

Middlebury
Creative Communities Program
FINAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN



JULY, 2007
Vermont Council on Rural Development

Middlebury Area Creative Communities Program

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Overview of the Creative Communities Program	4
First Public Forum on the Creative Economy	6
Initial List of Project Possibilities	12
Priority Topics	16
Action Plans	18
Resource Team Recommendations	32
Participants	37
Resource Team Contact Information	38

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Introduction

The Middlebury area has all the components for being a center of culture and innovation. Area residents take pride in cultural assets ranging from the long-running Festival on the Green music series, to the After Dark performances in the slow winter and spring months, to a professional opera company. Middlebury was an early site of Vermont crafts work, including the ongoing presence of Frog Hollow Crafts Center. Arts activities are often connected with historic building preservation, for example in the Town Hall Theater. Furthermore, these resources both draw from and reach beyond Vermont as Middlebury College and its Center for the Arts presents both national and international performers.

Innovation within a rich cultural climate is one key to success for Middlebury. The downtown continues to support locally owned businesses that have devised strategies to remain competitive. Community initiatives such as the Addison County Relocalization Network (ACoRN) encourage new businesses in areas like local foods and alternative energy. The agricultural community contains examples of innovation within a traditional field, such as dairy farms producing energy through anaerobic digesters (e.g. Foster Brothers, Blue Spruce Farm).

Community members clearly feel both that they have a strong foundation for the creative economy and that they need to build from that beginning. The Creative Community forums consistently drew a large crowd of residents who came with many ideas. Middlebury has a large pool of engaged community leaders. Furthermore, the Creative Communities process brought in new participants at every stage, setting an important precedent for engaging volunteers to implement priority projects.

The community forums undertaken in early summer enumerated several challenges in addition to the resources already present. These provided a starting point for developing action plans. A full list of challenges and assets appears later in this report.

One challenge is Middlebury's physical arrangement. The densely built downtown creates a hub of activity, but has limited areas for expansion. Traffic and parking can be a problem, exacerbated by the river that runs through downtown with only one bridge crossing it. The college is not directly in the downtown, creating a disconnect between the downtown business community and the college campus community.

The project **Make Better Use of the River** can address some of these challenges. It creates new space by developing an underutilized asset. Activities, events, or simply interesting space along the river can create a reason for people to visit downtown from removed locations. The river also ties together downtown activity with less-urban activities, such as kayaking or canoeing.

Another challenge outlined in both Middlebury's application to the Creative Communities Program and comments from forum participants is supporting new, entrepreneurial businesses. The Middlebury Business Association, Addison County Chamber of Commerce and Addison County Economic Development Corporation all provide business assistance. At the same time, Middlebury has a relatively small taxable grand list and high taxes for those on that list. Real estate prices are high and continuing

to rise. A relatively high cost of living in Middlebury poses a problem in attracting, as residents, the individuals who might make up the entrepreneurial workforce.

The plan to **Establish a Business Incubator** would provide action directed specifically at encouraging entrepreneurs to develop new businesses in the Middlebury area. The plan to become a **Pioneer in Alternative Energy** also supports this idea. Developing local energy production capacity builds jobs and introduces new business avenues for farms, foresters, and others. At the same time, community-wide efforts to address energy management can establish Middlebury as a forward-thinking, creative place to locate.

Finally, Middlebury faces an issue shared by many towns with a wealth of creative economy activity: organizing local leaders to work collaboratively. The project to create a **Creative Economy Umbrella Organization** tackles this challenge. The networking and support provided by the organization can enhance current activities while setting the stage for future projects.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development has enjoyed working with everyone involved in the Middlebury area's Creative Communities Program. We would like to thank the Ilsley Public Library, Town Hall Theater and National Bank of Middlebury for providing meeting space. We would like to especially thank the Outreach Group that worked at a local level to build participation in the forums. This group included:

Jan Albers
Douglas Anderson
David Clark
Fred Dunnington
Gail Freidin
Robert Keren
Nancy Malcolm
Andy Mayer
Liza Sacheli
Nancy Slater Cobden
James Stewart

Nancy Malcolm chaired this Outreach Group and will continue to provide leadership as all projects move forward, for which we are grateful.

Accomplishments in the Creative Communities Program result from local leadership and community effort. However, VCRD is eager to support implementation. We suggest that you carefully review the Recommendations section of this report for concrete resources and ideas, and that you call upon members of the Resource Team (listed at the end of this report) and VCRD staff for help.



Overview of the Creative Communities Program

By 2003, the idea of the creative economy had become pervasive in Vermont, but few policy makers and local leaders had understanding of how to advance the opportunity of the creative economy systematically in state policy or in practice in towns throughout the state. The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) convened the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI) to craft a strategic plan that would coordinate the work of statewide leadership, the congressional delegation and state legislature, and provide community leaders with a guide to practical action. The final product, *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy*, was formally issued at the beginning of the 2005 Vermont Legislative session.

The VCCI report is available online at <http://www.vtrural.org>. It outlines the current strength of Vermont's creative economy and offers recommendations for increasing the contribution that the creative economy can make to the state's overall economic health.

One of the policy recommendations in the VCCI report was to establish a Vermont Creative Communities Program that would jumpstart local creative economy development projects by offering targeted assistance for community-led planning. VCRD received a grant from Jane's Trust to implement this program starting in 2005.

Today, the Creative Communities Program builds on both VCCI's findings and the successful Community Visit program that VCRD has managed for many years. Community Visits offer a way for communities to identify key issue areas and construct work plans for addressing selected public concerns.

The Creative Economy

Organizations around the world, including several in New England, have studied and set their own definitions of the "creative economy." Some definitions focus on the revenue generated by particular creative sectors that fit standard industrial codes, others focus on the individual qualities of creative workers, and still others attempt to pinpoint specific policies that spark creativity in *every* worker.

The Creative Communities Program considers all existing creative economy perspectives and uses a working definition with three key components that are common to most creative economy discussions:

•The Importance of Place:

Our discussion of "place" includes the natural, physical and community environments that form the foundation for creative economy work. Is this a place where people will *want* to work, live, and participate as active citizens? Is there a healthy mix of culture and commerce? Is there a strong community identity that distinguishes this place from any other?

•Creative Partnerships:

The 2004 *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy* report began to outline the breadth of businesses, individuals, and organizations that contribute to a strong economy. These contributors include groups that have not traditionally been thought of as business partners, such as arts, heritage, place-based, and other

(usually) not-for-profit organizations. They are core partners in economic development discussions. Who needs to be at the table to help build a strong local economy?

•Individuals' Creative Skills:

Businesses in every field generate a competitive advantage from new ideas and unique skills – how do we increase business' ability to capitalize on creative contributions? What type of environment attracts and retains today's top creative thinkers? What inspires creative thinking in *everyone* in a community?

The Creative Communities Process

The Creative Communities Program consists of three public meetings that generate the brainstorming, prioritized projects, and action steps detailed in this report. The goal is to bring a diverse group of community members to the table who are in agreement in their commitment to a strong future for their community and can begin to work together to identify key steps for ensuring that future. The timeline for Grand Isle County's process was as follows:

May 15th, 2007 – First Public Forum

In the month leading up to the first forum, a local steering committee helped get word out about the Creative Communities process. The first public forum combined presentations on what the creative economy means with brainstorming about how it applies to the Middlebury area and specific ideas for projects to advance local creative economic development. This list (p. 6) formed the basis for the prioritization session in the second public meeting.

June 5th, 2007 – Project List Review and Prioritization

The second community meeting reviewed and revised the list of project possibilities outlined in the first meeting. Through discussion, championing, and voting, participants identified 3 priority areas to become the focus of forming Project Teams and work plans in the third, and final, forum (p. 18).

June 27th & July 24th, 2007 – Project Team Working Day

In the final forum run by VCRD, Project Teams for each project set specific strategies, identified available (and potential) resources, and outlined a work plan for the next year around the projects selected in the second meeting. A Resource Team invited by VCRD facilitated the group discussions, offered ideas and resource suggestions and answered questions from their experience. The work plans based on this meeting and recommendations received later from the Resource Team appear in the following pages of this report. Middlebury held a second working day on July 24th to add a fourth project, a business incubator, and refine goals for the creative economy umbrella association.

I. First Public Forum on the Creative Economy

Ilseley Public Library

May 22nd, 2007

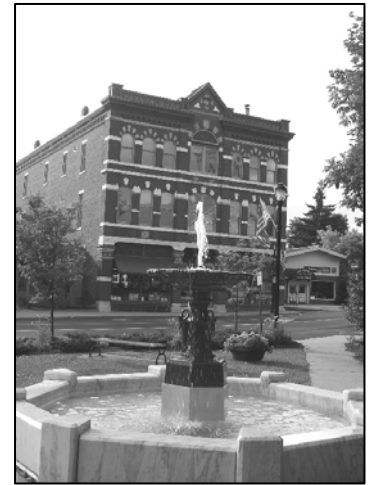
The first public forum in the Middlebury Area Creative Communities Program took place on the evening of May 15th with a capacity crowd at the Ilseley Public Library. The forum brought in several speakers who have led creative economy work to provide background on the concept. Helen Labun Jordan, Director of the Creative Communities Program, and Paul Costello, Executive Director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development, gave a general description of the creative economy and the Creative Communities Program process. Robert McBride provided a perspective from Bellows Falls, where he has worked for over a decade on the creative economy. While leaders in Bellows Falls have amassed considerable creative economy experience, they continue to look for new ways to maintain momentum. A report from Bellows Falls' recent collaboration with the Creative Communities Program is online at www.vtrural.org. Chip Evans, Executive Director of the Workforce Development Council and Chair of the Creative Communities Program advisory committee, shared a statewide perspective.

The introduction moved quickly to facilitated discussion of creative economy projects happening in, or planned for, the Middlebury area, what could strengthen these projects, and what new initiatives might be needed. The following notes capture the comments received during that discussion.

What are Middlebury's creative economy assets?

- The Town Hall Theater is a critical cultural asset that needs to be completed.
- The Festival on the Green is a major summertime event.
- There is a strong local system of healthcare and health center (Porter Hospital).
- Frog Hollow Crafts Center has been an anchor of the arts movement, including ongoing education work.
- There is a strong educational system from early childhood onwards.
- The educational system includes technical training and adult education, for example with the Hannaford Career Center and Workforce Investment Board.
- The Farmers' Market is an asset.
- There are two downtown heritage organizations that have statewide impacts – the Sheldon Museum and the Vermont Folklife Center (which is moving downtown).
- A locally owned (Middlebury National) bank serves the community.
- Middlebury College is a major educational institution and the campus is more accessible to the local public than at many other colleges.
- Skilled individual craftspeople, writers, artists and performers live in the Middlebury area.
- There are successful college and high school athletics with facilities that make it easy for the community to attend sports events.
- Middlebury has a strong Natural Food Co-op.
- Outdoor assets include TAM (Trail Around Middlebury), good parks and bike trails.
- Middlebury students get involved with local non-profit organizations.
- The college hosts great concerts.

- The Ilsley library is a wonderful community facility.
- The Middlebury area has a philanthropic spirit. Many people invest time and money in their community. VT Community Foundation is based here.
- The Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN) and Addison County Transit Resources (ACTR) are leaders in alternative energy and alternative transportation, respectively.
- In general, Middlebury is tackling global issues like peak oil.
- Otter Creek is a significant, though underutilized, natural resource.
- Good local restaurants and locally-owned businesses; nearly always occupied storefronts downtown.
- There are strong elderly services through Project Independence.
- The community television station is a great way to connect community, but many households can't access the channel (especially in adjacent towns).
- Downtown is dense with historic buildings (although this is also a challenge – see next section).
- Addison County celebrates its agricultural heritage and stewardship.
- Monument Farms has recently started producing a co-op line of milk that brings local milk to local consumers.
- The Middlebury region has high levels of community participation.
- New housing developments represent growth and attention to zoning directs that growth towards appropriate buildings that fit with their surroundings. The Marble Works is one example.
- The social service network, for example United Way, is strong.
- Strong services include hospice care and counseling service.
- There is a literary community with national recognition.
- Middlebury is seen as a true shire town of the county, a gathering place (again, this can be a challenge as well – see next section).
- Bike riding is particularly good, people can meet in downtown Middlebury then explore paths that reach further out.
- In general, Middlebury has great access to outdoor activities.
- Middlebury has an excellent location – access to Lake Champlain, the Green Mountains, and Burlington.
- Small businesses or individual professional practices have creative and proactive owners.
- There is a strong locally-owned newspaper.
- Elected officials are visible, accessible.
- The college is a draw for many residents who choose to locate in the Middlebury area.
- The college includes concerts, language schools and the art museum.
- Middlebury has won (in the past) national ranking as one of the best rural towns to live in.
- There is the After Dark music series and the Vermont Symphony Orchestra annual Pops Concert, sponsored by the Sheldon Museum.
- There is a youth (teen) center.



- Middlebury has an independent movie theater
- This region has high human capital.
- Local churches are active in Middlebury.

What are some of the challenges Middlebury faces in developing the local creative economy?

- The road system is a major impediment. Middlebury is at an intersection of state roads and there are several points of congestion that need alleviation. Rte 7 has terrible traffic. Specific problems are the need for a second in-town bridge and lack of downtown parking. State has failed to support solutions.
- Housing is *much* more expensive than it was a few years ago.
- The current tax base is not keeping pace with the scope of community projects.
- The county's farms face major challenges – perhaps crisis.
- Property taxes are very high, an impact felt especially in families with young children.
- Middlebury is losing socio-economic and cultural diversity because of living costs.
- An example of lack of tolerance, and lack of exposure to different cultures, is local attitudes against migrant workers.
- There is a lack of racial diversity.
- Middlebury, like Vermont, is in need of more creative approaches to energy management and production.
- Nearby (Williston/Rutland/Ticonderoga) big box stores draw away shoppers.
- It's been hard to get surrounding areas to think of Middlebury as a shopping destination.
- While many cultural and community assets exist, it is a challenge to create synergy between them.
- The college and town still have some way to go in integrating and removing unhealthy competition with each other.
- Middlebury doesn't want to be locked into a "quaint" image.
- Middlebury needs to present itself more strongly as a cultural center.
- It is difficult to reach the Marble Works
- Downtown expansion opportunities require creative thinking to address space constraints.
- The river is "a mess."
- Wages at local employers are not high enough for employees to live in town.
- Middlebury and its surrounding towns don't relate well to each other.
- It's difficult to attract former young residents to return to town or the college students to stay.
- The bus system is underutilized.
- People don't know where to find existing parking.
- It's difficult to get all groups in the community to participate together in common projects.
- Gaining local consensus is always a problem, which makes it difficult to undertake major projects.
- There is no night life.

- Many parts of the town, including retail businesses, shut down at 5:00.
- Youth have strong sports programs, but need more creative opportunities.



- It's a challenge to engage lower income residents in downtown life.
- There are no incentives for leaving cars out of downtown and walking / biking instead.
- Middlebury needs a bowling alley.
- There is a shortage of affordable child care.
- Internet, cell phone, and radio coverage are spotty.
- The Community Access television could do more for the community if more homes could receive the channel.
- There isn't much activity in winter (Middlebury is not a ski resort town).
- The region is not prepared to take advantage of future job opportunities using telecommunications.
- The telecommunications issue is indicative of a need for a larger paradigm shift that will prepare young people for the next generation of jobs.
- Another problem with short sightedness is slow action on global climate change. All of Vermont (including Middlebury) needs to drastically reduce CO2 emissions.
- A major demographic shift is the retired individuals coming to Middlebury.

What are projects that could strengthen the Middlebury area's creative economy?

- Optimize use of Otter Creek.
- Establish neighborhood activities – for example First Fridays with shops open late, music on the streets, etc.
- Help people turn their home-based crafts (for example sewing, quilting, wood work) into businesses.
- Find a better funding system for community services that support the entire county. Current funding puts undue burden on Middlebury residents. Everyone who uses the town services should have a part in paying for them.
- Pull together creative assets under one umbrella with a clear mission.
- Develop “third places” for socializing outside of the home and work.
- Support a festival that celebrates art, heritage, and history. One example is the Across the Bridge festival that occurred last summer. Another option would be “Middlebury Days,” with successive events that move around town over the course of a week.
- Host monthly networking opportunities for creative economy organizations.
- Help establishments that border the river better utilize that river position.
- Connect groups concerned with affordable housing.
- Invite children into community planning discussions.
- Establish a technology transfer program with the college.
- Launch a website with community events and places for online interaction.
- Finish work on the Town Hall Theater and use it to build a steady inflow of visitors.

- Ensure that laws and regulations protect local ability for self-determination and control over local assets.
- Form a locally-owned wireless broadband provider.
- Establish a visitors center.
- Increase transportation alternatives and increase participation in existing alternatives.
- Support local agriculture through a buy local campaign.
- Designate a sales tax-free zone or time period (town would have to repay taxes to state).
- Expand ways that local agricultural products can reach consumers, for example through more cooperatives such as Monument Farms.
- Open more public bathrooms.
- Create a community garden.
- Ensure that the Cross Street Bridge is built.
- Create a small business incubator.
- Provide canoe and rowboat rentals below Frog Hollow.
- Increase the number of venues available for displaying amateur artwork, crafts, and music.
- Develop a sidewalk / bike trail along Exchange Street.
- Start a year-round farmers' market that includes food, crafts, and music.
- Use the Internet as a tool to connect the community, reduce isolation.
- Make fitness activities affordable and accessible throughout the year.
- Use a walking trail and historical markers/ plaques to tell the story of Middlebury's past. Make the sites interpretive and interactive.
- Revive the Friday night bands on the green.
- Install hydropower on Otter Creek.
- Assist young people in returning to town.
- Help young people establish businesses and/or encourage businesses that will offer attractive employment to young people.
- Identify an area, like renewable energy, where Middlebury can be a pioneer and a model for other communities.
- Expand the Frog Hollow craft school.
- Find a comprehensive way to communicate with visitors, so that they can fully experience Middlebury without doing research before arriving (example – kiosk, visitors' center, flyers, signage, etc.).
- Improve family friendliness. For example, make stores more accessible for parents with strollers.
- Publish a resources book that gives things to do while in town.
- Find a way to include smaller businesses in commerce associations – for example by lowering Chamber dues or starting an entrepreneur-specific chapter.
- Provide tours and comprehensive information for local shopping as a way to promote buying locally without adding difficulties for the shopper.
- Increase use of the library as an information center.
- Learn from what other towns have attempted with their creative economy.
- Hold a visioning session of what Middlebury is, who it wants to bring in.
- Make downtown wireless and advertise that availability.

- Start a community-controlled radio station that provides community information (as opposed to a primarily music focus).
- Build a parking garage. Perhaps behind the library.
- Welcome students to the downtown.
- Remove student car privileges at the younger class years.
- Form a town / college collaboration on a municipal & community building that is an inviting centerpiece of activity – in a style similar to Newport’s municipal / state office building.
- Find creative ways to promote new, appropriate development in the dense downtown.
- Create areas to congregate along the waterfront.
- Found a college dedicated to art and design that is affordable for local residents.



II. Initial List of Project Possibilities

The May 15th forum produced stacks of notes from enthusiastic discussions. The Vermont Council on Rural Development looked through these first forum notes to pull together the first draft of a projects list. The projects listed express the specific ideas presented in February, combining very similar ones and adding in considerations that came up during the background discussion. They block out ambitious concepts that could provide a starting point for project teams to research and refine. VCRD did not filter projects based on feasibility or how closely they relate to the creative economy. Instead, this process simply organized the notes, combined small ideas into larger ones, and connected general observations to concrete project possibilities.

Revisions to the initial list occurred at a public meeting, on June 5th, where participants added new topics, rearranged the grouping of smaller topic ideas, and made corrections to each proposal. This public process produced the following, final proposed topic list.

Create a Year-Round Venue for Selling Local Foods and Crafts:

Summertime offers multiple venues, such as the Farmers' Market, for local food producers, craftspeople, and musicians to share their products and talents. However, the colder months lack these opportunities. Middlebury should establish a year round marketplace for the region, that includes indoor facilities. This project could increase sales for local food producers and craftspeople. It could also add cultural components, such as different ethnic foods or education about local heritage.

Establish a Business Incubator: The Middlebury area has many entrepreneurial, creative individuals. A business incubator could assist these residents in making their good ideas into business opportunities. One example given was helping home craftspeople make their crafts into a business. Another example was the need for affordable space for new enterprises. A third speaker offered the example of other towns that have successfully paired with local colleges and universities for incubator development. A feasibility study would determine what shape this incubator should take and what services it should offer to businesspeople in the Middlebury area.

Make Better Use of the River: The Otter Creek is a wonderful natural asset for Middlebury, but is not used to its best potential. Possible improvements include: cleaning up the river area, helping businesses with space along the river highlight this resource, creating a river walk that draws people to the river, and renting rowboats and canoes for exploring on the water. This Project Team should work with other groups involved in river efforts and implement a comprehensive plan for making the river into a true local centerpiece.

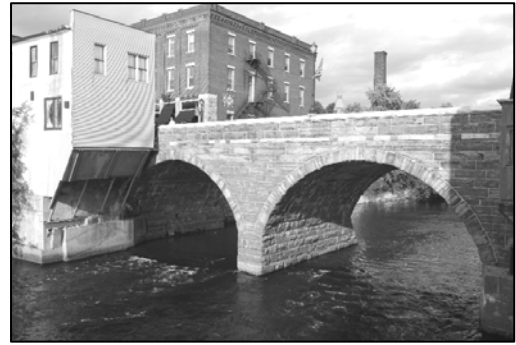
Host an Annual Event that Establishes Middlebury as a Creative

Center: The Middlebury area has multiple creative assets that could be better publicized to establish the community as a center of creative work. An annual festival could serve to highlight these assets for both local residents and the larger region. Two examples offered were the Across the Bridge Festival, which occurred last summer, and

the possibility of “Middlebury Days” with successive events that move around town over the course of a week.

Establish a Learning Center for Art and Design:

The Middlebury area should build on its strong educational system to found a statewide center for art and design, targeted towards older learners (potentially as Vermont’s first art & design college). In the short-term this project could work on expanding the existing crafts school.



Create a Middlebury Community Center: “Third Places” (places where people gather outside of work or home) can be key in building a unified community. Middlebury should develop its own third place in partnership with Middlebury College. A community building could become a physical foundation for ongoing community collaboration. One participant mentioned the Newport Municipal Building as an example of a multi-use, community-available place. This Project Team would need to determine what type of facility could best combine the interests of diverse community groups, and determine if this is possible within existing structures.

Improve Traffic and Pedestrian Flow: Middlebury suffers from several points of congestion in its traffic patterns and pedestrian flow. The problems range from state-level management of highways that converge in Middlebury to the simple challenge of navigating strollers through local shops. Access also needs improvement to areas outside of the immediate downtown center, for example to the Marble Works and to businesses that are not in the downtown. A Project Team should address ways that the community can deal with traffic issues, including parking needs, bike and pedestrian-ways, and the Cross Street Bridge project.

Establish Middlebury as a Pioneer in Alternative Energy Production and Management:

Middlebury already has the foundation for becoming a pioneer in alternative energy, including local organizations like the Addison County Relocalization Network and nationally-recognized projects, like those started by local activist Bill McKibben. There are also opportunities for further developments, like small-scale hydropower or improved alternative transportation. The need for local, renewable power ties in closely with the need to provide viable business opportunities for farmers, foresters and others in the working landscape who could produce the biomass to fuel future energy production. These production efforts should be matched by conservation and efficiency measures. Middlebury should become a model of community-based alternative energy planning.

Launch a Buy Local Campaign: Multiple pressures exist for local businesses in Middlebury. Specific examples include loss of local farms, pressure from nearby big box stores, and the lack of a reputation as a shopping destination. A buy local campaign could help reverse these concerns by making Middlebury the first stop for shopping in the region. Projects could include: marketing directed towards college students, developing a family-centered shopping experience, sales tax breaks, “First Fridays” type monthly open

houses with later store hours and entertainment, and/or providing a guide / directory to locally available goods and services. This Project Team has many options for the shape a buy local campaign could take.

Provide Affordable Fitness Activities Year-Round: This Project Team would have a dual mission of enhancing access to Middlebury's many outdoor recreational options and at the same time making alternative activities available during inclement weather. A particular focus should be on affordability.

Found a Community Creative Economy Umbrella Association:

Middlebury needs to take a broad perspective of its cultural, community and economic assets under the creative economy. This perspective will help the area to effectively promote the local creative economy. It will help build a platform for diverse community groups to come together, including children, low-income residents, Middlebury College, residents of surrounding towns, and young people interested in locating in the area. This Project Team would establish an infrastructure to unify local creative economy work. Additional suggested mechanisms include: mentoring and skills sharing programs, monthly networking sessions for area businesses, outreach to micro-businesses, support for keystone community projects (such as the Town Hall Theater), and a major visioning session for the Middlebury community.

Form an Affordable Housing Coalition: One significant threat to the creative economy in Middlebury is erosion of socio-economic diversity. Many groups around town are involved in this issue through affordable housing work. This Project Team could assist those efforts by convening all groups and individuals involved in affordable housing to set the foundation for ongoing collaboration and identify any gaps that the Project Team could help fill in.

Design a Virtual Community Space: The Internet provides a way to link people in a community and also reach those who are connected to the community without living there (for example young people who have recently moved away). Online tools can also make it easier to organize neighborhood activities. A specific application is an online community calendar. The Middlebury area should design a virtual, interactive community space that keeps people connected and can spread word about events, projects, and other items of general interest. At the same time, a key point of using the Internet to strengthen community is widespread high-speed access. This Project Team should also identify where gaps are and determine if a second phase should include local Internet provision to underserved areas.

Communicate Middlebury's Assets & Activities to Visitors: Many visitors arrive in Middlebury without a pre-planned agenda for exploring the community. Middlebury should do a better job telling its story to these visitors. Possible tools include a downtown visitors' center, a kiosk, walking trails and downtown tour, better signage, a resource book, and using the library as a center of information. This Project Team should design the most effective way to engage casual visitors.

Create a Task Force to Address Tax Policy: Many questions exist about the tax structure for Middlebury as a county center. Some participants wonder whether

Middlebury carries too high of a burden for county-wide services. Others have concerns that high taxes discourage new business start-ups and also foster tension with tax-exempt non-profit organizations. At the same time, it is not clear what alternatives exist. This Project Team should study tax issues in Middlebury and then embark on a clear course of action to bring tax policy in line with creative economy goals.

Preserve Special Places: While Middlebury continues to develop, bringing in building projects of all varieties, the need remains to preserve open areas that have special value for town residents. This Project Team would work to identify those valued places, and partner with local organizations to set out a secure plan for their future that recognizes both their unique value and the need of the town to have flexibility to grow and develop.

Convene a Conversation About Land Use: The Middlebury region is known both for its downtown area and the working, rural landscape that surrounds that center. The interplay of these two aspects of the region's character affects many aspects of development, from the types of jobs available to transportation systems to conservation policies to cultural heritage. This Project Team should convene a public conversation about land use, bringing in diverse members of the public, and identifying what will (and what should) shape the Middlebury region's landscape in the decades to come.



III. Priority Topics

Selected June 5th, 2007

The second community meeting for the Middlebury area brought participants back to the Ilsley Public Library. This meeting is the center point of the democratic decision-making that takes place through the Creative Communities Program, where residents select priority areas that will become the focus of yearlong project teams. This is a forum where ideas flow freely, arguments are offered, perspectives shared, and people have the opportunity to champion their beliefs and then vote their priorities.

The first step in the evening was to review the list of ideas drawn from the initial forum in May. Participants revised this list, added new ideas, and combined some closely related items to develop the final version listed in the previous section. Discussion then led each participant to mark their first choice from the list, a decision that started the process of considering priorities and removed some low-priority items from discussion. Finally, a combination of championing favorite projects and voting led to three priority projects. Several votes were close and a group of interested citizens requested that an incubator project also return to the table. This addition brought the total to the four priorities listed below:

Establish Middlebury as a Pioneer in Alternative Energy Production and Management: Middlebury already has the foundation for becoming a pioneer in alternative energy, including local organizations like the Addison County Relocalization Network and nationally-recognized projects, like those started by local activist Bill McKibben. There are also opportunities for further developments, like small-scale hydropower or improved alternative transportation. The need for local, renewable power ties in closely with the need to provide viable business opportunities for farmers, foresters and others in the working landscape who could produce the biomass to fuel future energy production. These production efforts should be matched by conservation and efficiency measures. Middlebury should become a model of community-based alternative energy planning.

Make Better Use of the River: The Otter Creek is a wonderful natural asset for Middlebury, but is not used to its best potential. Possible improvements include: cleaning up the river area, helping businesses with space along the river highlight this resource, create a river walk that draws people to the river, rent rowboats and canoes for exploring on the water. This Project Team should work with other groups involved in river efforts and implement a comprehensive plan for making the river into a true local centerpiece.

Found a Community Creative Economy Umbrella Association: Middlebury needs to take a broad perspective of its cultural, community and economic assets under the creative economy. This perspective will help the area to effectively promote the local creative economy. It will help build a platform for diverse community groups to come together, including children, low-income residents, Middlebury College, residents of surrounding towns, and young people interested in locating in the area. This Project Team would establish an infrastructure to unify local creative economy work. Additional suggested mechanisms include: mentoring and skills sharing programs,

monthly networking sessions for area businesses, outreach to micro-businesses, support for keystone community projects (such as the Town Hall Theater), and a major visioning session for the Middlebury community.

Establish a Business Incubator: The Middlebury area has many entrepreneurial, creative individuals. A business incubator could assist these residents in making their good ideas into business opportunities. One example given was helping home craftspeople make their crafts into a business. Another example was the need for affordable space for new enterprises. A third speaker offered the example of other towns that have successfully paired with local colleges and universities for incubator development. A feasibility study would determine what shape this incubator should take and what services it should offer to businesspeople in the Middlebury area.

IV. Action Plans

June 27th & July 24th, 2007

On June 27th, community members from throughout the Middlebury region organized into Project Teams to implement the ideas generated during the earlier strategic planning sessions. Each Project Team has a chairperson to run sessions for the next year. At the first team meetings on June 27th, committee members worked closely with facilitators and resource teams to develop step-by-step action plans, and to devise a list of human and financial resources to help achieve their goals. The resources appear in the Resources & Recommendations section.

A second meeting on July 24th brought together a Project Team for the business incubator and also finished the second half of plans for the Creative Economy Association.

This final phase of the program marks the time when residents begin the work of turning ideas into action. The Resource Team members, listed at the end of this report, are available to lend ideas as the projects move forward. Their initial recommendations are in the following section.

Establish Middlebury as a Pioneer in Alternative Energy

Production and Management: Middlebury already has the foundation for becoming a pioneer in alternative energy, including local organizations like the Addison County Relocalization Network and nationally-recognized projects, like those started by local activist Bill McKibben. There are also opportunities for further developments, like small-scale hydropower or improved alternative transportation. The need for local, renewable power ties in closely with the need to provide viable business opportunities for farmers, foresters and others in the working landscape who could produce the biomass to fuel future energy production. These production efforts should be matched by conservation and efficiency measures. Middlebury should become a model of community-based alternative energy planning.

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Action Steps:

1. Inventory Existing Energy Projects

- See initial brainstormed list (on the next page). What's missing?
- Research existing companies.
- Define what the Middlebury area does best.

2. Coordinate With Existing Projects & Groups

- Identify what pieces are missing from current work & where this group can contribute the most.
- Coordinate with other Creative Economy groups, particularly the business incubator group.
- Involve relevant town groups, like design review committee, education, planning.
- Does energy work in the Middlebury Area need a coordinating committee / more formal structure for coordination?

3. Communicate Basic Information About Energy Group

- Answer what it means to be an energy production & energy efficiency pioneer. Why should Middlebury be this pioneer?
- Develop a brand and logo.
- Find effective ways to get the message out. Possibilities include:
 - Weekly e-newsletter
 - Interactive website
 - Brochure
 - Weekly events
 - Presence at existing events like the Home & Garden show



These outlets can also be part of the communication & education listed in the following action step.

4. Develop Greater Community Value for Energy Conservation & Renewable Energy Production

Some ways to develop community values around sustainable energy might be:

- Continue ACoRN study of money & energy flows in and out of Middlebury area.
- Establish the connection between energy production and the local economy – perhaps a large visual like a thermometer to catch attention.
- Train weatherization experts who can help local homeowners conserve energy, save money and improve their house.
- Help individuals understand how they can have an important impact on energy use. Possibilities include:
 - Develop a “lowering our energy consumption” game with prize
 - Create clear feedback loops that reward changes in sustainable behavior
- Create a scoring system to rate green buildings.

5. Encourage Incentives for Conservation, Efficiency, & Renewable Production

Build on community conservation values, along with measurable returns from energy conservation and production (see study above), to put in place more mechanisms for local energy projects. Some brainstormed options are:

- Market the Middlebury area as a place friendly to environmental business.
- Draw in capital to finance local entrepreneurs
- Tax incentives
- Work with a business incubator to develop new energy-related businesses

Current Projects:

- Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN) promotes relocalization & local ownership of energy resources.
- Local biodiesel production cooperative
- Middlebury College will create a biomass plant. Nine acres of willow on marginal land being grown for energy.
- Addison County Regional Planning Commission has an energy committee, helps towns conserve energy in municipal buildings & with equipment, has a grass energy (pelletizing) project with Middlebury College.
- A local Global Warming Action Commission has a transportation focus.
- Algae to fuel projects are being pursued, including funding to define the carbon offset.
- Home and Garden show
- Project for biomass combined heat and power plant.
- Middlebury Hydro project (see also notes from River committee)
- Middlebury College has a “bright card” project to purchase carbon offsets from solar systems and farms.
- The College expects to be carbon neutral by 2016.
- Ripton is helping homeowners with weatherization.

Challenges:

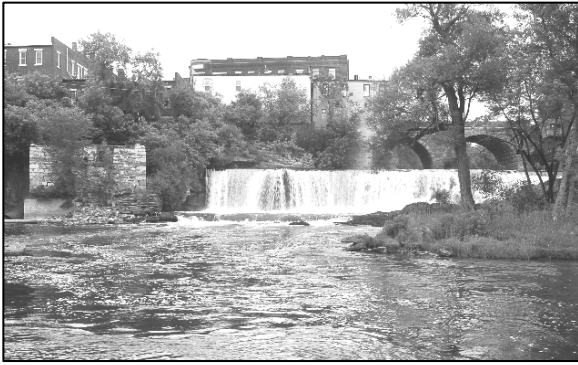
- Consumption levels
- Affordability
- Financing
- Cumbersome permits and regulations
- Lack of coordination
- Need to create markets
- Culture of inertia
- Lack of leadership
- Technology hard to commercialize, sometimes not economic
- Lack of understanding about impact of energy issues on local economy
- High risk for entrepreneurs
- Lack of protection for local ownership
- Lack of policies to promote change (e.g. tax benefits)
- Personal biases / pet projects
- Need to embed efficiencies
- Research needs

Make Better Use of the River: The Otter Creek is a wonderful natural asset for Middlebury, but is not used to its best potential. Possible improvements include: cleaning up the river area, helping businesses with space along the river highlight this resource, create a river walk that draws people to the river, rent rowboats and canoes for exploring on the water. This Project Team should work with other groups involved in river efforts and implement a comprehensive plan for making the river into a true local centerpiece.

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Action Steps:

1. Assess and Map Otter Creek

Identify and focus on cataloging the current assets and challenges of the 1.5 miles of Otter Creek directly in downtown Middlebury. This assessment should include a map of properties and an assessment of the health of the Otter Creek.

2. Identify a Large Flagship Project as Well as Several Smaller Improvements to Capture the Community's Interest & Show Movement

Examples of possible flagship projects include building a pedestrian boardwalk or solving long-standing impediments to opening key river access points. Examples of immediate smaller projects include improving view sheds to the Otter Creek and cleaning or marking river access points. One early project that should be accomplished is cleaning “the Eddy” – the backwater area that fills with debris.

3. Balance Economic Development and Natural Resources Enhancement

The Otter Creek must be a healthy river if it is to be a core part of downtown Middlebury's economic growth. Middlebury will need to balance initiatives to enhance the river's health with projects that capitalize on the river's view, location, and recreational assets.

2. Create a Business Plan

The business plan should focus on an achievable scale and include:

- A master plan for the river – ideally based on past planning documents
- Dollar figures and timelines
- Marketing
- Incentives for participation

See also list at end of notes for current projects and past studies.

The business plan should address identified obstacles that include:

- Limited number of key landowners that have not participated in past efforts
- The powerhouse and flume areas – both hazards and potential assets
- Health of Otter Creek – reducing pollution – specifically phosphorous, E. coli.
- Old wastewater plant
- Costs of river development work

5. Identify Needs of Community, Businesses and College

The development of the river should tie directly to the needs of the people of Middlebury. Assessing what these critical stakeholders want in their development of the river is key.

6. Identify and Pursue Funding Sources for Business Plan

See brainstormed resource possibilities list at end of notes

Possible Future Projects (not in Action Steps):

- Tour boat
- Riverfront arts
- Pest control
- Pocket parks
- Boardwalk (a circuit past Storm Café and Marble Works footbridge)
- Nature trails
- Canoe rentals at the 4-acre park
- Pedestrian bridge under the Main Street bridge
- Bike path
- Power House Restaurant
- National Bank property development
- View enhancements at Marble Works and similar to efforts already undertaken
- Adopt-a-Park
- Marketing / awareness campaign around river

Previous River Plans:

- 1970's
 - Study of townscape and river plan
- 1990's
 - Downtown Action Plan: Riverfront Park / Pedestrian Bridge
 - Economic Development Administration Study – A master plan for the river which was not completed. Cost estimated at \$3 million.
- 1997 Town Plan
 - Distinguishing between urban v. natural access

Projects Currently Planned / Underway

- Hydro Project
- New bridge plans
- Development of land behind library
- Former Ice House property
 - Expanding deck dining
 - Private effort for a conference center
 - Mr. Ups Deck
 - Kayak use – stone mill and storm café accesses.
 - Enhancements by CVPS on their land:
 - Canoe portage
 - Picnic Area

Resources:

Middlebury Area Resources:

- Middlebury College
- Schools

- Local Fundraising
- Town Committees – Rec Committee, Conservation Committee
- Private Association – e.g. Ducks Unlimited, Trout Unlimited
- Youth engagement
- Landworks (planning consultants)
- Vermont Community Foundation
- CVPS substation access
- Frog Hollow Potters
- Doug Lazarus
- Marble Works



Resources with Statewide / Regional Focus:

- Arts Council
- Vermont River Conservancy
- Vermont Community Foundation
- National Park Service Rivers/Trails Program (Jennifer White, Billings Museum)
- Agency of Transportation – Enhancement Grants
- Agency of Natural Resources – Clean & Clear Program, micro-hydro
- Examples of other towns – Stowe, Burlington, Brandon, Hanover, Springfield
- Winooski River Redevelopment: HallKeen (Real Estate Management and Investment) / Bill Niquette, InFill Group (Original Winooski planner) 802-264-4831
- Quadricentennial celebration for Lake Champlain
- Land and water conservation funds

Found a Community Creative Economy Umbrella

Association: Middlebury needs to take a broad perspective of its cultural, community and economic assets under the creative economy. This perspective will help the area to effectively promote the local creative economy. It will help build a platform for diverse community groups to come together, including children, low-income residents, Middlebury College, residents of surrounding towns, and young people interested in locating in the area. This Project Team would establish an infrastructure to unify local creative economy work. Additional suggested mechanisms include: mentoring and skills sharing programs, monthly networking sessions for area businesses, outreach to micro-businesses, support for keystone community projects (such as the Town Hall Theater), and a major visioning session for the Middlebury community.

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Goals for the Creative Economy Umbrella Association:

The Creative Economy Association has the overall mission to build an authentic cultural environment in the Middlebury area, similar to the goals of the Slow Foods movement in preserving authentic local cuisine. Europe has an example of similar efforts in the “Slow Cities” movement. Slow Cities attempt to dramatically improve the urban quality of life and residents’ sense of place <http://www.slowmovement.com/>.

Four initial goals of the Creative Economy Association are:

- Foster direct arts-to- business connections. This can take several forms, such as:
 - Building arts & culture activities that draw in visitors during business’ slow seasons
 - Ensuring that arts events direct patrons to local businesses (for example, dinner in a local restaurant before a show)
 - Providing business skills education for artists.
- Actively seek out and support connections between groups that could work together but have not had the chance to make the connection before. See above for arts-business examples.
- Serve as an arts council-type organization that pulls together artists & cultural organizations. In addition to useful networking within the arts / cultural community, this function would also lead to also better cooperation around projects of mutual interest and make it easier to form partnerships with organizations in other fields.
- Engage a broad cross section of the community in live cultural events.

Action Steps:

1. Select a Final Name for the Group

The current title of a creative economy umbrella association is confusing. It does not provide a clear description of this group’s goals. A stronger name and precise description can draw in more participants.

2. Re-engage People Previously Targeted for Creative Economy Work

Both the lists of people who attended creative economy forums and the list of people to invite to the forums provide a starting place for expanding the creative economy association group.

Everyone identified as key participants in creative economy development should receive regular invitations to this group’s activities.

3. Start a Regular, Informal Networking Opportunity

An enjoyable networking opportunity that brings together people from the arts, cultural organizations, business and other fields can spark creative new ideas. The project ideas suggested (see list at end of notes) could be a starting point for conversation.

4. Inventory Existing Events and Cultural Organizations

A starting list of what is already happening will ensure that this group does not reinvent the wheel. It will provide a starting framework to build partnerships and generate support around Middlebury-area creative activities.

This inventory should include how people find out about arts, community, and cultural events. For example, how is the town invited to college events and vice versa? Are common calendars easy to find?

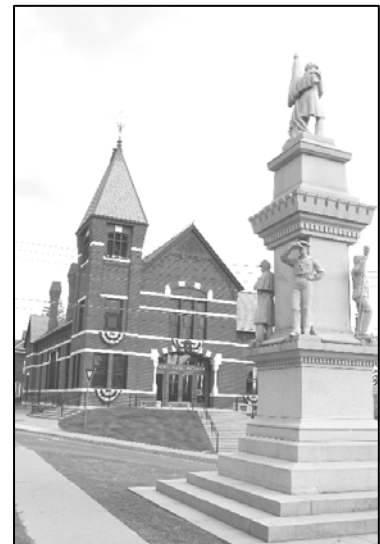
5. Start a Monthly “Open Middlebury” Night

“Open Middlebury” would combine the concept of art hops and holiday store hours – encouraging businesses to stay open late one night a month while providing additional activities to draw visitors to the downtown. Some important aspects of this event:

- Tie into the existing framework of the Chamber and Downtown Program
- Start small and get bigger
- Make it a regular event – it will probably take many months to firmly catch on; being predictable / reliable is vital.
- Offer a variety of events
- Invite Middlebury College to be a partner in planning. This event can bridge college and downtown. The targeted audience needs to include Middlebury students, faculty, and staff.

Other Possible Actions / Tools to Reach Goals (Brainstormed on 6/27 and 7/24)

- Classes to teach young / new artists how to establish a business
- Business training for professional artists
- Mentoring opportunities with area youth and /or low income residents
- Developing a creative brand and packaging Middlebury as a destination
- Increase activities in the 8-midnight time slot
- Position culture within the new MBA / Chamber merger
- Study “creative economy” in Middlebury – clearly define how arts & culture impact the local economy, and what we mean by “vibrant economy”
- Review creative economy projects that *didn’t* get selected as priorities and help some move forward.
- Network to provide volunteers for events that need them.
- Build a strong partnership with the college – for example cross marketing or bringing students in as performers / artists in town events.
- Form partnerships with local papers to promote arts and culture.
- Host a food event that ties in local foods and restaurants from both downtown and the larger region.



Establish a Business Incubator: The Middlebury area has many entrepreneurial, creative individuals. A business incubator could assist these residents in making their good ideas into business opportunities. One example given was helping home craftspeople make their crafts into a business. Another example was the need for affordable space for new enterprises. A third speaker offered the example of other towns that have successfully paired with local colleges and universities for incubator development. A feasibility study would determine what shape this incubator should take and what services it should offer to businesspeople in the Middlebury area.

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Defining the Incubator

The Project Team started by identifying key features for the incubator project for Middlebury:

- The incubator should be designed to support emerging innovative small businesses—creating jobs for the future.
- Based on needs established through analysis of existing services, and expressed needs of potential incubator clients, the incubator should provide or share technical services, technology, and potentially some common clerical or administrative services.

- Some services readily exist in Middlebury through the ACEDC and SBDC. These incubator-type services could be coordinated and strengthened.
- The incubator could work with other community groups, especially the sustainable economy/energy task force, to support businesses in that sector.
- Another area that could be targeted is the value-added agricultural products sector. The incubator could be designed with industrial kitchen facilities.
- The incubator could help garage, cottage, and basement businesses step to another scale.
- The incubator could connect to financial service opportunities, inform clients of options, and build ties to angel investment capital when appropriate.
- ACEDC undertook a major effort to analyze the opportunity for a Middlebury incubator 10 years ago. They found significant need for an incubator that could serve a diverse array of developing businesses and built a plan to develop a new incubator building. The project stalled for lack of federal funds—Middlebury’s demographics did not work well with HUD or EDA.

These objectives can be reviewed and refined as the project plan described below progresses, adding more input to the process.

Action Steps

1.) Hold a Town-wide Meeting for Input

Bring together small businesses, innovative businesses and start-up entrepreneurs to take their input on the kinds of services or supports that could help them succeed in Middlebury.

- This public meeting will require background work to get people thinking about incubator possibilities and reach the start-up and home-based business people who may not be part of traditional business communications loops.

2.) Develop a Board or Network of Advisors

This network can provide advice to small entrepreneurial businesses.

3.) Invite Additional Partners to the Table

Partners integral to the process include:

- Digital Bridges
- Fresh Tracks Capital
- Private equity capital managers in town
- Worth Mt. Capital
- J.P. Carrera’s real estate division head.

Other potential resources toward implementation include:

- Addison County Economic Development Corporation
- Small Business Development Center
- USDA Rural Development
- NBIA—the National Business Incubator Association
- Vermont Economic Development Agency
- Potential local bond development

4.) Inventory Existing Resources

Inventory the local, regional and statewide resources available to small businesses and which may connect with the incubator. Work to package their services in a “virtual incubator” as a step in the process of developing the physical incubator project.

5.) Begin to Build a Pool of Early-Stage or Venture Capital to Support Emerging Businesses

This capital can support businesses as part of programs connected to a physical incubator building space, but also be part of ongoing services to start-up businesses in advance of an actual building.

6.) Review Previous Incubator Plan

Share and evaluate the plan developed 10 years ago and examine other options for the design of a Middlebury incubator.

7.) Draft a Financial and Implementation Plan

The implementation plan for the incubator should include seed money to hire a director to drive that implementation.



Resource Team Recommendations

Resource Team members represent a wide array of professionals from across the state, and agree to serve as partners and advisors to the Middlebury area Project Teams. Their recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the Middlebury area's unique assets and needs. It is hoped that community members will turn frequently to these pages for concrete ideas, resources, and support. Resource Team members are eager to support the Project Teams as they begin their work. Call on them for help (contact information is found at the end of the report). The following are recommendations compiled from the Resource Team's comments.

Make Better Use of the River

One of the first tasks for this committee should be to set a clear understanding of which part of the river will be the initial focus, then to become familiar (and make the public familiar) with that section. The Action Plan implies that the downtown section will be the initial focus of work, although discussion in the forum suggested that the focus might be larger.

Even if the original focus rests on the downtown section, the Project Team should have a larger sense of the river. Information like navigational status, existing and potential portages around rapids and dams, and land ownership structures (privately owned, owned by utilities and railroads, conserved) will impact many project ideas. For example, if the group decides to build a kayak launch in downtown, that project's feasibility will depend on what's happening with the rest of the river.

The **Vermont Center for Geographic Information** will have options both for mapping the river area and for integrating that knowledge into community planning (<http://www.vcgi.org>).

The Connecticut River is a key resource to towns on Vermont's eastern edge. Studying the **Connecticut River Byways** program (<http://www.byways.org/>) or the **Connecticut River Joint Commissions** (<http://www.crjc.org/>) could offer ideas of what other places have done with a river asset. Three towns participating in the Creative Communities Program also participate in the Connecticut River Byways program – **Bellows Falls, Windsor and St. Johnsbury**. To get a sense of how they view their river as part of the creative economy, check their reports online at <http://www.vtrural.org>.

The **Vermont River Conservancy** can provide statewide information on river preservation (<http://www.vermontriverconservancy.org/>). Contact Steve Libby, from the Resource Team, for more information on their programs.

An important part of any conservation work will be the land surrounding the river. Some organizations that deal with these types of land issues are: **Vermont Land Trust** (www.vlt.org) and **Middlebury Area Land Trust** (www.maltvt.org), **Natural Resources Conservation Service** (<http://www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/>), **The Nature**

Conservancy, which has a Vermont division (<http://www.nature.org/>) and **Clean & Clear Watershed Coordinators** (Ethan Swift, 802-786-2503).

Many communities are planning recreational trails around their natural assets. Visit the Creative Communities Program reports of **Rutland, Richmond, Plainfield, and Hardwick** to see what they have planned (www.vtrural.org). Two commonly-used resources for trails are **Local Motion** (Chapin Spencer, 802-652-2453) and the **National Park Service – Vermont Programs** (Jennifer Waite, 802-457-3368). A resource for water-specific recreation would be the **Vermont Paddlers' Club** <http://users.aol.com/boatful/vpc.html>.

Middlebury town has already started to investigate hydropower options for the river. A basic introduction to the regulatory process for hydro is available from the **Agency of Natural Resources** at http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/fed/damsafety/hp_workshop.htm.

Establish a Business Incubator

A business incubator is a sizeable project. This project team will have to pay particular attention to its own organizational structure. The action plan currently gets to this point with lists of partners to invite to the table. It will also be important to think about different tasks this group needs to tackle and who should work on which component. This attention to structure will prevent the project from becoming unwieldy.

The **National Business Incubator Association** is a national resource for groups interested in creating incubator space. Their website is <http://www.nbia.org/>. They also host regular conferences that someone from this group might attend.

Middlebury has a unique grouping of assets for starting an incubator space. One challenge will be to complement, not duplicate, tools already in place. The task of inventorying and surveying identified in the action plan recognizes this need. The information gathering should also include a survey of the skills sets of Middlebury area residents, particularly those that are poorly matched with jobs today. This information will give the option of targeting incubator services to those businesses that provide new employment opportunities for underserved workers.

One component of the action plan is to organize existing resources so that entrepreneurs can easily determine where to go to meet their needs. This group should review online resources others have put together. The state maintains **www.thinkvermont.com** as a business resource. Communities have become more sophisticated in presenting community-wide resources. An example of a recently launched site is St. Johnsbury's page: **<http://www.discoverstjvt.com>**. Free tools also offer a surprisingly professional web presence. A popular one is **pbwiki** (www.pbwiki.com).

While business development needs are sometimes better met by programming alone than by an incubator building, a building can be key for some businesses that have high utilities demands and/or need equipment that is more affordable when shared. The **Food Venture Center** is one example of a place, where businesses can share equipment and

production facilities along with receiving technical assistance (contact Brian Norder at 802-849-2000).

The **Vermont Business Incubator Network** can provide contact information for incubators around the state that might serve as examples of different approaches. Committee members may want to visit some of these sites and talk to organizers and businesses to see what works, and what does not. Businesses in incubators will know what has proven effective and what might have been done differently. **AJ Rossman** would be a good starting point, his contact information is with the Resource Team. Incubators are listed online at: <http://www.vtbusinessincubatornetwork.com>.

USDA offers some assistance that might be applicable to incubator work in Middlebury – although new projects would have to be compared to the funding options that were considered under the last incubator plan. **USDA Rural Development's Community Facility** direct (or guaranteed) loan program can be applied to construction costs. A **Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG)** can fund a comprehensive development planning activity. More information is available at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/VT/vtnhcf.htm>.

The **Vermont Community Loan Foundation** provides loans for projects that will contribute to the local economy and strong community in towns around Vermont. Visit their webpage at <http://www.vclf.org> for more details.

Found a Creative Economy Association

Several communities, both in Vermont and elsewhere, have built platforms designed to unify local creative economy resources. Here are some examples:

- **Rutland** and **St. Johnsbury** chose to focus on building collaborations among arts and cultural organizations as part of their Creative Communities Program efforts. At the time of this report, Rutland has been working for a year on its collaborations and has several significant accomplishments (St. Johnsbury has just begun). The contacts for these efforts are, in Rutland, **Patricia Kreitzer** (kreitzer@sover.net) and in St. Johnsbury **Jerry Aldredge** (catamount_jerry@charterinternet.com).
- The **Randolph Area** also selected ongoing creative economy organization as a priority Creative Communities Program project. They brought structure to this effort through choosing initial projects for collaboration related to online tools for building connections and (as with Plainfield) building a resource directory. Contact Julie Iffland: (802) 728-6014.
- The **Plainfield Area** has started PACA (Plainfield Area Community Association) to build a platform for future creative economy work. They are starting with a skills / resources directory. Contact **Karl Bissex** at kbmt@ezcloud.com.
- The **Lake Champlain Islands** is building several community projects that bring together multiple businesses, organizations, and area residents around the creative economy. The **Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of**

Commerce could offer ideas for building these connections. Contact **Ruth Wallman** at 802 372-8400.

- A well-known example of bringing creative and cultural businesses together is **HandMade in America**, an organization formed by Becky Anderson to focus on the economic value of craft and the handmade object in Western North Carolina. Using creative partnerships, HandMade in America has helped stimulate momentum to revitalize entire towns. They conduct workshops on rural sustainable creative economic and community development. Go to www.handmadeinamerica.com.

An early challenge for many of the creative economy associations is how to communicate efficiently both with each other and with others who might be interested in their work. The Internet offers multiple options: e-mail lists, blogs, wikis (see www.pbwiki.com) and also free survey software to gather information (www.surveymonkey.com). At the same time, it can also be important to have a physical place to go for information. Plainfield, for example, will be keeping information in the former town clerk's office in the center of town.

Many towns have successful art hops that can serve as a starting point for exploring the "Open Middlebury" concept. Consider visiting the following locations:

- **Bellows Falls** (Contact Robert McBride – ramp@sover.net, 463-3252)
- **Rutland** (Contact Whitney Lamy - whitney.lamy@chaffeeart.net)
- **Brattleboro** (Betsy Gentile - betsgentile@verizon.net)
- **South End Arts and Business Association, Burlington** (www.seaba.com)

The **Vermont Arts Council** may have funds to facilitate relationship-building between arts and cultural organizations and the business community. Contact **Sonia Rae** at (802-828-5425).

Establish Middlebury as a Pioneer in Alternative Energy Production and Management

This Project Team will need to keep a broad vision but start with at least one or two more narrow practical projects to get results early that will keep and build momentum. Some towns like **Manchester** and **Hinesburg** have done early projects with lightbulb exchange programs, others have set goals to shut down idling school buses, worked toward the transition of town vehicles to biofuels, or improved electric efficiency in all town-owned buildings.

The committee may need assistance from facilitators over time. **Deb Sachs** of the **10% Challenge** helps facilitate community planning around energy efficiency and development throughout VT. She could be a useful consultant (865-7330) as the committee begins its work. **Efficiency Vermont** could lend expertise to consult with the committee on setting short and long-term goals. **Daniel Hecht** of the **Vermont Enviromental Consortium** could be invited to consult with the group on ways to attract or support entrepreneurs in the energy sector (802-485-2455) and **David Blittersdorf**

from **NRG** could also lend recommendations for future steps the town could take to develop this business sector.

The Project Team should connect with the work of the Incubator Project Team. That group is considering the sectors and businesses that might be attracted to an incubator setting and could think with the energy team about supporting incubation of innovative enterprises in this sector. Their Chair is Steve Terry.

To form a sense of how Middlebury fits into the larger scheme of energy production in Vermont, this Project Team can refer to the recently released Energy Digest from the **Vermont Council on Rural Development** (www.vtrural.org).

Colleges often provide good examples of communities that undertake a transformation of their energy footprint. **Middlebury College** is an obvious place to start. **Dartmouth College** has a new sustainability coordinator, **Jim Merkel**, with significant experience in this area - (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sustain/>). The **University of Vermont** has also launched significant energy projects, including on-campus energy production and biodiesel use. Their environmental coordinator is **Gioia Thompson** (Gioia.Thompson@uvm.edu, 802-656-3803)

As this Project Team reaches the Action Plan step of finding ways to change the value equation for energy, a resource for information could be the **Energy Institute at Vermont Law School** <http://www.vermontlaw.edu/elc/energy/>.

With work going on already in Middlebury on energy, global warming, biofuels development, etc. the Project Team should consider building its capacity to serve as a coordinator of all these efforts so that they stay in communication and they leverage each other's success. Toward that end, the Project Team might want to review its membership and consider inviting representatives from each town and regional group, and each significant business enterprise, working on energy/sustainability efforts. It can then serve as something of a hub of communications between businesses and groups. Part of the work of the committee then becomes providing leadership in getting the word out through the media about the great things happening in the Middlebury area around these developments. This effort will inform and educate residents, but also build an identity for the town that can attract more entrepreneurs and like-minded business enterprises.

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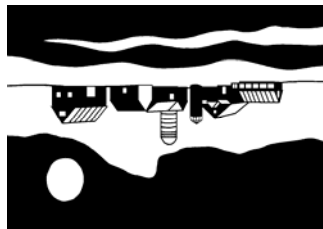
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