

HARDWICK

Creative Communities Program FINAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN



JULY, 2006

Vermont Council on Rural Development

Hardwick Creative Communities Program

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Introduction

The Hardwick area is “getting creative with its local economy”. This declaration provided the title for May’s public forum and neatly summarizes activities underway around Hardwick. The town is in an exciting phase of growing local business while at the same time ensuring that future growth won’t threaten Hardwick’s strong community character. Residents are taking stock of what they have already, where they want the economy to go, and how the creative economy can help reach those goals.

An early brainstorming process with the Creative Communities steering committee, composed of interested individuals from the area, listed many creative economic assets already in place for Hardwick. For example, the *Galaxy Bookshop* is a local business that is also an established part of community life. Affordable space provides a point of entry for new businesses, such as the successful *Vermont Glass Workshop*. Agricultural production builds a link to Vermont heritage while at the same time experimenting with different business models, such marketing specialty cheeses. The farmers’ market is an important component of a buy local movement not only for food but also products from local craftspeople and artists. Hardwick is keeping pace with evolving technology, including *VT Link*, a local Internet provider.

With strong starting points already outlined, Hardwick could look for ways to support future success stories.

Everyone on the local Creative Communities steering committee acknowledged that Hardwick serves as a center of activity for its neighboring towns. A distinct downtown section, places to eat and shop, local performances at the Town House, and new pursuits like a start-up soy processing facility and community garden space, help define this role. The steering committee used the Creative Communities process to ask how Hardwick’s function as a center could be enhanced and how creative economy projects could benefit the entire area.

Hardwick’s unique economic and cultural history provides a deep foundation for local pride combined with a strong sense of place. This foundation appears in all types of activities, both formal and informal. As one steering committee member pointed out, winter-time skating in a neighbor’s backyard is more fun and creates a stronger connection to Hardwick than common pastimes like watching TV. Every time we create positive, memorable experiences, it helps build a place where people want to live, work and locate businesses.

Finally, Hardwick area residents want a way to support a strong and traditional downtown. From big issues like the fire in November, 2005, to the impression that fewer people walk from store to store meeting friends along the way, many people worry that local activity and self sufficiency have been eroding. They want to do something about it.

Through almost two months of discussions, surveys, e-mails and knocking on local business owners’ doors, the Hardwick Steering Committee found consensus on 4 projects that can advance creative economic development. **Sprucing Up Downtown** will provide a platform to unite businesses and residents, and reinvest everyone in downtown beautification. It will signal

that Hardwick is a place with a growing economy and encourage people in the area to spend more time in the downtown. Creating a **Business Incubator and Arts Space** builds off of the existing entrepreneurial climate and makes small size an asset as individuals have room to explore their strong ideas, translating them into profitable business. Restoring an historic building as a home for the incubator could anchor a signature space in the downtown. Both **Developing the Future of the Town House** and **Expanding Recreation in the Hardwick Lake Area** contribute to quality of life in the Hardwick area. These projects will enhance activities available to the community, including venues that can bring community members together on a regular basis.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development and Creative Communities Program are deeply grateful to those who helped carry out the creative economy planning process in Hardwick. Local leadership is what has made, and what will make, this effort a success. We would like to particularly thank Addy Smith-Reiman who has led the creative economy effort from preparing the application to chairing the Creative Community process. Thanks also go to Rob Mermin and Lisa Sammet for volunteering time to entertain children at the May 20th forum, and to the Buffalo Mountain Coop and Halleluia Bakery for food. We are grateful to the Town House, Memorial Building, Depot, G.R.A.C.E., and Galaxy Bookshop for providing meeting space. Finally, the local steering committee played a significant role in outlining the process for Hardwick and gathering the input used to select final projects, for which they are due many thanks.

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 a 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?

Background to Hardwick's Participation in the Creative Communities Program

Hardwick is one of five pilot communities in the Creative Communities Program at the Vermont Council on Rural Development. The other four initial participants were: St. Albans, Rutland, Rockingham / Bellows Falls and Windsor. A press conference in the Vermont State House kicked off the program in December, 2005. Work began with Hardwick in January, 2006.

The thinking that led to Hardwick's application to the Creative Communities Program began in spring, 2005, when the Preservation Trust of Vermont co-sponsored a workshop for Hardwick non-profit organizations that were headquartered in historic structures. The intent of the gathering was a fundraising training, but everyone quickly realized it was the first time the leaders of the area's arts and heritage non-profits were sitting together at the same table. This group decided it would be to their advantage to meet on a monthly basis to check in with one another, open doors to collaboration and partnerships, and share grant sources, fundraising tips and general information.

Initial participants in the monthly meetings included the Hardwick Historical Society, GRACE, the Jeudevine Memorial Library, Hardwick Trails Committee, school system, Chamber of Commerce, Town Manager and NeKArts / the Hardwick Town House. As these community organizations saw the benefits of sitting down together to talk about their accomplishments and future plans, they began to consider further creative partnerships, such as with the local agricultural community, small business owners, and professional artists.

Hardwick anticipated that building a network through the Creative Communities Program could reach several community goals:

Creation of a stronger exchange of commerce with the surrounding communities: Craftsbury, Greensboro, Walden, Woodbury, Wolcott, Cabot and Stannard.

Celebration of Hardwick's assets and increased pride for the community.

Collaboration and communication among businesses, schools, non-profits and the town.

Increased community participation in activities or on boards.

Development of sustainable succession plans for current community projects.

The Creative Communities Program offered one vehicle for building on existing community engagement to situate Hardwick as a strong leader in the region's economic and cultural life.

The Creative Communities Process

The first step in the Creative Communities Process for Hardwick was to invite a steering committee that represented a range of local perspectives and could guide the process of planning for creative economic development. A brainstorming session with the group that first applied to the Creative Communities Program produced dozens of possible names, which were narrowed to a list of 10. Addy Smith-Reiman volunteered to chair the steering committee. Committee participants were:

Wendy Besset
Kenny Davis
Annie Galliard
John des Groseilliers
John Mandeville
Andrew Meyer
Dennis Pudvah
Addy Smith-Reiman
Linda Ramsdell
Ron Wiesen

At their first meeting, the committee voted to revise the standard format of the Creative Communities Process, expanding the tasks of the steering committee while reducing the number of public meetings from three to one. An outline of the format followed by other communities is available in their community reports at <http://www.vtrural.org>.

The centerpiece of the Creative Communities Program process for Hardwick became a public meeting on May 20th, 2006, to outline preliminary action plans for 4 project ideas.

A process of input gathering in Hardwick and surrounding towns preceded selection of the final four projects. While the steering committee ultimately selected the projects, they attempted to choose topics that represented shared interests expressed in the comments they received from people in the area. Below is a sample of these comments; full comments are included on pg. 23.

Comments on Potential Projects

“I would like to see ever increasing focus on local products, with an emphasis on the growers and craftspeople that operate with a sustainability focus. . . I’d like programs to foster entrepreneurial development of businesses and growers that align with these values.”

“Hardwick needs to focus on making the city, and the surrounding area, more attractive. Buildings, parks, public areas, all need some attention and a sense of vision for what the town’s roots are and how this can be expressed in terms of the physical characteristics of the town.”

“While the cultural shows at the Town House interest a select portion, [we need to] teach the kids and they will follow or remember in their older years. . . the artsie crowd does not interest Hardwickians nor does it seem to fit in the ‘creative, cultural, and natural assets’.”

“What I don’t want to see is more tourism promotion. I moved here because tourism trashed my hometown, driving up prices and driving out local business as everything became structured only around those tourist dollars and tourist weekends. . . focusing on what we as a community need but can’t buy here seems much more practical and healthy to me . . .”

“Recreation here is important. The trails here are wonderful and we need to market them to bring folks into our town to use them and shop here.”

“Students feel they have few opportunities to gather in the community. There was a teen center, but that initiative has folded. There also seems to be a dearth of work opportunities during the summer and after-school time.”

“Downtown revitalization and responsible commercial landlords.”

“More dining and entertainment options in the evening.”

“I see the Hardwick Trails committee and the larger recreation committee as a worthy endeavor. The recreation committee is well positioned to meet the needs of a wide range of community interests from youth to seniors. The trails committee has demonstrated its ability to make things happen. I feel their efforts will produce results for every aspect of the Hardwick community from the health of our community members to developing important economic draws for those outside of our community.”

“I would like for our local economy to be self-sufficient, grow from within and consistently with the current culture – that is, retain its core rural Vermont values. . . I believe we should seek to retain the mix of small villages with distinct characteristics differing from one another, many rural areas where people reside successfully in relative isolation, and the one smallish center of Hardwick. . .”

“More people buying local.”

“We should develop a service that enhances the ability for local organic farmers to reach their markets. By using the overall resources of the community and working together with local organic farmers, we can greatly increase the capability of our local organic farmers to both expand their businesses and attract other organic farms. These joint community and organic farmer services could include such things as expanded advertisement, marketing, and sales, and reach far beyond any that the farms would be able to achieve individually.”

“I think that most people, especially the people who run government, don’t understand how valuable culture is to the community, that cultural events and institutions bring in money to the community and also make the place a better place to live, which helps the whole community to prosper.”

“Make the Hardwick Area a magnet for innovative agricultural production, processing, and distribution by building on its existing and developing base in soy, cheese, organic dairy products, and organic vegetables.”

Priority Projects

On May 4th, 2006, members of the Hardwick steering committee met to review notes on proposed topics for the May 20th forum and choose the final four project areas.

These projects reflect the majority of comments submitted through e-mail, surveys, and conversations with the steering committee. They also pinpoint areas where progress is clearly possible, but where there are not major projects already nearing completion. They avoid listing general concerns and instead choose specific objectives. The priority projects are:

Spruce Up Downtown Hardwick:

A long list of projects can be placed under the title of “sprucing up” Hardwick. Particular projects to be considered, and implemented, by this committee are: restoring the Art Park mural, revitalizing the park area between the Gazette and diner buildings, creating better access to the river below the swinging bridge, expanding community gardening and other green space uses, improving signage and helping decorate downtown storefronts.

Develop the Future of the Town House:

The Town House should be a center of creativity, events, and fun for all ages in the greater Hardwick community. This committee would consider sustainability for the Town House in addition to expanding its programs. Particular questions include activities aimed at younger ages, parking, space for community events, and a possible film series.

Expand Recreation in the Hardwick Lake Area:

Today’s recreation opportunities in Hardwick serve residents of all ages from around the region, improving quality of life for many people. This committee would consider how Hardwick can expand recreation by using the area around Hardwick Lake. This area offers an excellent setting for future trails work.

Create a Business Incubator and Arts Space:

Hardwick can strengthen the local economy with an incubator that provides space for start up businesses, entrepreneurs in the arts (including space for art displays), and a program that encourages youth entrepreneurship. The committee formed to work on this project should consider the Centennial Building as a first choice for a central location. This incubator will not only support individuals’ business development but, through youth programs and artists’ displays, also create a vibrant center of activity in the Hardwick area.

Action Plans **May 20th, 2006**

On May 20th, groups of interested area residents met in Hardwick to discuss basic plans for the four priority projects selected on May 4th. A Resource Team of individuals from around the state facilitated these discussions and offered advice or answered questions as needed. The day-long event included breakfast from Halleluia Bakery and Buffalo Mountain Coop, entertainment for children by Rob Mermin, Lisa Sammet and NeKArts, and a potluck lunch. At the end, Hardwick had laid out the foundation for work over the next year, including setting chairs for Project Teams and beginning to build a volunteer base to move each project forward.

Spruce Up Downtown Hardwick

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Information Gathering: (see also forming partnerships)

1. Set area included in this group’s definition of “downtown.”
2. Find out what is happening with the Jeffords money.
3. Gather specific town plans for:
 - Sidewalks (any options for trees/ sidewalk plantings?)
 - Lighting
 - Parks
 - Bridge/ Bike Path that leads to community garden area
4. Find out more about what happened in Bristol (perhaps a field trip?)

Forming Partnerships (potentially as committee members)

- Select board & Chamber of Commerce– instill a vision of business promotion being an integrated whole that includes a vital downtown
- Planning Commission
- Banks
- Businesses that benefit from an attractive downtown
- VT Housing / Lamoille County Housing Coalition
- Government (Lucy Leriche)
- Farmers’ Market
- Community Gardens
- Recreation Committee (trail tie-in)
- Organizers of NeK Arts sculpture exhibit

Downtown Beautification Association This association would be open to any members, but should particularly target downtown businesses and downtown residents.

1. Projects
 - a. Add color.
 - b. Open up storefronts so that they are appealing and clearly open.
 - c. Encourage holiday window displays.
 - d. Draw attention to the range of local businesses operating in downtown; create the first impression of a vital local economy.
2. Town Policy Issues
 - a. Provide a design review committee / design guidelines as a way to help with decisionmaking (that would be helpful, not punitive).
 - b. Open business revolving loan fund to projects for aesthetic improvements.
3. Possible Long-Term Projects
 - a. Preserve / revitalize historic buildings.

Pedestrian Flow Hardwick should recognize that walking through your community strengthens that community.

1. Slow traffic through downtown, particularly at intersections. Possible solutions include:
 - a. “Bump outs” by crosswalks & better markings
 - b. Island at intersection in front of bookstore
 - c. Vertical design elements (eg trees) along main street
2. Improve pathway leading to community garden space.
 - a. Start by checking current plans for pedestrian bridge
3. Explore options for bringing the Farmers’ Market closer to community garden areas.
Things to consider:
 - a. Parking (including for farmers’ trucks)
 - b. How to support the Market if it has a change in venue – for example, could there be extra promotion through a downtown link?
4. Explore walking options along Lamoille River.
 - a. Including connections by the Daniels Building
 - b. See also river access under “Park Space”
5. Mark existing walking systems / new pathways with clear signs.

Park Space

1. Art Park
 - a. Primary goal = fix the mural. It’s possible that the mural will need regular repainting (potential for community involvement) or a new wall built in front of the current mural wall that is a better surface.
Question – Who does / should own the Art Park?
2. Space beside Hardwick Gazette & diner buildings
 - a. Provide attractive places to sit
 - b. Add greenery that doesn’t block the view of the river
 - c. Highlight the fence (made by local craftspeople)
 - d. Tie in access to the river
3. Tree / shrub plantings around town

- a. Double check that sidewalk tree plantings are not feasible
- b. Look for small spaces around town that could have a planting

Resources

Urban Forestry Program (VT)

VT Arts Council/ NEA

VT Transportation Agency Enhancement Grants

Municipal Planning Grants

NVDA Webpage (note transportation section) <http://www.nvda.net/NVDAasRPC/grants.html>

Future of the Town House

The Town House should be a center of creativity, events, and fun for all ages in the greater Hardwick community. This committee would consider sustainability for the Town House in addition to expanding its programs. Particular questions include activities aimed at younger ages, parking, space for community events, and a possible film series.

Challenges:

- Organizational
 - Transitioning away from 1 person volunteer as Executive Director (to a paid position)
 - Spreading work to avoid Board member burn out
- Fundraising
 - For Phase 3 restoration: \$140,000 needed – at least half remaining to be raised
 - Remaining needs include lighting and sound (performers need to bring own, which limits who will come)
 - All money has been in grants – no capital campaign or local fundraising
- Publicity – advertising appears in many places, but some people still don't notice
- On-street parking is inadequate
- Furthering role as a community gathering place, including but not limited to music/theater performance. Examples of popular events: Auction, Regional drama festival
 - Official role in town (currently includes town meeting)
- 2007 5-year plan review

Looking Forward

Primary Functions to Be Met by Individuals:

- Volunteer Management – Recruiting & Managing
- Programming – Diverse interests met with performances, visual arts, and external programming
- Publicity
- Communications
- Fundraising – Including membership
- Budget
- Ambassador Role

Action Steps:

- Need Community to Care
 - Collecting information on what community wants for TH
 - Knocking on doors
 - Building List Serve
 - Booth at Spring Festival
 - Events (like music series) that bring people from further away

- Examine other models
 - Including roles that TH could play beyond performing arts
- Highlight town's commitment – for example TH as traditional town meeting site
- Build on existing momentum
- Complete Phase 3 Fundraising and Repairs
- Expand and improve publicity around events
 - Gain more attendance
- Outreach to youth (Note: did film survey and offered to let youth program)

Local Organizations for Partners:

- Business Community (including beyond Hardwick) – Banking, insurance, stylists, co-hosts, sponsors and underwriting
- Other interest groups with common threads
- Presentation to surrounding towns
- Appropriations available?
- NVDA Grants – can fit new \$ to projects
- Kiwanis, PTA, affinity TH groups
- Present schedule at every Hardwick selectboard meeting
- Knights of Columbus
- Hardwick Planning Commission
- River Arts – especially school programs

Expanding Recreation Trails around Hardwick Lake

Today's recreation opportunities in Hardwick serve residents of all ages from around the region, improving quality of life for many people. This committee would consider how Hardwick can expand recreation by using the area around Hardwick Lake. This area offers an excellent setting for future trails work.

1. Gather Information

- a. Investigate dam costs and repair needs
- b. Assess natural resources in lake area
- c. Determine details of property ownership

2. Build Hardwick Trail Connections

- a. Road on East Side of Lake
- b. Rail Trail
- c. Cross country skiing area
- d. Bike trail
- e. Build additional trail systems
A charette may be needed to create a clear vision for this trail system

3. Build and/ or Improve Lake Access

- a. Billings Road
- b. Along Lamoille from Cottage Street
- c. Build a ramp on west side (Rte 14)

4. Develop Signage to Recognize Access and Trails

5. Bring Community to the Lake Area To celebrate work accomplished and build support for the process.

Ideas include:

- Community walking tours
- Boat Regatta
- Events targeted to youth

Potential Resources / Resource Needs:

- a. Talk to someone who is an expert at marketing recreational resources
Kingdom Trails; Lyndon Recreation Department (might take on a project)
- b. Get a program plan that moves from visualization to development, possibly with contracted assistance (e.g. TJ Boyle, David Raphael)
- c. Tie in with other popular recreation – e.g. Craftsbury Ski Areas
- d. Financial Resources:
 - Community Development Block Grants
 - Municipal Planning grants
 - VT Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation Trails Funding
 - VTrans

Incubator for Business and Arts

Hardwick can strengthen the local economy with an incubator that provides space for start up businesses, entrepreneurs in the arts (including space for art displays), and a program that encourages youth entrepreneurship. The committee formed to work on this project should consider the Centennial Building as a first choice for a central location. This incubator will not only support individuals' business development but, through youth programs and artists' displays, also create a vibrant center of activity in the Hardwick area.

Possible Directions for Project:

- Arts studio space
- Space for small businesses to develop
- Shared office costs – eg. For copier, building, etc.
- A way to highlight the many micro-businesses in the Hardwick area & give support for further business development
- Housing for artists
- Gallery space and gathering space
- Youth spaces
- Restaurant / Café/ Brew Pub potentially tied into natural foods, local foods
- Classes
- Possibility of community radio
- Connections to agricultural focus of other local incubator efforts

Action Steps

1. Assess Centennial Building and other potential sites. Build a ballpark figure on costs.
2. Start communications with the owner of the Centennial House to evaluate opportunities for purchase.
3. Tour other incubators. Invite people who have created them to meet with the committee.
4. Assess the sustainability of the business case for a Hardwick incubator, including a planned management structure.
5. Survey local businesses for their interest in being in an incubator and identify needs they would like an incubator to meet.
6. Build partnerships with Housing Vermont, LHP, GHP.
7. Start conversations with potential funders.
8. Investigate and develop ownership structure.

Potential Resources

- a. Preservation Trust of VT can:
 - Inventory the status and costs of the Centennial Building
 - Provide a small grant for planning
 - Arrange a field trip to tour incubators
 - Provide technical assistance at some meetings(See Doug Porter in Resource Team contact information)
- b. Community Development Block Grants
- c. NCIC
- d. USDA (RBEG and RBOG)
- e. Municipal Planning grants
- f. Vermont Community Foundation
- g. NVDA – potential partner
- h. Freeman Foundation (ask Preservation Trust of VT)
- i. Housing VT/ LHP
- j. Vermont Congressional Delegation

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 Hardwick Project Teams. Their recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community's unique assets and needs. It is hoped that community members will turn frequently to these pages for concrete ideas, resources, and support. The following recommendations are compiled from Resource Team members who worked with project groups on May 20th as well as additional comments from individuals with experience in the project areas.

Spruce Up Downtown Hardwick

For the Art Park mural, the **Vermont Arts Council** could provide a grant through their Opportunities Grants program. Find out early when the deadlines will be. <http://www.vermontartscouncil.org>. **Robert McBride** in Bellows Falls helped commission a mural for the entrance to his town. He can be reached at (802) 463-3252.

The **Vermont Youth Conservation Corps** provides assistance for downtown work that involves park space or conservation (for example along the river). Call (802) 434-3969.

Look at other successful downtown efforts. **Bristol** is one example, and (on a larger scale) the **Main Street Project** in Johnson. A **community development coordinator** could be key to ongoing investment in the downtown – maintaining projects started through this process, gathering new ideas for projects, and building an overall vision that ties an appealing downtown to a strong local economy. Talk to **Lea Kilvadyova** ((802) 635-2611) for a perspective from Johnson. Call **Joss Besse** at the **Vermont Downtowns Program** ((802) 828-3211) for other success stories.

Hardwick could look to Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) or Municipal Planning Grants to support **downtown revitalization**. CDBG accepts applications every 2-3 months, but the Municipal Planning Grants are only accepted in September. Call the Agency of Commerce for more information at (802) 828-3211.

Friends of Burlington Gardens has given mini-grants to Hardwick's community gardens. More might be available for downtown beautification projects that include garden space. Contact **Jim Flint** at (802) 658-5733.

St. Albans recently did extensive work on Taylor Park as a centerpiece of their downtown. Through the course of this work, they developed a list of resources for supporting green space in Vermont communities. Contact **Jeff Young** (e-mail jeffeyoung@yahoo.com) for information.

When towns bring in landscape architects to design the streetscape they often find funding in transportation grants. Check **VTrans** and the **NVDA** webpage (note transportation section) <http://www.nvda.net/NVDAasRPC/grants.html>

Two helpful websites / organizations could be the **Project for Public Spaces** (<http://www.pps.org/>) and **National Main Street Program** (<http://www.mainstreet.org/>).

Mike Buscher and **David Raphael**, two of the Resource Team members, have experience in downtown streetscape design and could be excellent ongoing resources for this project (see Resource Team information at the end of this report).

Develop the Future of the Town House

The May 20th forum was a good starting point for discussing the future of the Town House. The current Town House Board (and interested community members) should have more in depth discussion about their future goals. For facilitation assistance and/or recommendations contact **Paul Costello** at the **Vermont Council on Rural Development** ((802) 828-6024).

The **Vermont Arts Council** offers a grant for Local Arts Partnerships. Planning grants of up to \$2,500 and implementation grants of up to \$10,000 / year are available to arts organizations starting working partnerships with other community organizations. Contact the VT Arts Council's Director of Community Programs (802) 828-3778

Talk to the **Vermont Arts Council** about towns to visit who have done similar projects around arts-oriented facilities as a centerpiece for the community. A good starting point could be talking with **Gerianne Smart** and others in Vergennes about what they did to restore their Opera House and make it a key part of community life ((802) 877-2524). This team could also call **Alex Aldrich** ((802) 828-5420), Executive Director of the Vermont Arts Council, or **Doug Porter**, from the Preservation Trust of Vermont ((802) 658-6647), for ideas of people to speak with.

An important part of moving forward with Town House plans will be the level of support local town governments are willing to invest in its future. A possible plan could include outreach to the community to not only tell them about the Town House but also hear what they would like to see included as part of Town House programming. This type of community engagement could be conducted by the Project Team or by hired consultants.

The **Center for Rural Studies** is one group that performs surveys and evaluations for non-profit organizations, they could be a place to start for exploring what options exist to generate a useful profile of community interests (<http://crs.uvm.edu>).

Expand Recreation in the Hardwick Lake Area

Springfield has a frequently used riverside trail. A visit to Springfield and to talk with the group that put that trail together could be useful.

Chittenden County's Regional Planning Commission created a master plan for paths that could serve as a model. For questions about trail planning in Chittenden County, **Chapin Spencer** at Local Motion, (802) 652-2453, will either know the answer or know who to ask.

VT Conservation Youth Corp may be able to help build, clear, and clean up trails and access points. Call (802) 434-3969.

College students often can assist with trail building – either the physical building or mapping out the trail systems. Check with **Sterling, Johnson State** or **Lyndon State** colleges to see what partnerships might be possible. At **Dartmouth College**, geography majors design, create and print trail maps.

The **Vermont Recreation Trails Grants Program** of the **Agency of Natural Resources** may have funding. Matching grants are offered for maintenance of existing trails and the construction of new trails on state, municipal and private lands where a recreational need for such construction is shown. These grants can also help prepare and print of trail maps and more. Contact Sherry Smecker, grants administrator at (802) 241-3690; she can also advise you on additional resources.

Funding for outdoor recreation and trails is available through the State of Vermont **Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation**. For details, explore their site at <http://www.vtfpr.org/recgrant/trgrant.cfm> and <http://www.vtfpr.org/reclwcf/index.cfm>.

The **VT Agency of Transportation** (VTrans) administers a Bicycle/Pedestrian program that provides advice and connections to grant resources. Amy Bell is the coordinator: 828-0457.

The **Bikes Belong Coalition** (BBC) assists local organizations in developing bicycle facility projects with grants of up to \$10,000. Bikes Belong Coalition, 1368 Beacon St. Suite 102, Brookline, MA 02446-2800, (617)734-2800 tim@bikesbelong.org.

The **Vermont Bike and Pedestrian Coalition** could be a resource (<http://www.vtbikeped.org>).

In fall 2006, Becca Roof, currently Executive Director of the Coalition, will begin a consulting business on bike and pedestrian trails. Her contact information will be: Becca Roof, Going Green, 802-279-4037, becka_roof@pobox.com

The **National Park Service Rivers & Trails Program** helps plan and implement local trail, greenway and river protection projects. Contact Jennifer Waite, VT Projects Director, NPS Rivers and Trails, PO Box 178, Woodstock, VT 05091, 802-457-3368, Jennifer_waite@nps.gov.

If part of a trail system includes conservation projects near rivers, then you can also check with the **Natural Resources Conservation Service** which works with farmers and landowners to do stream bank erosion work. Contact Bill Forbes at NRCS (802) 775-8034 for information. You could also check with your local **Watershed Association**.

Create a Business Incubator and Arts Space

The first step behind incubator planning should be to identify Hardwick's goals for the incubator space. There may be trade offs between different emphases. Some incubators target new businesses that would not have located in their town otherwise. Other incubators primarily

support the development plans of existing small businesses. Often incubators will serve community development goals, like bringing focus, activity and excitement to downtown through an attractive building. There are dozens of different goals that incubators can meet; clarity will be needed to define this project and the benchmarks for success. For some ideas of what is happening around the country, look at the **National Business Incubation Association** webpage (<http://www.nbia.org/>).

As part of setting goals, it is important to identify the target clients for the incubator. One of the most important aspects of an incubator is that it provides networking opportunities for participants. There has to be some common ground between these individuals before they can take advantage of the network. Furthermore, Hardwick needs to know, going into the project, that demand exists among their target clients.

An often overlooked part of incubator development is setting an understanding for when a businesses reaches a stage to leave. To remain sustainable, an incubator needs to smoothly move old businesses out and new ones in.

A USDA Rural Development **Rural Business Opportunity Grant** (RBOG) might be able to fund comprehensive development planning activity. These grants can exceed \$40,000 and could serve as a starting point for a development strategy around assisting emerging businesses. Contact Rhonda Shippee at (802) 828-6033.

Entrepreneurial development (specifically addressing technical assistance needs identified by small and emerging businesses) can be addressed by accessing grant funds through the USDA Rural Development **Rural Business Enterprise Grant** program. Specific market research, accessing new business skills or conducting feasibility studies for market expansion are a few examples of how the program can be used to foster the expansion of small and emerging rural businesses. Sherry Paige of USDA can help consider the feasibility of an application: 828-6034.

Sometimes business development needs are better met by programming alone than by an incubator building. However, 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, where businesses can share equipment and production facilities along with receiving technical assistance (contact Brian Norder at (802) 849-2000).

Another aspect of renovating a building for incubator space is that it opens more funding opportunities - particularly if the investment will go towards rehabilitating historic and/or downtown buildings.

Vermont has many examples of incubators that this Project Team could learn more about.

The **Vermont Community Development Association** recently did a tour of Randolph that included the town's work on incubation space. Contact VCDA at (802) 229-9111.

The **Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies** is an example of a new high-tech incubator. **Tom Rainey** led the start of VCET and has experience with business incubation in other states as well. <http://www.vermonttechnologies.com/>

There are several incubator-type arrangements in Vermont specific to the arts. For example:

- **Studio Place Arts** in Barre combines studio, gallery and classroom space. Janet Van Fleet, from SPA, joined the Windsor Resource Team for the Creative Communities Program and their arts-specific incubator discussion (see <http://www.vtrural.org>).
- The **Rockingham Arts and Museum Project** in Bellows Falls (Robert McBride, 802 463-3252) offers an example of incorporating artists' living space with retail space in a downtown building as part of a larger community revitalization project.
- The **Burlington Community Land Trust** established an artists' cooperative including living space in Burlington through their affordable housing programs – the **Rose Street Artists' Cooperative**, http://www.bclt.net/c_rosest.shtml.
- The **Tip Top Bakery Building** provides reasonably priced studio space in a building that generates a “creative collaborative environment” in White River Junction (Matt Bucy, <http://www.tiptopmedia.com/>).

Many incubators become useful only after businesses reach a certain size. **Invent Vermont** provides a virtual incubation service, helping inventors who are not yet at the size to enter an existing incubator. Invent Vermont provides workshops, technical assistance, networking and socializing opportunities and serves as a virtual incubator (<http://www.inventvermont.com/>). A larger example of virtual incubation is the **National Business Incubation Association** (<http://www.nbia.org/>).

Community Development Block Grants can provide funding for incubators. Check with Molly Dugan at the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (802) 828-3211

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.

Mark Blanchard is the **Small Business Development Center** expert on incubators. ((800) 464-SBDC).

Written Comments on Project Ideas

Many Hardwick area residents wrote in comments on their ideas about creative economy projects, which are collected below. Verbal comments are not included in this list. These comments formed the basis for the Steering Committee's selection of 4 priority projects.

1. What are your goals for the local economy? What do you not want?

Ever increasing focus on local product, with an emphasis on the growers and craftspeople that operate with a sustainable focus in terms of managing their resources and creating output.

Programs to foster entrepreneurial development of businesses and growers that align with these values.

Marketing and communications that highlight the above, as a Vermont State of mind, that this area in particular successfully champions and models.

Stimulate the economy without over trafficking etc.

I would love to see Hardwick grow more businesses that Hardwickians really need. Shoes, clothes, toys, pets and pet food, farm supplies are all things I travel elsewhere to purchase. A decent family restaurant would also get a lot of our families' dollars.

Of course, entertainment is sorely missing from the town too. Wouldn't it be nice if Hardwick had a movie theater, or bowling alley, or indoor playground for those winter months (I used to drive to Berlin on a regular basis to go to McDonalds, just so the kids could play on the climbing structures inside!), or indoor swimming pool, or skating rink, or night club, or a pool hall, or a combination of several of those!

I would like to see increasing high speed internet access in the area.

What I don't want to see is more tourism promotion. I moved here because tourism trashed my hometown, driving up prices and driving out local business as everything became structured only around those tourist dollars and tourist weekends. The hardware store in my hometown is now a gourmet food shop, and it is the ONLY business left in town. There is no grocery store or gas station. But every home there sells for \$200,000 or more.

Focusing on what we as a community need but can't buy here seems much more practical and healthy to me than drawing in outsiders to spend at the few places we have here for them.

As a farmers' market vendor, one of the frustrations I have felt is that there is a certain group of "market-type" customers, those who value alternatives to the grocery store, and care about keeping their dollars local. There is a huge population that doesn't stop at the market to shop.

I want businesses and retail stores that are viable, I want our children to look at Hardwick and understand that it can offer them options for staying here and being successful. I want a variety of businesses: from manufacturing, service and retail. I think we need to explore what would be viable here. I think many people would be very happy to not have to drive out of town more than 1/2 hour to purchase anything. However, many of us do drive further than that to work everyday. Could these businesses open here and be successful? I don't have the answer to that.

Certainly, a big box store is not what I am interested in, so I don't know if a small store can compete, even with Wal-Mart being 45 minutes away in Berlin, or even 1 hour away in Williston and Littleton.

Recreation here is also important. The trails here are wonderful and we need to market them to bring folks into our town to use them and shop here.

I want a local economy that's sustainable and growing. Encourage new types of businesses - innovative ideas. A celebration and appreciation that the arts and creative minds build strong communities. The Welcome Mat is out - both for people (including those passing through) and businesses. What if we painted a welcome mat on the sidewalk in front of the door to every business???

I don't want chain stores - let's keep the money in local circulation. I don't want absentee landlords who do not care about their buildings and tenants

I want to see more collective interest from local businesses run by Vermonters and don't want to see an imbalance between natives and transplants.

When I think of the local economy I come back to how the schools are preparing students for employment. I would like to see a stronger connection between the school (specifically after-school programs) and students. Something that moves beyond the endless gifts of financial support.

Because the Hardwick area in near future will lack some above average or even average commercial required infrastructure (eg. Interstate access, rail, reliable shipping, etc.), we should work very hard to improve the "quality of life" features in our area. We should try to greatly improve the quality communication access - cell phone, emergency services systems, rural available broadband, etc.

I would like for our local economy to be self-sufficient, grow from within and consistent with the current culture - that is, retain its core rural Vermont values. I believe the current growth rate of about 2% should be maintained. I believe we should seek to retain the mix of small villages with distinct characteristics differing from one another, many rural areas where people reside successfully in relative isolation and the one smallish center of Hardwick. I would like to see the commercial growth of Hardwick to be isolated to the current downtown, Rt 14 south, Wolcott Street and the corner of Rt 14 north & Rt 15.

In order to improve our "quality of life" features, we should work equally hard to develop more commercial and industrial businesses as well as recreational and family-life features.

We need to attract higher level education services from UVM or any College/University.

We need to expand the vocational educational facilities we have now and will have in the future with recently voted approved the building of a vocational school annex in Hardwick.

I want the small businesses to survive. I do not want us to get big box stores. I want the town to retain its small-town flavor, but be successful in that. Have Main St full with lots of thriving businesses that can employ a few people each.

All Downtown buildings to be occupied and all store fronts renovated and the buildings be repaired. The town should physically look welcoming-planters on the outside of buildings

(similar to the co-op) look much nicer than the flags that hang down and blow into your face as you walk next to the buildings.

Slow but steady growth in creative directions, increasing the Hardwick Area's reputation as a supportive arts community while NEVER becoming a "cute" tourist town.

I would like the people in the area to realize that supporting the ARTS brings much into the area, that having a good arts and cultural base gives a lot to the life of the community and should be supported.

Downtown revitalization and responsible commercial landlords.

Revitalize the downtown area and make it more conducive to independent stores opening and being supported.

Engage teens & young adults in constructive ways, rather than chasing them off.

More positive attitudes.

More people buying local.

Downtown revitalization.

Community pride.

Younger people able to stay with viable employment!

More dining and entertainment options in the evening.

More job opportunities-light industry or high tech service.

Economic improvement without sprawl or selling off of our soul (i.e. no Walmart, etc.).
More business venues on Main Street.

Local, local, local! More locally owned and operated (sustainable and environmentally friendly) businesses (that mostly deal with foods).

I would like the people in the area to realize that supporting the ARTS brings much into the area, that having a good arts and cultural base gives a lot to the life of the community and should be supported.

More locally-produced food and goods. More local self-sustaining businesses

More small businesses.

A vibrant community with flourishing local businesses-a place to eat would be great!

2. What are your major concerns about the Hardwick area in relation to culture, the community and economics?

The need to change the image of this area. I personally know a great communications professional who has successfully redefined the image for other entities facing a similar challenge to Hardwick. The Hardwick area in particular needs to tackle its image problem head on. It's a great area, and it needs to start repositioning public opinion, and letting the world know.

Along with the above, Hardwick in particular needs to focus on making the city, and the surrounding area more attractive. Buildings, parks, public areas, need some attention, and a sense of vision for what the town's roots are, and how this can be expressed in terms of the physical characteristics of the town.

While the cultural shows at the Town House interest a select portion I've seen no interest in developing kids programs. Teach the kids and they will follow or remember in their older years.

My concern is that we become an even bigger bedroom community and folks don't see this town as their community anymore, but think that way about the one they work in. We need to work hard to keep people connected to Hardwick.

We should continue to bring various aspects of the community together. Ten and fifteen years ago - the schools, churches, businesses, and community organizations didn't talk to each other very much - much less work on projects together. That has changed for the better and I would like it to continue to grow.

The Town House has become a focus for cultural activities, especially since the renovation. This is an inspiration to continue to bring the arts to public view.

Students feel they have few opportunities to gather in the community. There was a teen center, but that initiative has folded. There also seems to be a dearth of work opportunities during the summer and after-school time.

The lack of belief or confidence that "we" can succeed on our own without an external "white knight" coming to our rescue. (I consider this our number one issue.)

Lack of infrastructure services needed for expanded commercial businesses. Lack of an educated work force. Lack of local investment resources. The lack of cooperation and mutual respect between Craftsbury, Greensboro and Hardwick communities.

I think that most people, especially the people who run government, don't understand how valuable culture is to the community, that cultural events and institutions bring in money to the community and also make the place a better place to live, helps the whole community to prosper.

There are good ideas for projects for the community, but money is a problem. Time and

people willing, people able, to work on these ideas. I think we are all stretched out too thin, those of us who are doing things to help the community.

We need to get those in the creative economy to realize the importance of local politics and to get involved. Reactionary local politics curtail cultural/economic growth. Think local, act local is a good bumper sticker, too. Run for office.

3. What specific projects would you like to see worked on?

Black powder shoots, fishing and hunting programs, skateboard park, basketball court, tracking seminars, the list is endless. Of course these would be donated time or reimbursed by the town. The artsie crowd does not interest Harwickians nor does it seem to fit in the "creative, cultural and natural assets.

And for cryin out loud- take out the senseless dam!

I think the most important thing you can do is work on a marketing program. Build it and they will come...I don't think so. The money the town got to revitalize the downtown and the money for the bike trails (Woodbury - Hardwick and the swinging bridge down to the community garden) are wonderful. Once the Lamoille Valley RR becomes a usable trail we need to figure out how to get folks off that trail and into town. Can Hardwick become a recreation destination? If so, wouldn't all our retail businesses benefit?

The High School is teaching a wonderful curriculum called REAL (Rural Entrepreneurship) and a component of that is looking at the community. I would like to see this part of the curriculum offered in the evenings for local adults.

I think the creation of an incubator space for small, emerging businesses is an interesting idea - I know that NVDA created one in Newport and I believe it has been very active and has created quite a few jobs in the process.

I am very interested in housing that Hardwick residents can afford and the redevelopment of old, abandoned buildings.

The Centennial House. List of venues with contact people and fees: for people and organizations that want to use space in the community for events and projects. More gallery space in town. Encourage businesses to spiff up their stores/store fronts (i.e. - fresh paint, clean windows, etc)

More sculpture in Hardwick. An art gallery at the old Freezer Lockers in E. Hardwick. Looking toward more balance between natives and flatlanders in the future, we're all in this together, the lifeboat approach, ie:survival!

I see the Hardwick Trails committee and the larger recreation committee as a worthy endeavor. The recreation committee is well positioned to meet the needs of a wide range of community interests from youth to seniors. The trails committee has demonstrated its ability to make things happen. I feel their efforts will produce results for every aspect of the Hardwick community from the health of our community members to developing important economic draws

for those outside of our community.

Events at the Town House & Depot automatically improve the local economy. Attendees have dinner, buy gas, or minimally stop at Hays quick stop for bottled water. But, one reason I give a pass to events there is the horrendous parking problem! Surely the people living on Church St. find happenings a trial for that reason too...

Here is a possible, partial solution: The town's "yard"--where they keep gravel & trucks--is right across the RR tracks. They could arrange for some of the closest area to be used for events parking--even space for 15 or 20 cars would lighten the on-street load considerably.

I realize this would mean arranging for some kind of path or walkway across the track area & little dip & I'm sure it would cost some money, but I think the results would be worth it. Perhaps the High School could make part of it a project for seniors to plan/execute?--cheap muscle!

Think of being able to offer more convenient, reliable parking space for Town Meeting , Historical Society events, and (probably most of all) the Chamber Players. I really believe it would be a boon to the town, since every opportunity to bring people into town means extra for the local economy.

I wish we could 1) get the Hardwick/Greensboro/Craftsbury area to buy into creating a Community Arts Center and Retreat 2) that someone would run--at the Townhouse?--a regular, weekly, throughout the year commercial Alternative (and Foreign) Film Series, including Classic Family Film series for kids.

A) Development of a Multipurpose Recreational Facility on the town and Hardwick Electric owned 468 acres of land surrounding the Lamoille River and Hardwick Lake

B) the development of an incubator space for currently home based local micro-businesses.

C) The development of a community college or other equivalent advanced educational facility probably by attracting an existing Vermont college to expand into our area.

D) The development of a service that enhances the ability for local organic farmers to reach their markets. By using the overall resources of the community and working together with local organic farmers, we can greatly increase the capability of our local organic farmers to both expand their businesses and to attract other organic farms. These joint community and organic farmer services could include such things as expanded advertisement, marketing, and sales reaching far beyond any that the farms would be able to achieve individually.

Creation of a business incubator in the Centennial Building or elsewhere.

Creation of a Pottery Center, perhaps in the Jeudevine Mansion in which the Co-op is now temporarily housed.

Make the Hardwick Area a magnet for innovative agricultural production, processing and distribution by building on its existing and developing base in soy, cheese, organic dairy products, and organic vegetables. Perhaps, the appropriate development of what is called the Akins Field property could be utilized in this initiative.

Back the establishment of a regional community center in Craftsbury that would provide recreational, educational, health promotion, sports, and artistic opportunities and outlets of all kinds to the region it serves.

Revitalize the Art Park.

Bike path

More local produce and fresh (butcher cut) meats. pH is a function of hydrogen. Every time you wrap in plastic you automatically move to acid pH. Even for cookies. More casseroles. Hand washing removes the silica in dirt that the body must have to make Vit D otherwise it will make sodium and we have a wetlands and diabetes in our own bodies and lung failure and cancer. Yes-we can readily move to 3 crops per year and healthy people.

Support Juedevine Memorial Library.

Complete the restoration of the Bemis block.

I want to see the Centennial Building bought by someone local who is involved in their community and completely renovated to its original grand state and used as it should be a cornerstone in our downtown.

More community events-street party? Teen activities in the evenings?

Someplace to eat out that serves food I can feel good about and not question its origins (ORGANICS! & LOCALLY GROWN!)

DSL internet service to whole town-not just downtown.

Create parking for and walkway to events at Depot & Town House.

A really nice restaurant (sit down) with music offerings. Or a café with cultural events.

A craft/art store

Specific projects: Farmers' Market permanent structures, Library expansion, Elementary playground update. What about a downtown gallery to spotlight local artists and artisans?

Nature programs especially for families and kids.

Development of the trail system.

Development of the Town House.

A restaurant serving something better than hamburgers.

Fix the "art park."

Enhance the Hardwick Lake area.

Support the community garden.

A very accessible gallery to give more visibility to so many Hardwick area artists.

DSL service.

A place to gather in the evening.

More healthy activities for teens.

Expand/develop recreation-trails system, Hardwick Lake.

Improve the appearance of downtown/Wolcott St. The downtown needs spiffing up.

I would like to see community theater and more musical concerts.

A cultural venue (music, art, entertainment) like Compost.

May 20th Participants

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Michael Bosia
Chris Camarra
Alana Considine
Shari Cornish
Diane Cornish
Philip Edgerton
Elizabeth Edgerton
Jonathan Gilbert
George Hemmons
Hilary Hoffman
Patrick Kane
Pat Laggis
Emily Lamyns
Marie LaPre Grabon
Ann Lawless
Roger LeCours
John Mandeville
Sybil Messier
Andrew Meyer
Kristina Michelsen
Nancy Notterman
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