BUHS.
- There are not many job opportunities for kids other than the recreation department and the pool. The nursing home is one option, but it doesn't hire youth people often.
- There are no businesses in Vernon for internships.
- There used to be many internships at Vermont Yankee, but they stopped doing that.
- Even if a student can get a job, transportation is a challenge.
- There isn't really a hangout space besides the pool. Teenagers don't want structured activities; they just want to hang out. And they want to eat and they can't go to the local bar that serves food in town.
- Younger teens (13-15) are still coming to open gym and still involved in department activities. Once they're driving, if they're not working, they go to a friend's house or the mall – they leave Vernon.
- The challenge with high school programming is that you have to "convince the cool kids" that it's cool to do. The afterschool program at the school is great, but athletes can't do it and it becomes "uncool." We don't know what's cool.
- As a parent, it would be nice to have the relief that somehow they're being supervised, even in an unstructured environment.
- Substance abuse is a challenge. It may be not as prevalent as other places, but it certainly exists in our town.
- There are few opportunities in Vernon for youth activities outside of recreation and sports. There are really no theater or arts activities.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Vernon could hold concerts on the common and have student musicians play for the community and/or display art. We should find ways to celebrate the achievements of young people.
- 6th graders could cook or serve community dinners. There is a cooking class.
- The elementary schools are "taken care of." We need to think about how we can support the older grades.
- It was so hard to engage youth in this conversation. Teachers aren't from this town so we're reaching out to teachers who don't live here and they don't know the Vernon kids. That's one of the big challenges to having kids lead something – how do we find them?
- Students aren't going to go where there is supervision.
- We should do a class reunion to bring people together that were in the elementary school together and now never see each other. It could be a pool party. There is a teen night now where they keep the pool open later and have a raised bonfire and music. It is well attended.
- We should use one of the vacant spaces in town for a youth center that is heated, year round, supervised but not really structured with volunteer staff or youth staff. It could be open two or three nights a week.
- We should talk with the boys and girls club in Brattleboro as a lot of kids go there (although a couple of participants expressed that it can be "scary" to go there alone).
- Get the town bus to do a daily town route. It could go beyond what Pioneer bus does now. A group of residents could pull a schedule together to pick up kids on the way to pool.
- It would be awesome if there was a place to go in Vernon to look for community volunteer opportunities. The BUHS students need a certain amount of community service to graduate. It would be great to have a way for kids to know who needs help when and where.
- Seniors in the high school could be in charge of managing the youth space to provide job skills and ownership.
- We could implement an "artist on display" program at the school.
- Could there be a young adult night at the Portside tavern, or could he be an ally in organizing an event?
- We need to get Vernon kids together to actually talk about what to do. We can't skip that step in the middle.
- Connect those students before they disperse. Guidance Counselor at the school – led by a teacher to organize events to bring cohorts together or a party at the school
- Churches are great resources for youth space and often have a kitchen, basement space, piano, etc. Kids may want to break away from parents but they may enjoy a church group setting.
- One church in town has a large screen tv, games, and a pool table. Youth space is available.
- If there's food they'll show up!
- Town meeting doesn't feel like community. This feels like community. We should make it more like this.
- We could bring younger people running for office in VT to Vernon to meet with students and talk about their role. We need to develop opportunities for kids to learn leadership and ownership in their community.
- The library could be open after hours for programming.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- The difference between programming and place making is important. A teen center could provide many things – leadership, internships, career skills, something to do, a place for people to craft or to sing.
- Why aren't young people sitting in on our community leadership discussions and getting engaged in community development? How do we engage them and harness that energy? Getting kids to show up to something in the community is important, and challenging. Creating a clearinghouse of opportunities where kids can plug in is a great idea. Self-selection is important.
- VYCC could be a great resource for engaging kids in the community and recreation.
- Differentiate between supervision and a safe place.
- In Richmond, 6 years ago we revamped bridge street with a brewery, restaurants, and a park. One thing that has always been there is the farmers market. Friends hung out there. We have a half shell, like the gazebo – that's the first place we performed as kids. The green in Vernon could have potential as a space for youth.
- There really is a tremendous amount of resources in Brattleboro, and it's not that far away. Maybe there could be a shuttle service to take advantage of those resources. Getting involved in the renaissance of the Flat St. neighborhood could be good - the reputation is improving. Reaching out and capitalizing on the resources nearby could be something to consider.
- Make sure that youth are leading these conversations. It is hard to speak for the youth. Try and engage leadership among youth.
- Transportation is a great idea. There could be several stops along a bus route and maybe a connector to get to Brattleboro.
- Youth have to be here. Try free food to get youth involved. If there is some opportunity for young people to run a snack bar or carts it could be a great way to involve them.
- I am happy to hear about the leveraging of the housing stock for new families. Don't forget that parents need to invest in this place for you. Parents also need to have fun. If you want people to end up there you need to have fun too. BDCC can be a resource.
- What about the development of a Rec-tech center? A place for technologically or arts oriented people or athletes who don't have a winter sport.
- What better organization to try some pilot activities and branch out than rec department? With all the faith the community has and all the success behind it. Pulling back kids and setting up summer jobs so younger kids look up to college kids.
- The Rec dept. has buy in from the youth and the adults. This community has a good feel about it. Very safe and very nurturing. You guys care about each other. That's an asset you've developed and that's impressive.
- The tendency is going to be to want to do all of the ideas now because the problems and opportunities are now and the people who are here now might not be later. Give yourselves permission to move at a pace that is respectful of what the development of your ideas requires. The ownership of whatever you do has to come from the youth. There is an enormous wealth of opportunity for youth to be involved in interpretation (trails, nature, signage) – have youth come up with a solution. Let them show the way.

Vernon's New Identity

Visiting Team: Roger Allbee, Greg Brown, Chris Company, Paul Costello (facilitator), Chelsea Gazillo (scribe), Andrew Graham, Adam Grinold, Fred Kenney, Ryan McLaren, Pat Moulton, Buzz Schmidt, Fred Schmidt

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Vernon is a great place to live and raise kids.
- We have a great elementary school.
- The recreation department is an asset.
- The library.
- It is very scenic here: hills, river, farmland.
- Vernon has strong agriculture.
- Nice roads.
- The residents. We have a different type of community from other towns in the area. Pretty quiet, people are respectful of their neighbors.
- We have a good Sherriff's department in town.
- There is a strong desire to preserve rural quality of Vernon.
- We are close to cities and towns as well. Good location and access. We are not isolated.
- We are a town looking for its identity. We have the opportunity to create one.
- The town forest and the trails are an asset. Many people who use and maintain them.
- Vernon has productive agriculture soils and timberlands.
- There are Several social clubs: historians, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, churches, etc. If you want to get involved, you can.
- There is great potential and talent amongst the people who live here.
- We have a strong sense of community. We care for each other.
- We have unique flora and fauna relative to rest of Vermont: black gum, black racer snake, etc.
- We have ample sunlight – the most potential for solar energy in Vermont.
- There is a senior living home with independent living apartments.
- People are working hard to improve the town: community potlucks, decorating the Town Hall, beautifying the town signs.
- There are lots of generational families who have been here for a long while.
- We are very welcoming of new families, perhaps because of VY.

What are the Challenges?

- There has been a lot of negative press over the years because of VY. This is a chance to repaint the community in a different light. We are different from VY, we're just a nice town.
- There's more to the town than a closed nuclear plant and dairy farms. It is unfortunate that is the historical reputation.
- There is a difficulty with being a conservative town in a liberal county, and people here can be defensive about that. We have lower taxes than the surrounding region, and it has been the major issue for 50 years. Any discussion about opportunities butts up against the tax issue.
- A lot of the tax talk in the town is that taxes are going up quickly relative to other towns, and that things are getting harder, but relative to other towns Vernon is doing much better than them.
- Vernon is a changing town. It used to be all about VY, and we are getting some new people moving in, some families with children. When I moved here there were lots of families, then it moved to be more workers, and now it's going back to families.
- There is a tug with Guilford, but Vernon has its own zip code! This echoes back to the village center discussion: Vernon doesn't have a sense of place largely because there isn't a definable center, as there is in Guilford, Newfane, and other towns. Part of figuring out our new identity is figuring out a sense of place here.
- Think of Newfane: it's beautiful. It used to be up the mountain, but when the railroad came through they moved the whole town down into the valley and created a square and an identity. What is the identity of Vernon? Is it based on a business? Is it based on place? What is the target identity that we're going for?
- It's pretty spread out. It seems to me that Dummerston and Guilford are as spread out as Vernon. Somehow I've never thought of Vernon as being divided. I grew up in Vernon, and back in those days they located the school here because it was in the middle of the two population centers. We used to get mail in South Vernon, Massachusetts. There were three train stops, one for each population center.
- Who might move to VT and choose Vernon? The sports identity is a great niche. People from more populated areas are worried that their kids will be placed out of activities by competition, or they eschew competition. Kids here get to participate!
- Vernon Green is an awesome place. I had to spend a few weeks there. Probably they are the economic powerhouse in town now that VY has closed. We ought to reach out to them and ask them their plans and needs.
- There were 800 people here until 1960. Now there are 2100. We are the gateway to "the beckoning country."
- What are we projecting to other folks? What are the photos that you see on the website? The sports fields – it's one of the most beautiful towns in the region. Some people have never gotten past the VY plant.
- I wonder if there are people that don't want new people to come in. Are there people who know that it's important to have that influx of new people and development?
- Over the years it's gotten better, but we've been a very politically divided town. A lot of the rhetoric has been very divisive. It's become endemic to the town – look at the dinner, there was no mingling. The same type of people sat with the same type of people.
- I believe Vernon has an advantage with school choice for high school. They're not stuck going to Brattleboro, they can go wherever suits the kids best.
- Most of the people in town are of one race. We all look alike. We don't have enough diversity.
- The image you want to project is very similar to other small towns in Vermont. What makes this town unique and different from other towns that are homeowner based, looking to build an economy and community?
- A benefit we share with other rural towns is that we have one school where all our kids go. We have an opportunity to build on that, and celebrate it. However, all the kids leave after 7th grade, which draws them out of the community earlier than age 18.
- We have nowhere for people to spend money. We have a rec department and a free library. Those are great if you have kids. We have land and opportunities to build places to go out and spend money. Nobody goes to a place just to go there. They go there to do things. Newfane has made itself a destination.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Two words: Rediscover Vernon! I think that applies to everyone. I grew up here, and I have to rediscover Vernon. It's not the same Vernon I grew up in in the 50s, and it's not that same as it was 10 years ago. We all need to rediscover it. We've gotten complacent with always finding "food in the larder". There's been a bottomless bucket of money. Now we are going to have to go back to ways of living that we employed before VY came here. Is there a possibility of attracting other types of investments in the town? We can't rely totally on tourism. We need to go back to older ways of living.
- If we develop our trails, the people using them will need services and amenities. People want a place to buy water and food at the end of their day.
- Develop a committee in town to maintain and develop trails.
- This was started last fall, but there are a lot of artisans in Vernon. Last fall you could take a tour of the artisans' workshops. It's going to be December 10th-11th this year.
- Vernon Green is a real gem. Boomers are aging and will need places to go. When we were visiting Vernon Green, we wanted a place to go to get dinner. Visiting families are an opportunity

for this community. They are a market to tap into. A real opportunity. Vernon can brand itself as “family friendly”.

- Most communities have a gathering place, usually a restaurant. My friends in other towns get together for coffee at cafes in their towns. That is the only thing that’s really lacking here. Those places are great, and can serve both coffee and beer.
- What about agriculture? People want to see farms more and more, see where their food comes from.
- There are a variety of things we can do that aren’t structures. A lot of people bike through here, and it is unsafe right now. If we improve our trails, someone will set up a place to sell water and other items.
- The Connecticut River Byway comes through Vernon: it’s Route 142. In Vermont it starts here, but it’s only developed in Brattleboro.
- We have different audiences: families who want to move here, ourselves, businesses, etc. right now there’s nobody managing those different stories. We need to tell our story.
- On the way to getting where we need to go, we need to develop statistics. What is our median age? Median income? When did people move here? What story does that tell?
- I’ve lived here off and on for 15 years. When we celebrated our 250th anniversary, we worked hard to make it happen, and begged people to participate. There are people who have always volunteered, but now there are middle-aged people who don’t want to volunteer any of their time. We need to build our volunteer base and engage younger volunteers.
- On the planning commission, Martin just gave a metric that 60 homes have sold in the past year. People want to come here! A family moved into the house across from me, which sold in one day.
- There’s a page on the website called “Come Live in Vernon” it’s the third-most visited page on the town site, so people are interested in living here!
- We have all of the great sports fields and the pool. We could create an outdoor ice rink.
- We have an area field right by the pool that we could use as a community garden. We are an agricultural community, but Brattleboro has the best farmers’ market around. Let’s have a farmers’ market here once a month!
- We need to pick ourselves up off the mat and move on. The VY ship has sailed. Let’s put our best foot forward and keep going.
- I am upset that the Regional Planning Commission did not support VY during the relicensing process of the plant, which gave so much to our area. I’m willing to set that aside, but we shouldn’t forget it. The plant provided a tremendous benefit to the town, the region and the state.
- Let’s have a series of events to invite others in and also to rediscover our own community and ourselves.
- Let’s do a flyer with all of the fabulous stuff that we have been talking about! Then we have to decide who it is targeted at.

Young families? Work with real estate agents, create a stronger online presence.

- The clerk’s office has been working on an 8-panel flyer that will be coming out when the new town administrator starts.
- We could use welcome wagon.
- In reality, we need to embrace our past. We can’t ignore it. Some people came in for various reasons, let’s put it in perspective and have it be part of our story.
- We used to have a thing called Farm Days held across from the Rec Center, but the volunteers got burned out. It was great, because it got the farm community out, and people came down, and Ben & Jerry’s donated ice cream.
- Brattleboro has the Strolling of the Heifers, which is one of the biggest events in Vermont. We have great dairy farms, maybe we can do something like that taking people out to farms.
- We could hold a biking event.
- Every February Brattleboro has the Winter Carnival, and lots of people come into town. Maybe we could be an alternative venue for some of that traffic or do it at another time of year. Newfane has an Apple Pie Festival. We used to have Town Supper, but it petered out due to volunteer burnout.
- There used to be a Vernon craft fair in December.
- The snowmobile club goes up to Brattleboro for the winter carnival. They could easily meet here.
- We should have a community party at which we celebrate the harvest and use our agriculture! We could use our own agricultural products, and showcase our community. Everything we do here is a fundraiser for something: fire department, town hall, etc. let’s do something that’s just a celebration, and invite our neighboring towns.
- Young people who want to buy houses are looking for places that have strong communities. Right now Vernon is divided into three different age groups, that don’t mix very much. We haven’t found a way to get together as a town community.
- We need to re-focus on the community dinners and the town picnic. It used to be packed.
- A lot of people come down for the fireworks on Town Picnic day, but maybe the food can happen later, or something can happen differently that focuses on the fireworks.
- Right now we don’t have fireworks because we don’t have money.
- There was talk years ago about a Renaissance festival. Brattleboro used to have a Renaissance group that would go down to Greenfield Fairgrounds. Now they don’t have access, and they might have disbanded.
- Some of the things that came up at town meeting were safety issues, particularly among the elderly community. We pay a lot for 24-hour police care, mostly for the elderly people. Maybe we could have a committee of people who were on call, rather than EMTs and police.
- We have some very nice roads for cycling in town. People come to do various loops around town, down into Mass, etc. We could build up our town as a cycling hub

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- People appreciate the agricultural heritage, and hunting and fishing. It would be beneficial to leverage those things.
- Rediscover ourselves through the things we build: cycling, a café, those things are good for other people, and also good for Vernon.
- There is a lot of volunteer burnout, but a lack of common identity. Marketing plan for Vermont, we all talk about the problems in Vermont, but other people think things are great here. Cultivate the new folks: get them engaged.
- Things aren't so bad: the real estate market is stable, you have unique terrain, it's beautiful. You should say that you have great sense of community. It may not seem true, but for outsiders it looks that way. The opioid thing hasn't devastated this town as much as others in the region. You do need a town locus: call it the Vernon Market Square, and have at least one event there per season. A café would be great. People need a place to hang out. Compared to a lot of places you have a lot going for you. It's an older community, but that can be a strength.
- It's great to see that people want to make this town a better place. There was a lot of talk of agriculture and the art. A farmers' market would unite the community and bring people in. Coffee is a great thing, get some of that going on.
- The conversation changed quite a bit. We talked about what we have during this conversation, rather than what we lack. There is a vision of the ideal New England town, but really a lot of the elements already exist.
- These things start small. Be wary of eye-rolling. You have to start small, and don't look for a silver bullet. Irene ripped Newfane apart. Afterwards there was a lot of bad feeling between people, and the business group feel apart. However, people came back, and brought back old town traditions that had been dormant for a while. We all supported it as best we could. People need to work on new things and support the old things too.
- Has anyone rewritten the history of Vernon recently? Not since 1957. Updating it would help us rediscover ourselves. Be bold: Putney put out a book called Greatest Little Town in the World. Thing big, and put it out there.
- I was struck by the number of assets relative to the challenges. Pick some things you can be successful at really fast, and those things will bring out other people when they see what is possible.
- You have a big opportunity. I think of Hardwick. 20 years ago they were dying, they changed their narrative and now look at them.



On Community Visit Day, participants shared their ideas for Vernon with the visiting team in six focus forum sessions (captured here in these 14 pages of notes).

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Visiting team members gather for a briefing before the Community Resource Day task force sessions.



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