

**WILMINGTON COMMUNITY VISIT  
FINAL REPORT**

**Vermont Council on Rural Development  
June 2001**

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# Wilmington Community Visit

## Introduction

The first thing a visitor to Wilmington notices is the beauty of the land, the mountains, hills, and the Deerfield River Valley, and then, from the White House Inn to the downtown four corners, the charm and character of the historic buildings in the village.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development Community Visit Team came to Wilmington in the spring of 2001 to help the community evaluate the challenges before it, prioritize them, and set action plans toward some of the town's most important long-term goals. The team came to examine challenges and problems, many of which are catalogued and prioritized in this report. Beyond these challenges, it found a great many community strengths that balanced the "issues" before the town.

The visiting team was deeply impressed by the dedication that the men, women and teens of Wilmington brought to the Community Visit Process. We have found that the key to success of any Community Visit has been local leadership and organization. In both these areas, Wilmington excelled. David Larsen's diplomatic skill and commitment made him the ideal chairperson for the Wilmington Community Visit. The support and participation of Selectboard leaders was terrific, and the organizational work by Sonia Alexander, the Town Manager, with assistance from Mary Towne, was absolutely top notch.

We were also keenly impressed by the knowledge and commitment of community members; first the local steering committee, then the focus group members, and community meeting attendees. The Community Visit provides an opportunity for an overview of challenges; it serves as a starting point toward their resolution, but nothing real happens without community leadership. The Wilmington Visiting Resource Team was especially encouraged by the vitality and leadership potential of each of the Task Forces formed to address community priorities.

One moment typified the hospitality of Wilmington toward the Visiting Team: on entering the elementary school for the community dinner, each Community Visitor was greeted with warmth and poise by a member of the fifth grade class. Their positive spirit reflects the community's enduring values and bodes well for the future!

### **The Community Visit had three major parts:**

1. On the **Community Visit Day** on March 26, Visiting Resource Team members heard testimony from Wilmington residents in nine focus group areas which had earlier been identified by the local steering committee. Notes and issues raised in these sessions are detailed in Part V.

Based on the testimony received, the Vermont Council on Rural Development identified an initial list of the Major Challenges before the community (Part II).

2. The second stage of the Community Visit occurred at the **Wilmington Community Meeting** on April 30<sup>th</sup>, when VCRD presented the Major Challenges list and facilitated the review and prioritization of these issues by over 70 town residents. The resulting list of **Prioritized Challenges** (in Part I) were the focus for the formation of Task Forces set to build plans to address them.

3. In the third phase of the Visit, the **Community Resource Day** on May 31, Task Forces met with a second Visiting Team to build Action Steps and consider state, federal, non-profit, and private resources that may be available to support their work toward the progress of the Wilmington community. The **Task Force Action Steps** they defined are listed in Part IV.

**Resource Team Members** (listed in Part VI) signed on with a commitment to serve in an on-going way as sounding boards and referral agents for Wilmington Task Forces. Many of these visitors can be on-going partners in the work before the committees, others can be a great source of advice or connection to other resources; call on them for help. Members of the Wilmington Resource Team listened closely to the issues brought forward by town residents and have made suggestions in support of Wilmington's efforts in each challenge area. Their **Recommendations** (Part III) are not prescriptions; community members are in the best position to make decisions about their next steps and strategies. Recognizing existing local efforts and the leadership of the Task Forces, the recommendations are offered, rather, as suggestions for next steps, and as lists of potential resources as the Task Forces make their way forward.

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.

It has been an honor to work with the many Wilmington volunteers who care about the future of their town and are willing to work together for the common and long-term good of the community. The list of challenges before Wilmington, and indeed before the State of Vermont, is long, but the opportunities and potential more than outweigh the priorities identified. The energy, dedication, and talent in the diverse and dynamic Wilmington community provide solid foundation for optimism.

# **I. Wilmington - Priority Challenges**

**Established in Wilmington Community Meeting, April 30, 2001**

- ❖ **Education Issue** – Explore options for acquiring capital funding to deal with facility deterioration and space deficiencies at the high school. Address funding needs to provide adequate programs and courses beyond minimum standards for Wilmington children.
- ❖ **Act 60 Issue** – Determine whether there are possible actions to convince the Legislature to re-evaluate Wilmington’s “gold town” designation, reduce its contribution to the “sharing pool”, or separate capital expenditures from the sharing pool.
- ❖ **Community Center Issue** – Continue efforts to establish the teen, day care, senior and other community-based activities center. Build in possibilities for regularly scheduled out-posted social and employment services on site.
- ❖ **Economic Development Issue/Growth/Non Growth Issue** – Reach consensus as a community to determine where the town wants to go. Expand on tourist-based economy to create a year-round appeal and bring in other businesses. Establish same hours for all businesses and extend beyond 5:00 PM. Plan for controlled positive growth. Act 60 and high taxes discourage growth. There is a low number of full time residents and a lack of good paying jobs to retain young people in the community. A subgroup under Economic Development will look at: **Downtown Beautification and Parking.**
- ❖ **Elderly Services Issue** – Improve services and living opportunities. Wilmington needs an elderly housing facility to allow elders to stay in the community. Volunteer coordination is needed to help elders with paperwork and accessing needed services. These services need to be drawn in to the community.

# **II. Wilmington - Major Challenges**

**Identified by Focus Groups – March 26, 2001**

- ❖ **Education Issue** – Explore options for acquiring capital funding to deal with facility deterioration and space deficiencies at the high school. Address funding needs to provide adequate programs and courses beyond minimum standards for Wilmington children
- ❖ **Act 60 Issue** – Determine whether there are possible actions to convince the Legislature to re-evaluate Wilmington’s “gold town” designation, reduce its contribution to the “sharing pool”, or separate capital expenditures from the sharing pool.
- ❖ **Youth Engagement Issue** – Involve youth in civic and community service projects and leadership opportunities to give them feeling of inclusion and value and an opportunity to have a voice in the community. Consider possibilities of a teen activity center.
- ❖ **Community Center Issue** – Continue efforts to establish the teen, day care, senior and other community-based activities center. Build in possibilities for regularly scheduled out-posted social and employment services on site.
- ❖ **Volunteer Issue** –Broaden Volunteerism. Volunteers are needed in fire and rescue departments and throughout the community. Recruit energetic volunteers for existing volunteer groups and identify individualized special skills such as mechanics, technology and arts that can be shared in schools and community.
- ❖ **Economic Development Issue** – Reach consensus as a community to determine where the town wants to go. Expand on tourist-based economy to create a year-round appeal and bring in other businesses. Establish same hours for all business and extend beyond 5:00 PM.
- ❖ **Truck Traffic Issue** – Make a final decision on Town Relocation vs. Southside Bypass vs. working with existing traffic in village by traffic calming and speed enforcement. Route 9 must be changed to mitigate the destruction results of truck traffic on the village center. Either Bypass or other changes should address immediate hazards, irritations, and in-town environmental degradations.
- ❖ **Downtown Cleanup and Beautification Issue** – Identify methods to protect, maintain, enhance and beautify the character of the village center.
- ❖ **Downtown Parking Issue** – Develop downtown parking facilities and explore potential for parking on the south side of the river with a walking bridge.
- ❖ **Government and Social Services Issue** – Establish a center for services in Wilmington so residents do not have to seek them in Brattleboro or Bennington.
- ❖ **Community Communication Issue** – There is a need to develop better community-wide communication to keep citizens informed and connected and improve information sharing between different groups. A centralized community calendar and listing of services is needed.
- ❖ **Growth/Non Growth Issue** – Plan for controlled positive growth. Act 60 and high taxes discourage growth. Wilmington needs controlled growth. There is a low number of full time residents and a lack of good paying jobs to retain young people in the community.
- ❖ **Zoning Issue** – Revise and update zoning. Existing zoning is restrictive, contradictory, and outdated. More volunteers are needed in zoning development and review. A consensus is needed but difficult to form with the resident mix of natives, non-natives and 2<sup>nd</sup> homeowners disagreeing about the community needs.
- ❖ **Medical/Mental Health Issue** – Improve access to services. People must travel outside community to access resources. Wilmington needs to systematically draw these services to a central location in town.
- ❖ **Substance Abuse Issue** – Provide alternatives to substance abuse. Some usage is condoned by many adults, considered low leveled, primarily recreational and not at a crisis for the community. However, if there were more activities, especially for teens, substance abuse might be lessened.
- ❖ **Transportation Issue** – Consider ways to improve transportation in the valley. Transportation has improved but remaining difficulties and isolation need to be addressed.
- ❖ **Elderly Services Issue** – Improve services and living opportunities. Wilmington needs an elderly housing facility to allow elders to stay in the community. Volunteer coordination is needed to help elders with paperwork and accessing needed services. These services need to be drawn in to the community.

## **III. VCRD Resource Team Recommendations**

### **In Response to the Five Wilmington Priority Areas**

#### **Education Issue**

- Call Tom Appel from New England Management Company (251-6024) for his advice cost estimations and sources of funds for school construction.
- Evaluate possible enhancements to the curriculum through shared programs with other school districts either by contracted partnership or through a union school district. Evaluate the historical attempts to build a union district and develop a strategy to educate potential partner communities about cost benefits to shared programs and the potential to expand offerings beyond those that currently exist.
- Consult Jeff Francis, E.D., Vermont Superintendents Association (229-5834), for planning support and about locating potential facilitation of discussions with other districts.
- Call Doug Chiappetta in the Department of Education (828-2141) with specific questions about school improvement strategies.
- Wilmington might design special uses for special areas of the aging facility that might connect with correspondingly unique sources of support for repair or building. For example, a shop or repair facility might find support from an agency working on job force preparation.
- Invite members of the Act 60 Task Force to join in creative local efforts to mitigate the most damaging effects of Act 60 legislation.

## **Act 60 Issue**

- Wilmington needs to realize that the Legislature will never exempt Wilmington, by itself, from the sharing pool. Only systematic changes to the law will fly, and the town needs to work with the Windham County legislative delegation to support a solution acceptable to the Wilmington community.
- It is important to recognize the House, Senate and Governor are willing to change Act 60 to some degree. The legislative process is a bottomless pit in which to expend energy and time unless one is strategic about their approach. The strategy must be grounded in understanding what Wilmington REALLY wants and needs and what is REALLY possible given the inclinations of the Legislature and the resources Wilmington has to devote. If there is a match between the needs of Wilmington and the inclinations of the Legislature in the next session, there may be a decent chance for success. If there is no match, the outcome is much less likely, more difficult to attain but not impossible.
- In either case Wilmington may need some professional help or some talented volunteers to outline the strategy, determine who the players are, and to make the case to the right people in the right venues. Wilmington should avoid presenting itself as a “ski town” complaining that it must share its wealth. Rather, it needs to demonstrate with tangible facts and figures that Wilmington is going to suffer or is suffering from the same or similar problems that the “poor” schools and towns did prior to Act 60. This may take some analysis and time to show, but if done well even those lawmakers who support Act 60 may be more easily convinced that some changes are necessary. If a compelling case cannot be made, then many lawmakers whose support or acquiescence is needed to allow changes in Act 60 may not be relied on to vote for change. If these persuadable legislators are not convinced, then Wilmington will need to rely on power politics to win the day. This kind of politics relies to an inordinate degree on certain individual people in the State House to push a desired outcome to fruition. This is a tough and dangerous game to play and probably best played by hired professionals rather than volunteers and novices. Town consensus would need to be reached before anyone involved in this level of politics could speak in the name of Wilmington.

## **Community Center Issue**

- Broad and sustainable leadership to the Community Center development is critical. Without it efforts will fizzle and the community may grow weary and even cynical about this “good” project.
- The Community Center Group needs to reach out and build an active and balanced board representing broad interests and community and business leadership.
- Stick with the ‘limits of the possible’ and pursue those things for which there is real demand.
- Small incremental success is good, certainly better than a big effort which fails. So work step-by-step toward long-term goals.
- Build partnerships with other communities or other synergistic activities.
- Mobilize local support in a visible way.
- Develop a fundraising plan that includes private sources in addition to public monies. Get advice on how to do this. Chuck Putney in Bennington is an excellent consultant for project fundraising.
- In developing a Community Center think strategically: Function needs to precede form. In other words, acquiring a site or building should *follow* from a well-designed and sustainable program plan. The current plans for a Center start with a site and then plan how it can be used. Be clear that the function comes first. Don’t invent functions to fit structure, but study community needs and prioritize the greatest needs and the functions that will be most “marketable” for initial development.
- The Wilmington Community Alliance should use this ‘priority issue’ to re-energize and update the community of the project.
- Explore the Patch model to bring out-posted services into Wilmington. Barbara Ternes has successfully put together a Patch office through the Park Street Center in Bellows Falls (463-9927). In this office, 16 different agencies and programs send case workers and staff to handle social service needs for the community on a circuit service basis. She is ready to help Wilmington build this model.
- Stay in close touch with the Economic Development group.
- Jon Michael Muise, USDA Community and Business Outreach Specialist, is available to assist in this effort: 254-9766, ext. 106.
- Potential funding sources include the USDA Rural Development Community Facility Program (contact Naomi Hatch, 828-3220), and the Vermont Community Development Program (contact Katherine Vose, 828-3220).
- Contact Paul Bruhn at the Preservation Trust of Vermont (658-6647) for his evaluation of the Community Center site, and for his funding recommendations.

## **Economic Development /Growth/No Growth Issue**

- A short (even a one page) community vision document could be put together as a development tool and a way to build consensus about Wilmington’s economic future. Strong community support for this vision is critical, so its development should include review by all interested parties. The vision must be realistic, doable. It must be supported by a real leadership team which will command respect, stick around, and follow through. This leadership needs to have respect and patience for the general public. The task force must identify, invite, persuade, and encourage SUSTAINED, INVESTED, AND TRUSTED LEADERSHIP.
- This leadership should be asked to join a reactivated Economic Development Committee.



The Committee/Task Force should write an economic development plan with a variety of options to pursue, then hold a larger public meeting to discuss the options and arrive at an implementation plan.

- In developing a common vision, focus on areas of agreement, not on conflicts. Key steps might include: 1. Identifying the assets/values of the community that citizens want to see kept in place 50 years from now. 2. Identifying issues and opportunities that need to be addressed. 3. Identifying common goals—the consensus points for future work. Define what “positive controlled growth” means for Wilmington.
- A long-term resource strategy should be identified. An incremental approach of over 5 years is better than flash in the pan - here today - gone tomorrow. The Task Force should develop a fundraising plan as outlined above under the Community Center list.
- Wilmington needs to play to its strengths. It could identify a strategy to do that through a SWOT analysis to identify: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- The Wilmington Economic Development Committee should strengthen its relationship with American Skiing Company, owners of Mt. Snow. Together with the Town of Dover, the group should begin discussions with American Skiing’s local management, ask for their on-going participation in the committee, and work to support the development of a year-round resort. That failing, the two-town group should approach American Skiing’s corporate management directly.
- The idea of extending downtown business hours to a common closing time, at least seasonally well past 5:00 PM, could be accomplished in short order through the Chamber of Commerce. If the Chamber is not interested, downtown businesses should create a downtown association to take up and resolve this issue.
- Bill McGrath is an outstanding resource as Wilmington continues to build positive development strategies. Bill is the Executive Director of the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation, (257-7731). He could be asked to facilitate the Task Force’s production of an economic development plan.
- Jon Michael Muise (see under community center) is available to work with the Task Force on creating a common vision of appropriate development, sharing resources for downtown development, and downtown beautification.
- James Matteau, Executive Director, Windham Regional Planning Commission may be able to lend staff assistance to planning efforts.
- Lynn Barrett, the Regional Marketing Representative at Southern Vermont Regional Marketing Organization, can provide marketing tools, free or fee based, to help Wilmington market itself to tourists (258-3992).
- Bill McMasters from UVM Extension (334-7325) runs a ‘take charge’ economic development/leadership program.
- Beth Humstone at the Vermont Forum on Sprawl (864-6310) can share their *Smart Growth Scorecard* as a way for the town to measure how it is doing in terms of growth management.
- Contact Wayne Fawbush, E.D., Sustainable Jobs Fund (828-5320) for strategic assistance. The SJF is particularly adept at developing cooperatives and collaborative business strategies. They could be useful in considering methods of collaboration for joint marketing in the arts.
- Alex Aldrich, E.D., Vermont Arts Council (828-5420) has information on the “creative economy”; he would be a useful consultant on any art collaboration to build the economic prospects of the community.

## **Downtown Beautification/Parking**

### **(A sub-group of Economic Development)**

- Contact the Vermont State Chamber of Commerce for advice on downtown rehabilitation resources.
- Invite Paul Bruhn, Preservation Trust of Vermont (658-6647), to tour downtown Wilmington and consider resources for preserving and enhancing downtown buildings. Ask him about the Mainstreet Program.
- The town of Wilmington should continue its work to get into the Vermont Downtown Program. Once in the program, technical assistance will be available from the Department of Housing and Community Affairs on downtown issues.
- Invite VTrans, Vermont's Agency of Transportation, to partner with the Vermont Arts Council to work with the Beautification Task Force toward developing a plan for enhancements to the village center in conjunction with changes to the Route 9 corridor. Invite Micque Glitman (828-2657) and Gary Dubray of VTrans and Alex Aldrich of the VT Arts Council (828-5420) to visit Wilmington. Give them a grand tour and seek to formalize a process to gain arts and infrastructural enhancements to the village center. Work to gain their ongoing advice and commitment of resources for the preservation and enhancement of the village center.
- Set a Wilmington Town meeting to consider the community's vision of its village center for the future. Show the VTrans/Arts Council Video of the model project in Danville as a starting point to build a local planning process toward similar ends.

## **Elderly Services Issue**

- Network with regional and state service providers so they know of the community's needs.
- The Task Force should invite additional members including representatives from Home Health and the Area Agency on Aging to meet and work as a coalition to determine if and where a senior housing project could be built.
- The Task Force could then conduct a needs assessment for such a project. The more objective material that is gathered the better. The task force might ask the Area Agency on Aging to pull together numbers of nursing home admissions and try to figure out other ways to measure the number of people who must leave town because housing and services are unavailable.
- To do this, the Task Force will need to hire someone to do market studies and, ultimately, to develop the proposal. It should seek a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to help with this planning
- The Task Force should talk to prospective neighbors early on and include them as collaborators if possible.
- The Task Force can plan the senior housing project to help grow senior population to a critical mass and so serve as a community focus for services that can draw services for all seniors.
- Stay in close contact with the Economic Development group as potential sites are identified. It is important to place senior housing within walking distance of other housing, shops, and services.
- Look to possible grant funding aimed at helping to provide services for elderly residents; a major thrust of the grant should aim at finding ways to sustain services. It may be possible to pay a grant writer through a CDBG grant.
- It's important not to underestimate the challenge of building housing with supportive services, but there are many resources to help. The state housing plan considers "special needs housing" (with

services for seniors) a priority, so a good project stands a fair chance of finding funding. Be aware that this can take 2-3 years.

- Talk with people who have developed similar projects for their towns in the past few years—their advice can teach a lot—invite them to speak to your committee. The Department of Aging and Disabilities can give you information on similar projects in the region.
- The state has a moratorium on building new nursing homes and is looking at new models of care settings, so this is a time with opportunity to build something new and different.
- Contact Commissioner Patrick Flood at the Agency on Aging and Disabilities (241-2401) for lead support—use the agency as lead partners. They can describe the different sorts of licensing from Assisted Living Facilities to housing with supportive services.
- Jon Michael Muise (see above) is willing and available to help the Task Force identify the needs of elders in the community and make contact with organizations to assist in providing services.
- James Matteau (see above) has collected information on Housing Needs in the area that will be useful in advocating for elders in Wilmington (particularly in a grant-writing process).
- Tom Appel, New England Management Co., (see above) is a consultant who is familiar with sources of funds and cost estimations for the development of senior living facilities.
- Connie Snow, E.D. at the Brattleboro Area Community Land Trust (254-4604) should be consulted on potential resources and to seek their help organizing for a senior housing development.
- The Task Force should consult Housing Vermont in Burlington to determine what public resources and tax credits may be available to fund a senior living facility and for organizational consultation as the committee moves forward with its plans.
- Marie Saunders, E.D. at Southeastern Vermont Council on Aging (COASEVT) should be brought into senior services discussions (642-5119).

## **The End of the State, Too Far from Montpelier Problem**

- Identify challenges and ask for help from people at the top who control resources. Use the connections developed through the Community Visit Process (and listed at the end of this report)
- To put human face on Wilmington issues, make special invitation to events to targeted influential people and ask them for their help.
- Make Wilmington relevant - brag about why Wilmington is important to Vermont, why the town is unique. Brag about the momentum Wilmington has going.
- Develop a Strategic Outreach Agenda and identify who in the community can best implement it: Ask local leaders, influential citizens and or connected people to help state, federal and non-profit leaders understand Wilmington.

## **IV. Task Force Action Plans** **Established on Resource Day, May 31, 2001**

### **Elderly Services Task Force**

Set to improve services and living opportunities for elders in the community. Wilmington needs an elderly housing facility to allow elders to stay in the community. Volunteer coordination is needed to help elders with paperwork and accessing needed services. These services need to be drawn in to the community.

#### **Action Steps**

1. Create a board interested in elder issues to work on bringing elder housing and services into the Wilmington Community. Actively reach out for additional committee members.
2. Educate members of this board about available programs and opportunities for developing housing facilities.
3. Working with SVMC and the Department of Aging and Disabilities, assess need for housing and

- services. Bring in nursing students to do community health risk assessment identifying social, environmental, insurance, transportation and other access needs of residents over 65. Investigate needs for housing options in the community.
4. Investigate grant opportunities and build support for Wilmington elder projects.
  5. As a result of the first phase of the Community Visit, COA has addressed Wilmington elders' paperwork issues by designating case management staff to Wilmington two days a week who are able to visit residents in a timely manner. To support and expand these services, the task force will investigate opportunities for a half-time Volunteer Coordinator for the community.

## **Resources**

To help and support this initiative

1. The Department of Aging and Disabilities.
2. Lead staff from existing housing projects for the elderly from around the state.
3. COA
4. Wilmington resident volunteers (who'll be asked to serve with this committee)



## **Education Task Force**

Set to explore options for acquiring capital funding to deal with facility deterioration and space deficiencies at the high school and to address funding needs to provide adequate programs and courses beyond minimum standards for Wilmington children.

### **Action Steps**

1. Continue efforts to coordinate educational opportunities with Whitingham. Investigate joint contract school options, governance options, cooperative educational opportunities and possible shared services.
2. On the facility: Work with the Department of Education to coordinate a meeting with the state Historic Preservation officials to evaluate the status of the old high school building.
3. On the facility: Work with the Department of Education to incorporate community needs into the Middle High School design, to develop a traffic flow design, and to work with the facilities committee on technology education specifications.
4. Engage Wilmington community members to develop a vision for education. The vision could include academic changes connected to currently available technology but that concentrates on thinking skills, basic math skills and that offers enhanced opportunities like AP classes.

## **Resources**

1. Andrea McManus, Department of Education, Consortium for Reinventing High School.
2. Nancy Boone, Historic Preservation
3. Cathy Hilgendorf, Department of Education

4. New England Association of Schools and Colleges
5. Doug Chiappetta, Department of Education
6. Jeff Francis, VT Superintendents Association



## **Act 60 Task Force**

Charged to determine whether there are possible actions to convince the Legislature to re-evaluate Wilmington's "gold town" designation, reduce its contribution to the "sharing pool", or separate capital expenditures from the sharing pool.

### **Action Steps**

1. Try to find out what the Supreme Court's definition of "equal educational opportunity" is, and how to move to equalized education with communities like Brattleboro that are receiving schools.
2. Investigate possibilities of Wilmington schools going private or forming a union school district with another community(s).
3. Make a recommendation to the school board to separate Wilmington from the WSSU School District and save the community approximately \$300,000 annually.
4. If all else fails, make a recommendation to the school board that it build a budget where per pupil costs equal the block grant from the state.
5. Chart what the tax rate would be if the school was level-funded and no donated funds supported the budget, and communicate this information to the full community.

### **Resources**

1. Gary Sage, Report on comparison of course offerings.
2. Legislative delegation.



## **Community Center Task Force**

To continue efforts to establish the teen, day care, senior center, and other community-based activities center. Build in possibilities for regularly scheduled out-posted social and employment services on site.

### **Action Steps**

1. Contact Catherine Vose of Vermont Community Development Program to discuss the

- CDBG planning grant criteria.
2. If the Community Center is eligible, set up a meeting with a program specialist to develop application.
  3. Investigate funding sources for the already permitted building.
  4. Investigate the establishment of 5 01 c 3 status for the Wilmington Community Alliance.
  5. Develop a Business Plan: revisit numbers for tenants' interests, repair costs, etc.
  6. Re-energize the committee, and re-commit to action.
  7. Revisit relationships with other towns which have expressed interest (meet with their select boards).
  8. Raise awareness with local, state, and federal officials.

## **Resources**

1. CDBG Planning Grant
2. USDA Rural Development
3. VT and national foundations
4. HUD
5. Private contributions, both financial and human resources
6. Orton Foundation
7. Non-financial volunteer support, SEVCA, VCRD, and partner organizations.



## **Economic Development Issue/Growth/Non Growth Task Force**

Established to help Wilmington reach consensus as a community to determine where the town wants to go. Expand on tourist-based economy to create a year-round appeal and bring in other businesses. Establish same hours for all businesses and extend beyond 5:00 PM. Plan for controlled positive growth. Act 60 and high taxes discourage growth. There is a low number of full time residents and a lack of good paying jobs to retain young people in the community.

### **Action Steps**

1. Develop a check list(s) to clarify the permitting process, which would include town permits, state permits, and water district permits. These would be offered through the Chamber or the Town Clerk's, where specified employees would receive training in across-the-board customer needs.
2. Vacant-non-growth delinquent tax properties need to be taken to tax sale.
3. The committee will undertake to support and or coordinate a number of projects including: a. an artist mall; b. the skating rink, c. contracting with a community grant writer; d. promotion of fishing; e. development of a local Farmer's Market.
4. The committee will work toward obtaining Downtown Designation.
5. The committee will develop a letter requesting input on an economic development vision for Wilmington.

## **Resources**

1. Robert McBride, “Arts Community”
2. Bill McGrath, E.D., Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation
3. Grant Writers: Richard Smith, Cindy Hayford/Susan Marten/Lori Ann Russo
4. Visit Killington and Stowe leaders
5. Orton Foundation
6. Chuck Putney of Bennington for grant help
7. Mary Carlton, Farmers Market Nutrition Program



## **Downtown Beautification and Parking Task Force**

(a subgroup of the Economic Development Task Force)

### **Action Steps**

1. Add to and diversify the committee.
2. Speak to village residents, business owners, and townspeople to elicit their ideas, share committee ideas, and get feedback from the community.
3. Develop a vision of what we want the town to look like, what we want to celebrate, and how we can reflect the history and heritage of the community. Build this vision in a six-month period. Incorporate ideas for fixes.
4. Actively seek out participation of artists in the community in designing the vision.

### **Resources**

1. Alex Aldrich, VT Arts Council
2. Michael Singer
3. Orton Foundation, Helen Whyte
4. Bill Botsow, Bennington Coordinator, Public Building Arts Program
5. Robert McBride, Bellows Falls
6. Nelli Harig
7. Scott Pierpont
8. VTrans, Micque Glitman, Gary Dubray



# **V. NOTES AND MAJOR ISSUES**

Compiled in focus groups of Wilmington residents reporting to Community Visitors on March 26, 2001

## **Resource Team A – Education Issue, Youth Issue, and Economic Development & Affordability Issue**

*Robbie Harold – State Director, USDA-Rural Development, (Team Facilitator)*

*Robert Justis – Director of Economic Development, CVPS*

*Jolinda LaClair – Chief of Staff, Senator Jeffords Office (Focus Groups I & II)*

*Richard Smith – Deputy Commissioner of Economic Development*

*Con Hogan – Consultant*

*Bill McGrath, Executive Director, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (Focus Group III)*

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

### **I. Education Issue Focus Group**

*Cheryl LaFlamme Rothman*

*George B. Crafts*

*Patricia C. Murphy*

*Jack Carroll*

*Tom Johnston*

*T.J. McCarty*

*Amy McKenzie*

*Jessica Rizio*

*Kaitlin Ellingsen*

*Dana Thompson*

*Frank Spencer (via phone)*

### **Points of Testimony**

- Act 60 is a huge issue in the community.
- 1.3 Million Dollars are sent to Montpelier and not returned to the community.
- The high tax rate on land and low income of the residents threatens school programs and positions.
- Many are concerned that the continued high taxes and residents' inability to pay will result in the loss of open land and family-held property.
- The high school building is in poor condition, and there is no money to make the repairs and bring it up to par.
- State mandates demand a specific level of spending, but provide no funding to meet expenses. Increased costs in special education add to the financial crisis.
- Program cuts mean that there are limited classes in basic education courses and very few electives. Students have study halls instead.
- Upper classmen are tuitioned to local colleges to get some of the classes they need.
- There is a fear that future students will not receive the education they need due to the lack of money to fund programs, teachers, and maintain facilities.
- The elementary school facility is in better condition than the high school

- The elementary school enrichments are more plentiful than those of the high school.
- There is money in the valley due to the resort industry, but it doesn't stay in the community to be used for the schools.
- Resort jobs pay minimum wage and do not provide benefits or livable income for families.
- There is poverty and hunger in the community.
- Parents must consider sending their children to private high schools or having to move away.
- There are no funds to offer enrichments like language or art courses or even field trips.
- Not enough federal funds come to the town to meet the special education needs.
- The high school library has a very limited selection of books.
- Consideration is given to the idea of closing the high school.
- Attempts to become a Union District have been defeated by the Town of Whitingham (8 miles away), which has twice rejected the proposal to merge high schools.
- Many residents, including students, have 2 or 3 jobs. Even the teachers have second jobs to make ends meet.
- There is trouble recruiting teachers, especially in math and science; while this is a nationwide problem, Wilmington can't compete with the salaries nearby communities can offer.
- High parent and volunteer involvement helps meet some of the gaps.
- While community members probably cannot be hired as teachers due to the Vermont certification requirements, it might be possible to have "experienced volunteers" teach subject-specific electives such as engineering, video production, or Viet Nam-era history.
- The same core group volunteers for everything and numbers are decreasing.
- Students have jobs in the community and resort industry.
- Positive comments indicated that Wilmington does meet Vermont Standards, the students who go on to college mostly perform well; there are good computer facilities, and the Brattleboro Career Center has been a fantastic resource for students.
- The pre-school opportunities are good because of proactive parents.
- Space needs exceed those allowed according to State formula for square footage.
- Community Development is needed.
- Social options need to be explored to attract single people to the community.

### **Key Challenges Summary**

1. Separating capital funding from Act 60 monies and addressing taxing issues. Getting the legislature to listen and recognize the inequities. Although designated as a "Gold Town" by Act 60, Wilmington residents feel their income doesn't support their being identified as such and resent the 1.3 million dollars that has "gone to Montpelier and not come back".
2. Dealing with facility deterioration and space deficiencies at the high school.
3. Providing adequate programs and courses to give children a quality education, not just an adequate education to minimum standards.

## **II. Youth Issue Focus Group**

*Doug Swanson  
Mike Rosso  
Dawn Borys*

*Jon Raymo  
Jenn Coon  
Debbie Reilly*

*Kathy Larsen  
Joan Henry  
Julie Lineberger  
Stephanie Arsenaault  
Cindy Hayford*

*Barbara LeVan  
Azure O'Neil  
Lorren Laffoon  
Tom Fitzgerald*

## **Points of Testimony**

- Teens are bored (a universal complaint) and state there is little to do. Unless one is interested in sports, there are limited opportunities to participate in social activities.
- Skiing/snowboarding is expensive for locals, and not everyone wants to participate in those pastimes.
- Time for social activities is limited, because so many of the students work. They use their wages to pay for gas, skiing, snowmobiles, other activities and college.
- Cars are needed to get to movies and amusements outside of town.
- Elementary students have a number of activities organized and managed by parents and community volunteers.
- Teens don't participate in some of the activities such as sledding parties and movie nights.
- Some teens suggested that conflicts with student work-schedules could be part of the reason for their lack of participation in organized events.
- Some felt that age diversity could be a barrier; teens don't attend adult-organized activities.
- There is an effort to establish a local building to use for a teen center, day care, assisted living and other community-based activities. This process is being held up by the Act 250 process and is moving slowly. There is a high level of hope to be able to reach this goal.
- Students would like to have an adult they could relate to as a teen center manager. Students would go to hang out or do specific activities with their circle of friends if the adult in charge was someone who could "be on their level", i.e., not critical or judgmental.
- A survey showed that only 24% of the youth felt valued by the community.
- One way to make students feel that their opinion counts might be to involve them in local government, such as the planning board or in other civic groups. One student had participated on one and found it interesting.
- Students could be enlisted as helpmates for community projects either by serving on the planning committees, working on events, or providing childcare for parents who would like to participate. This would also help to make them feel part of the community.
- If students felt their engagement in the community was important, it would give them a strong sense of belonging, which would encourage them to give back throughout life, either in Wilmington or some other place.
- Mixed thoughts were expressed concerning drug and alcohol issues by the youth of the community.
- One adult volunteer stated that a survey done by the students indicated 73% of the students used alcohol or marijuana.
- One parent stated that the teens are handling alcohol in the resorts where they work and it is very visible and accessible. While his teenagers were home, he tried to concentrate his efforts in keeping them from driving if they had been drinking.
- Students stated the small community is like living in a goldfish bowl and other parents

watching out for kids combines to make it hard to keep behavior like that secret, therefore people would know if drug and alcohol use was a problem.

- Students qualified the use by saying hard drugs were not likely to be used. They felt that drug abuse was not a big issue and was on a small scale.
- Another student suggested that parents were relaxed about it and that some students used drugs or alcohol at home within the family setting.
- Some students thought the survey might be skewed by students answering the questions inaccurately either by giving “joking” or “bragging” answers. The adult who conducted the survey said that questions were set up to filter out those kinds of answers.
- As a resort town of +/- 2000 residents, Wilmington has 10 bars.
- One parent indicated that the Diversion Board only handles about one case per month.
- General feeling is that it is a good community with a high quality of life. Crime is low, and it is a safe place to live. Residents have a great deal of pride in the community, and there is a hard working group of residents and parents who strive to improve things with the resources at hand.
- Students expressed concern that isolation and lack of diversity makes them naïve when they go out into the world.
- Volunteers are needed to bring expertise and energy to connect with the schools and youth. There are good volunteers but someone with knowledge in one area isn’t able to teach a specific skill in another area. Some residents with expertise don’t have the time to give, especially if it is unpaid; they need income to survive.
- Without new volunteers to replace them, volunteers sometime burn out.
- The churches have small youth groups, but are not normally promoting community-wide youth activities.
- Wilmington has had some success producing various events. Young people created a skate park in an area where previously kids just “hung out”. The youngsters not only built it, but manage it as well.
- The community sponsors workshops with topics such as parenting and jewelry making. These have had some success.
- Students said most of their families and their friends’ families communicate well and eat dinner as a family.
- There is a community alliance group that works at addressing multi-age needs. It contacts adults and students to unite them to participate in activities by either having another student “IM” on the internet or by a 3-step contact process of writing a letter, 1 on 1 contact, and a reminder of the date of the event.
- Perhaps some school credit could be given for some of these community activities.
- There is no Headstart program for young children but it could be a good addition to the community.
- Grants are being used for various efforts, but have raised concern that short-term grants will not permanently fund an initiative, and that it would be discouraging to lose a program later because there was no way to pay for it out of community resources. Median Income for full time residents is \$19,000. Wilmington residents pay only one-quarter of the tax dollars, and property values are driven by the inflated values of the vacation homes.

## **Key Challenges Summary**

1. Involve youth in civic and community service projects and leadership opportunities to give them a feeling of inclusion and value and an opportunity to have a voice in the community. Engage students in community events and civic leadership opportunities so that they feel valued and develop good citizenship skills.
2. Build community volunteer capacity and tap into resources of adult experience/knowledge in setting up workshops, classes and activities such as mechanics, technology, and arts to enrich education of community members of all ages.

## **III. Economic Development & Affordability Issue Focus Group**

*Fred J. Skwirut  
Alonzo Paige  
Laurie Boyd  
John Redd  
Sarah Friedman*

*Jill Adams Mancivalano  
Sharon Adams  
Jenny Spring  
John Conlon*

## **Points of Testimony**

- The community formed the Wilmington Economic Development Group that existed for about 5 years. The goal was to attract high industry (G.S. Precision had closed and moved to Brattleboro) into the area but they couldn't identify a good site that was environmental friendly. The group disbanded due to a lack of funds.
- The community contacted VEDA and some other organizations but never received any feedback.
- A survey indicated there was no labor force to tap into.
- A goal is to keep the youth in the community but the majority of the jobs are resort related and only pays \$7-8 per hour with no benefits.
- One local successful business is the Adams Farm. It operates year round, appeals to all ages and as a multi-generation family farm has developed over the years and grown.
- It is frustrating to have vacant buildings with no businesses.
- Parking is a huge issue.
- Transportation issues are seen as major concerns. The community would like to see the large trucks go away, but maintain a route that brings in travelers. Removing the trucks would make the streets more pedestrian friendly.
- The By-Pass study and process has been taking too long. The issue was raised by in the 1980's and they are still waiting for a report from the State.
- The Route 9 corridor devalues property.
- Attracting creative people like artists and writers would bring in residents who could operate their own businesses without needing a large workforce and would contribute to the economy.
- Technology helps to run certain types of small business in such an isolated community. A DSL line would help to improve access to the Internet.

- The community has unique features and a high quality of living.
- Infrastructure is a large barrier.
- Retaining the young people of the town is very difficult. Lack of higher wages and the complaints of the adults discourages them from staying in the community.
- Housing is expensive in comparison to wages.
- Few full time employees receive benefits and only make minimum wage.
- Financial burdens on small businesses don't allow the money to supply benefits to employees.
- Before large employers can be attracted to the area, the economic health of the valley needs to improve substantially.
- Mount Snow is essential to the small local businesses surviving.
- There needs to be a way to attract people to the shops, etc. during the off-season. There are unique businesses (unlike the outlet type stores in Manchester) that need to be marketed in such a way to encourage people to drive the 35-40 minutes from more populated areas.
- 15-20 years ago Mount Snow produced about 50% of the revenue in the area, now it is only about 25% which shows the business that have opened are bringing more in more money.
- If they can concentrate on making it a four-season attraction, drawing more entrepreneurs to help create more businesses it may be a financial incentive for the young people to stay.
- They need more business support by organizations like VEDA or SBDC and fewer barriers brought about from Act 250 and state agencies like AOT and ANR. They cited an example of a proposed Car Wash that couldn't get past the process.
- Not all residents think the town economy is based on tourism.
- Consensus is a problem. 75% of the community supported the idea of the By-Pass but after the route was identified, didn't like the location.
- Operating hours are an issue. All shops close at 5:00 PM. If they would remain open longer and all stores would agree to the same hours, it could help all businesses such as the restaurants as well as draw the skiers after they get off the slopes for the day. To be successful, all business would have to agree and many don't want to be "dictated to" in terms of being told when to be open.
- The Chamber of Commerce and Village Association should develop an effective community development strategy.
- To attract single professionals, personal growth opportunities and recreational facilities such as fitness centers would have to be developed. Families are occupied by work and school activities but there is little for single people to do.
- Act 250 process is seen as a big obstacle in developing a business. The basic law is okay but rules and regulations implemented by AOT and ANR are perceived to be cumbersome.
- The schools need to be fixed and buildings in the community need to be utilized.

### **Key Challenges Summary**

1. Wilmington needs to reach consensus in the community as to where the town wants to go.
2. It must address ways to overcome the negative economic impact from Act 250 and Act 60.
3. The community should expand on tourist based economy to create a year round appeal and bring in other businesses.
4. Wilmington should establish the same hours for all business and extend beyond 5:00 PM.

## **Resource Team B – Village Downtown Beautification Issue, Travel & Roads Issue, and Municipal Government Services Issue**

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

*Micque Glitman, Deputy Secretary, VTrans*

*Steven Jeffries, Director, Vermont League of Cities and Towns*

*Fred Schmidt, Director, Vermont Center for Rural Studies*

*Chip Sawyer, Vermont Center for Rural Studies, (Scribe)*

### **I. Village Downtown Beautification Issue Focus Group**

Margaret Streeter

Joseph Cincotta

Carolyn Palmer

Sherry Brissette

Sonia Alexander

Al Wurzberger

Adam Grinold

Lilias Hart

### **Points of Testimony**

- Buildings need to be washed, but there is not enough money.
- Historic recognition for buildings is a priority (historic plaques, village brochure [one already exists]). There are 59 architecturally significant buildings in town—they are a great asset.
- Would like "postcard" village (more trees, street lights, trashcans, flowers, emphasize aspects of natural world).
- There are no incentives for business-owners to beautify. The Brattleboro Historical Society has been successful—could it serve as a model?
- Maybe there should be tax incentives to beautify.
- If people were that financially motivated, they would have sold businesses by now.
- Previous efforts have tried too much (i.e. riverwalk).
- There is no town direction. No sustained, organized effort.
- There are too many groups with unclear agendas.
- Making final town decisions is a challenge.
- A revitalization group has been organized. It has prioritized town problems (road lines need maintenance, roads and town are dirty, the walk/don't walk light is broken, there are potholes, recycling is needed, a new parking lot is needed, new walkways should be built, businesses are cutting down trees that block storefronts).
- Garbage cans are on the way. \$800 was donated through a citizen's will for downtown plantings. The community is getting \$500 twice a year from Merchants Bank.
- Take these little successes and build a foundation; work with what is available.
- Traffic and parking are common denominators in most town priorities. Traffic load is too big for Wilmington.
- Beautification linked to trucks.
- Trucks speed excessively and spray snow and dirt onto walks and buildings.

- People want a village, not a "truck stop."
- There is a need for traffic calming measures.
- Two pending projects are mentioned: adjust traffic light for calming/parking mitigation.
- Lack of parking is a problem. No motivation for municipal parking.
- There is hardly any parking enforcement.
- Relocation of town has been done before in town's history. Estimates are less costly than previously thought. However, there would be no state/federal funding due to historical building issues.
- Could move and beautify at same time.
- Bypass would go up too steep a hill. Trucks would only be noisier from strain.
- Forget both options and just enforce the speed.
- Wilmington is too far from central State government and economically insignificant. General Consensus is there is too much bureaucracy to get things done.
- Flood Control is a concern; "another '38 flood would take out half the town." Especially relevant issue with this year's snowfall.
- Getting Downtown Designation would be a great step.
- Forming Zoning and Design Control Area- there is no sign enforcement. Rewriting zoning is very difficult.
- There is a dedicated core of community people.
- Wilmington is one of many towns with these problems.
- State needs to maintain, clean, and enforce dutifully.
- Let's deal with what we have, and focus group hopes resource team can help.
- Town was designed at human scale. It's time for decisions.
- Take it one step at a time.

### **Key Challenges Summary**

1. Truck Traffic Issue: The community needs to make a final decision on town relocation versus a south side bypass versus working with existing traffic in the village by traffic calming and speed enforcement.
2. Downtown clean up, enhancement, and beautification would add to the attractiveness of the town.
3. Downtown parking facilities are of critical importance to the present and future health and vitality of the village center.
4. Wilmington has a strong distrust of state government, and being far from Montpelier; it feels unheard and underserved.

## **II. Travel & Roads Issues Focus Group**

*Paul Kasanoff  
Barbara Cole  
Matt Carruthers  
Richard Joyce  
Mike Penson  
Ken Spicer*



## Points of Testimony

- How did Rt 9 get classified as a truck route?
- Route 9 is never in good shape. There are frost heaves and it is often closed from snow and accidents.
- Truck traffic makes for accidents.
- East-west truck traffic has more deleterious effect than ski traffic.
- Could an alternate east-west route be found to lessen Rt. 9 truck traffic?
- Trucks use Rt. 9 to avoid tolls on I-91 and I-90 and to avoid traffic enforcement.
- There is a fear that an upgrade of Rt. 9 will mean even more trucks. “Will Wilmington become a truck stop?”
- Straighter roads lead to more speeding. The upgrade could also encourage sprawl.
- Wilmington MUST address truck issue. The streets aren’t wide enough for comfortable navigation.
- Trucks are noisy, especially when employing jake brakes as they enter the village.
- Traffic calming is needed. Trucks speed right on through town creating dangerous conditions for pedestrians.
- Weekend traffic is heavy.
- Lack of parking is a major issue.
- There is no parking in winter.
- There’s no apparent plan for parking. Not enough area in village center.
- It might be possible to use “Moover” in conjunction with external parking; or a walkway across the river.
- “People in government (all agencies) work in a different world.” They waste time and money (i.e. with charts and consultants).
- Bypass and Rt 9 upgrade are both being worked on by separate bureaucrats with separate budgets.
- All progress is put off until later while all kinds of money goes to support a bypass study.
- A member is frustrated with bypass EIS study. (One focus group member drew up his own plan.)
- The state’s right-of-ways interfere with the town’s ability to put up welcome signs or install traffic-calming measures.
- Act 60 and taxes are breaking up the remaining valley farms.
- “This community is ruled by tourism.”
- It is overdeveloped: “Providing more for tourists than for ourselves.”
- Some residents say “We ARE a tourist town,” and we need to take advantage of opportunities. These problems are not unique.
- Getting consensus is always hard.
- The bridge on Rt. 9 West is treacherous.
- Bridges should be widened and lighted and external walkways should be built.
- Some residents agree. Want bridge-widening outside of town.
- Wilmington is a tasteful, New England community “with diesel fumes.”
- Village is identity of town. People like that identity and need to preserve its character.
- Maintaining village character is a challenge.
- 20 years ago, these problems didn’t exist, but the town has changed a lot.
- Sprawl protection is an issue. It’s important to maintain beauty and the countryside.

A walking-only village center would be nice.

- Town relocation is best alternative, but is unlikely.
- Town is in danger of losing its rural and natural character.
- There is not much of a solution left other than bypass
- Wilmington is a town with growing pains; growth is inevitable.

### **Key Challenges Summary**

1. Rt. 9 must be changed to mitigate the destructive results of truck traffic through the village center. Either a by-pass or a major traffic calming effort is needed to address hazards irritations and in-town environmental degradations.
2. More parking is needed. The potential for parking on the south side of the river and building a walking bridge should be explored.
3. Active work could be done now to protect, maintain and enhance the beauty and character of the village center.

### **III. Municipal Government Services Focus Group**

Nicki Steel  
Deborah Boyd.  
Don De Jong  
David Wheeler

Jack Dolan  
Dani Dyas.  
Andrew Palumbo

### **Points of Testimony**

- There is a shortage in fire and rescue departments. It is hard to find enough volunteers. Both heads of households are working these days.
- The fire department and police are doing good jobs, considering their resources.
- It is hard getting people to serve on town boards or to fill vacant spots. People only show up for contentious issues. The same people serve as volunteers; new people are not invited, and may not feel needed.
- Very few town natives are serving on boards.
- “This is not a whole community. People have disconnected themselves.” There is not enough contact between different groups.
- There can be a lack of unifying vision. Many groups going in opposite directions; this can cause conflict—especially when a group works hard and then has its recommendations vetoed.
- Boards don’t talk to each other.
- Sometimes people don’t work well together.
- People forget others’ perspectives (i.e. tourists vs. nontourists).
- There are conflicts between different groups (i.e. new/old/tourist/local).
- There are many places (i.e. fitness centers) where “we” aren’t allowed. Some feel like secondary citizens at times.
- State-level bureaucrats HAVE made an effort to help Wilmington, but it is hard to get a comprehensive Wilmington audience and hard for the community to come to consensus.
- Especially with newcomers--there is no knowledge of zoning regulations, and many residents don’t know what services are available.
- There’s no center for services, so residents must travel to Bennington or Brattleboro

for services.

- Communication is a major issue; for example, people were not aware of boil-water orders.
- Some would like to see agenda and follow-up of meetings. People only hear about contentious issues. It is hard to be informed about candidates because there are few organs of information
- People don't find out about issues until it's too late- they come in to complain late in the process, and the work gets thrown out.
- The weekly newspaper is the only media outlet. There is no local daily newspaper, website, radio, or local-access TV. (However, more than half of those present have Internet access.)
- Wilmington Municipal government has to spend too much time dealing with Act 60/Act 250/various agencies/EIS process. Can't even think about providing additional services.
- The bypass study has drawn on too long.
- Taxes have gone up with nothing to show for it.
- Zoning frustrations come from lack of understanding. Zoning is a long process (i.e. sign ordinances).
- Selectboard has long priority list, but nothing gets done. Municipal government is short-handed.
- Wish there was more for youth to do. Moover is handy.
- There have been teen center startups, but they never work (not enough money).
- There is a successful skate park facility.
- Doesn't feel students have a way to communicate. No line to municipal government.
- A student volunteer credit program might work.
- People are possessive of parking. The town lost a leased space near cemetery. The lack hurts businesses.
- Increase police enforcement of trucks. Most truckers agreeable, but some are real "cowboys." They get paid by the trip, and they're in a hurry.
- They have to abide by speed limits too.
- Would like enough funding to fully staff for existing services.
- Wilmington needs a water and sewer upgrade. Initial hookups are expensive.
- It needs a better town garage (more space to store town equipment).
- The community could use more weekend activities (for kids)--trips to other places.
- A fitness center would be a great attraction.
- Wilmington needs more road, walk, and building maintenance.

### **Key Challenges Summary**

1. More volunteers are needed throughout the community.
2. The lack of communications between different groups and interests in town, and the difficulties following town governance, undermines town unity and the momentum of group efforts.
3. Youth issues are a challenge: There's a lack of things to do, a lack of a center for activities, and a lack of opportunities for young people to have a voice and positive leadership in community affairs.
4. Traffic enforcement and parking are major agenda points for the future.

**Resource Team C - Growth/Non Growth & Zoning Issues,  
Medical/Mental Health and Substance Abuse Issues, and Elderly  
Services Issue**

*Hal Cohen, Director, Central Vermont Community Action, (Team Facilitator)*

*Beth Humstone, Director, Vermont Forum on Sprawl*

*Chuck Ross, State Director, Senator Leahy's Office*

*Patrick Flood, Commissioner, Department of Aging and Disabilities*

*Bill McGrath, Executive Director, Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (Focus Groups I & II)*

*Jolinda LaClair – Chief of Staff, Senator Jeffords Office (Focus Groups III)*

*Jon-Michael Muise, Community & Business Outreach Specialist, (Scribe)*

**I. Growth/Non Growth & Zoning Issues Focus Group**

*Arnie Bernard*

*Laurie Cole*

*Jim Knube*

*Jim Bogard*

*Julie Moore*

*Sarah Friedman*

*Steven Adam*

*Mike Eldred*

**Points of Testimony**

- Wilmington has contradictory zoning.
- Does the community need more or less zoning?
- There are questions of compliance with existing zoning.
- Act 60 is disabling for growth – high taxes means that there is no money for growth.
- Most residents don't know what is going on; there is low involvement in the establishing zoning.
- Wilmington needs growth, but it should be controlled growth.
- Young people leave after high school.
- Prevailing wages are low; it is a service economy.
- Fire Department Volunteers work out of town so there is a gap in fire prevention.
- Wilmington has a low number of full time residents.
- Retired people move to town and do not volunteer to support community activities—they may not feel invited to.
- Wilmington can be a hard town to live in, locals want to keep the town the same, newcomers want to upgrade, and people that come and go don't care.
- The school is facing a crisis – student numbers are declining.
- Town needs to invest in infrastructure – attract high tech jobs
- 2<sup>nd</sup> home owners purchases are made elsewhere.
- People don't come to Wilmington.
- Wilmington has a poor image.
- Existing zoning is restrictive.
- It is difficult to get what you want for signage.
- There is less open pasture land today because of high taxes have forced sales.
- Wilmington needs affordable housing.

**Key Challenges Summary**

1. Community involvement is critically needed—especially volunteer involvement in

zoning development.

2. Livable wages are needed for the future--low paying jobs, the lack of new jobs, a small pool of workers (youth flight), and poor infrastructure, make it difficult for the town to attract good development.
3. It is difficult for the community to come to consensus because of the breakdown of residents: locals, natives, non-natives, 2<sup>nd</sup> homeowners, and visitors. So the community has not come to consensus about more zoning, less zoning, new zoning, or how to develop better zoning.

## **II. Medical/Mental Health and Substance Abuse Issues Focus Group**

Michele Doucette  
Ally Reilly  
Kathleen Fitzgerald  
Sarah Friedman  
John Cerrato

Julie Cunningham  
Sally Murphy  
Elaine Lange  
Miki Boni

### **Points of Testimony**

- All resources are from outside of Wilmington.
- Isolation in Wilmington sometimes leads to substance abuse.
- Wilmington can be a fragmented community, with distance between locals and transplants.
- People don't read newspaper and so aren't aware of all the issues in town.
- Alcohol and pot are casual drugs
- There is nothing to do—especially for young people.
- There are few employment opportunities and wages are low.
- Some drug use is condoned by adults.
- Young people leave for outside opportunities.
- People with problems slip through the cracks.
- Transportation in the region has made progress; there are still difficulties and isolation.
- There is some drug abuse, but it is not the crisis that exists elsewhere.
- There is a stigma of being seen at services offices.

### **Key Challenges Summary**

1. Because there is no senior center, youth center or center for services, many Wilmington residents, especially elders and teens, face isolation.
2. There can be a perceived fragmentation of community – where natives, transplants, youth, feel no common identity (this is a strong sentiment from non-natives); this can lead to alienation or a feeling of isolation.
3. People have to go to other places to access services; since they are not in town, the actual level of services is inadequate.

### **III. Elderly Services Focus Group**

*Noel Dery  
Chelsea Boyd  
Jennifer Fitzgerald  
Peter Morris  
Irene Reagan  
Joe Reagan*

*Lynne Matthews  
Pat Zack  
Marcia Dorey  
Mary Jane Finnegan  
Peg Morgan  
Peter Park*

### **Points of Testimony**

- The population of Wilmington is aging.
- There is a lack of reliable outreaching transportation.
- There are not enough volunteer drivers for elders.
- There are no housing facilities for elders to stay local—so they may be forced to move.
- There is a lack of affordable housing for elders.
- Because there are no local services, seniors must travel to services—this can be a hardship.
- Out of pride, many older residents don't ask for help.
- Many elders are unable to fully retire due to their financial situations.
- There is some duplication of services and some disconnection of services.
- There are no adult day care services.
- There is a lack of respite services.
- Because of the lack of local elderly housing facilities, elders die away from their community.
- There is too much paper work for health care, medications, etc. and too little help.
- The community needs a volunteer coordinator.
- There is a lack of handicap accessibility.
- Children leave community and no one is left to care for aging parents.
- The health care center is wonderful.

### **Key Challenges Summary**

1. Because of the lack of elder housing elders will die away from “home”. Wilmington should develop an elderly housing facility.
2. The lack of elder services means that seniors must seek help and support outside of community. They need to travel to Brattleboro or Bennington. Wilmington could develop an elder service center as part of the community center.
3. The community needs more volunteers and the organization to recruit and coordinate them.

# VI. VCRD Resource Teams

## I. Community Visit Day Focus Group Team

This team met with community members in nine focus sessions on  
March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2001

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## **II. Resource Day Visitors**

**This team met with Task Force Members to build action steps and review potential resources on May 31, 2001**

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