

**Manchester**  
**Creative Communities Program**  
**FINAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN**



**AUGUST, 2007**  
**Vermont Council on Rural Development**

# Manchester Area Creative Communities Program

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### For Further Information

Paul Costello, Executive Director  
Helen Labun Jordan, Director, Creative Communities Program  
Vermont Council on Rural Development  
PO Box 1384  
Montpelier, VT 05601  
(802) 828-6024 or (802) 828-6022  
vcrd@sover.net  
ccp@sover.net  
www.vtrural.org

## Introduction

Participants in the Manchester area Creative Communities forums had a clear sense of what was special about their community. Manchester is an original four-season destination, with activities all year round that cover recreation, the arts, shopping, culture and history. Its location, close to multiple urban centers, draws in both visitors and new residents. The local educational system is one of the best in the state. Entrepreneurial actions in the past, such as building up the designer outlets, the start of major new businesses like Orvis, and early investment in Internet access, have paid off with economic strength today. Furthermore, today's successful businesses support community and cultural activities, which also receive support from a strong interest in local volunteerism. Manchester residents praise the wonderful quality of life available in the community as the town's key asset for developing the creative economy.

Alongside its numerous assets, Manchester faces serious challenges. For example, while Manchester draws businesspeople who work all over the world, the community worries about high housing prices and a local job pool in which earnings often can't meet these costs. This can lead to a situation where residents *need* to work elsewhere to afford to live locally. Some forum participants questioned whether the traditionally strong areas of retail sales and tourism had safeguards in place to weather problems such as the increase in Internet sales or rising fuel costs. Concerns over costs and job options tie into another broad challenge: the need to attract and retain young people. A further area of debate was the layout of downtown; forum participants discussed everything from pedestrian-friendly access to the stores, to the unwelcome look of Routes 11 and 30, to whether town zoning policies required revision. This report contains a full list of the challenges enumerated, along with lists of community strengths, in a later section.

Community members who participated in the creative economy forums were invited to think beyond current problems and toward solutions. Just as there was no shortage of ideas about what makes the Manchester area special, there was no shortage of ideas about what could make Manchester even better. Participants generated a long list of project possibilities that might resolve some of the concerns they identified. One suggestion, to launch an integrated marketing campaign for Manchester, focused on local strengths and included potential collaboration with surrounding towns. Another idea, to create more downtown housing, addressed the need for affordable places to live (particularly for young people) and also a need, commonly felt by Vermont communities, to have life downtown after dinner. Project ideas included job creation, downtown remodeling, summertime activities, the area's agricultural heritage, and more. A total of 19 distinct project possibilities reached the floor for discussion.

From the list of 19, Manchester residents chose three projects to serve as areas for initial focus. These projects all share the common theme of staying one step ahead of national developments and trends.

The project **Establish Manchester as a Leader in Sustainability and Green Business** builds from a growing business sector in Vermont and across the world. The action plan developed around this concept emphasizes the connection between a community's

attitudes toward sustainability and its ability to attract innovative green businesses and the young people who are often at the forefront of environmental work. The Vermont brand already marks Manchester as a part of a “green” place – this local project team can ensure that Manchester takes the lead in this field.

A related initiative is to **Establish a Local Foods Center**. This is a project that plays off of an established Vermont brand attribute, highlights connections between community character and economic development, and builds from the link between environmental and business interests, this time in the agricultural arena. Developing a center for local food sales, distribution, and (potentially) education, will strengthen other businesses that rely on people visiting the town, such as retail outlets, by bringing in more visitors. The foods center would mean a unique draw to Manchester. Because of its local focus and its place in Manchester’s established reputation for shopping opportunities, the experience of visiting this local foods center could not be replicated anywhere else.

Finally, Manchester wants to invest in **State of the Art Communications Technology**. Because the Manchester community connects so closely with major centers outside of Vermont, it is imperative that systems for communicating with distant locations remain at the highest quality. New technology and improved communications will also help more traditional businesses and organizations thrive, as regional, national, and international connections become standard practice. This initiative will help Manchester avoid problems other communities around Vermont are facing today as their dial-up Internet connections become increasingly outdated.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development has enjoyed working with everyone involved in the Manchester area’s Creative Communities Program. We would like to especially thank the Equinox Resort & Spa, Israel Congregation, and Maple Street School for providing meeting space. We would like to recognize the terrific efforts of the Outreach Group that worked at a local level to build participation in the forums. Beth Meachem and Lee Krohn co-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 [www.vtrural.org](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 Manchester’s process was as follows:

### **May 21<sup>st</sup>, 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 Manchester 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 14<sup>th</sup>, 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).

### **July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007 – Project Team Working Day**

In the final meeting 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.



# **I. First Public Forum on the Creative Economy**

**Equinox Resort & Spa**

**May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007**

The first public forum in the Manchester Area Creative Communities Program took place on the evening of May 21<sup>st</sup> at the Equinox Resort and Spa. The forum brought in several speakers who have led creative economy work elsewhere in the state 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. Alex Aldrich, Executive Director of the Vermont Arts Council, provided a statewide perspective on creative economy work. Patricia Menduni and Patricia Kreitzer, both of Rutland, spoke about the creative economy from their community's perspective. Rutland participated in the first round of the Creative Communities Program, and its report is online at <http://www.vtrural.org/creative-communities.php>. In addition to her involvement as a public participant in the Rutland process, Patricia Menduni also serves on the advisory committee for the Creative Communities Program and served on the staff of Senator James Jeffords, which allowed her to have a local, state, and federal perspective on the process.



The introduction moved quickly to facilitated discussion of creative economy projects happening in, or planned for, the Manchester 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 the strengths of Manchester's creative economy? What are key cultural and community assets?**

- The Manchester area has very caring people who come together to support the community.
- There is a strong sense of place.
- There is a wide diversity of things happening – from farming to shopping.
- “People live life in the community.”
- The Southern Vermont Arts Center is a big draw.
- Manchester is truly part of a region, connected with smaller surrounding communities.
- There is a strong ethic of volunteerism.
- Manchester is the original 4 season resort.
- Manchester is also the southwestern-most Vermont resort, with proximity to Fairfield and Westchester Counties.
- The Designer Outlets have been a strong draw for visitors and dollars, putting Manchester on the map as a destination.

- There is a rich educational base from pre-school to high school, with diverse educational offerings.
- The performing arts are vibrant – for example the Manchester Music Festival, Manchester Music Academy, Dorset & Westchester Playhouses, Ballet Manchester, etc.
- Northshire Bookstore is a major asset.
- The Manchester area has natural beauty – mountains, valleys, back roads.
- Outdoor recreation includes two major ski resorts along with smaller locations.
- World-renowned companies, like Orvis, the Vermont Country Store, and the Equinox, have headquarters in Manchester.
- The outlets bring in world-renowned brands for shopping.
- There are active historical societies.
- There are good restaurants.
- Hildene is a major heritage attraction and offers children’s programs.
- The Town has strong recreational programs.
- There is individual, private wealth.
- Riley Rink and Hunter Park offer recreation in town.
- There are well-regarded state parks nearby and the Green Mountain Forest, Appalachian Trail, and Long Trail.
- The Green Mountain Summer Festival is an attraction.
- Frog Hollow is in Manchester.
- The Manchester region has unique fishing resources, the fly fishing museum, and Battenkill River.
- The rural economy still exists – farms, cheesemaking, maple – this region has its authentic roots in agriculture.
- The community is welcoming to new residents.
- There is high involvement in local government – for example, Boards, planning commission.
- Local craftspeople have exceptional skills – for example woodworking, glass blowing.
- Manchester has a high level of environmental awareness – the Manchester challenge successfully changed incandescent bulbs to CFLs and the newest project is thermostats.
- Manchester has the Dana Thompson Recreation Center.
- The Equinox grounds and connected trail system are a great asset.
- There is strong spiritual life, active churches.
- The business community generously supports local events.
- Burr and Burton is a magnet for young families, rated the best High School in VT.
- Alternative / independent institutions make a well-rounded school system.
- Education includes the second oldest ski & snowboard academy.
- The community has great sports for all ages.
- There is an emerging Buy Local effort.





- The community has supportive media – papers, cable access – that give space to covering community efforts.
- Professionals who work around the world have home offices in Manchester.
- Galleries and local businesses support local talent by offering art venues.
- The community keeps its traditions alive, like the Loyalty Day Parade.
- Downtown brought broadband in early.
- There is high local intellectual capital.
- Emergency response systems are strong.
- Manchester has avoided sprawl.
- The 8.6 million Baby Boomers entering retirement will look to Manchester for the next stage of their life and potentially second careers.
- A branding exercise is happening with community leaders around Bennington County.
- The Northshire Nonprofit Network connects non-profit groups.
- A juried event this summer will call for designs for green, sustainable housing downtown.
- The outlet stores have launched a greening initiative for their buildings.
- The Green Mountain Center for Learning is an educational asset.

### **What challenges exist for the creative economy in the Manchester area?**

- While there are many reasons why young people might want to live in Manchester, the youth population is a weak link.
- Affordable housing is scarce.
- There is no nightlife.
- Infrastructure doesn't reach everywhere – some pockets lack Internet, cell service.
- Marketing efforts are fragmented. Not enough money goes to promoting a unified “Manchester” image.
- Activities have a lack of focus.
- There is ambiguity about Manchester's image – both locally and when the town promotes itself to tourists.
- There are not enough jobs to offer people with a higher education. The region lacks small businesses. This gap particularly affects recent college graduates who might locate in a place with a deeper job market.
- It is unclear what markets Manchester wants to serve.
- There is no collective idea of where the community is moving.
- People can't reach Manchester with public transportation and, once in Manchester, options remain limited if you don't have a private car.
- Manchester lacks a clearly defined downtown area.
- Shops' layout across town isn't pedestrian friendly.
- Zoning is organized around a car society.
- Parking regulations restrict growth options and activities (for example, outdoor seating in summer).
- The upcoming roundabout project will disrupt downtown.
- Visitors come in concentrated times, which needs evening-out.

- Marketing dollars bring in primarily seasonal jobs, not well paying, year-round jobs.
- Federal systems restrict community projects, like transportation.
- Vermont doesn't do enough advertising as a state, for example with the state magazine.
- A lack of safe walkways and bikeways limits alternative transportation. Enhancing these systems would also improve recreation.
- Manchester can't rely only on tourism to keep the economy strong – there has to be a strong local base.
- The economic environment is forcing family members to do long-distance commuting, disrupting family life.
- Act 250 makes creative investment difficult.
- The planning commission seems out of step with what the community needs for a creative economy.
- Businesses face high rents.
- Legislators need to recognize the importance of tourism and invest more in this sector.
- The Internet is placing stress on traditional shopping assets.

### **What projects could strengthen the Manchester area's creative economy?**

- Provide low cost, high quality education for *all* age ranges, including adults.
- Construct a new image for Manchester that reflects a full range of assets.
- Ensure that Manchester is well connected with the rest of the world by staying in front with available technology.
- Focus on a single “great idea.”
- Establish a food co-op that pulls together agriculture & crafts.
- Build on past work with alternative energy, for example using the old mill or instituting a carbon credit initiative.
- Start a green business and arts incubator in a LEED certified building.
- Support the “Shires of Vermont” branding effort and look at the existing regional constellation of efforts.
- Take advantage of the 250<sup>th</sup> birthdays of many area townships that will happen in 2011.
- Build on the expertise of baby boomers; connect their experience with creative & entrepreneurial ideas. Met Life, for example, has a foundation that promotes these connections.
- Bridge the many different areas of commerce in Manchester.
- Build a sense of civic place that reaches beyond commercial activity.
- Set out a common vision for where the Manchester area will be in 10 years and how to measure success towards that vision.
- Look to examples like Saratoga Springs for vibrant summertime downtowns.



- Make downtown more attractive for summer evenings with outside dining spaces, activities, music, and beautification.
- Open new venues for live music at night.
- Revive the bowling alley space.
- Work closely with planning organizations to set appropriate mechanisms to support growth.
- Upgrade Depot Street with greening, capital improvements, and attention to an image of the “quintessential Vermont village.”
- Move the CVPS power station and bury power lines.
- The Manchester area has many healers in a variety of disciplines. The Equinox was originally a wellness resort. This reputation for the area should be revived.
- Teach youth entrepreneurship for grades K-12.
- Close off a central road as a regular pedestrian area (weekly or monthly) during summer.
- Modify Routes 11 and 30 to make them more welcoming.
- While performing venues exist, there should be a performance space that is year round and caters to local participation.
- Keep the Spiral Press open later.
- Attract a satellite site for an institution of higher learning that offers programs relevant to local interests. Or start a new one.
- A virtual institution of higher learning could begin in Manchester.
- Start an inclusive marketing plan with committed funding.
- Focus on infrastructure, economy, and tourism.
- Market Manchester to colleges as a place for student interns.
- Improve communications between business and education to ensure that students’ skills keep pace with a changing work environment.
- Collaborate better so that people are not overwhelmed / confused by overlapping activities.
- Increase utilization of town green. Make safety improvements for small children, provide free WiFi.
- Coordinate better with ski areas so that future tourist traffic does not remain only in ski villages and push out Manchester as a destination for activities.
- Focus on improving occupancy rates.
- Ensure retail locations remain full, including a strategy for minimizing negative impacts possible from the Internet.
- Remind the world that Manchester is a “world class 4 season resort.”
- Define what a successful creative economy would look like.
- Support telecommuters. Find out what they need, provide office resources.
- Help people connect more easily with jobs that become available.
- Build on the theme that has emerged of a common space – buildings, pedestrian



- ways, green spaces, etc.
- Bring housing into the downtown.
- Look at the statewide issue of the “creative economy” and where Manchester fits into the larger movement.

- Pool marketing dollars to build a unified, and more effective, campaign.
- Make a food and wine showcase for Vermont products. Become the Buy Local capital of Vermont.
- Connect the idea of local foods to healthy living.
- Provide public transportation into town, for example from Albany.
- Highlight the high-quality shops in Manchester and ensure the sustainability of the town's reputation for world-class shopping.
- Create an adult education center that includes key skills like computers & foreign languages.
- Revive the film festival.
- Improve courtesy in retail locations.
- Reduce traffic problems.

## II. Initial List of Project Possibilities

The May 21<sup>st</sup> 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 May, 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 14<sup>th</sup>, 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.

### **Launch an Integrated Marketing Effort for the Manchester Region:**

Manchester has many creative cultural and commercial assets to promote, but without tying those assets together into a unified marketing effort, people outside the region may miss out on the full range of experiences it offers. Particularly important is the image of a four-season destination. A well-funded marketing effort can create that unity. This Project Team should investigate existing starting points like the “Shires of Vermont” work and upcoming 250<sup>th</sup> birthdays for area townships. Marketing should be enhanced by greater local coordination in scheduling events and close partnerships with nearby ski areas. Finally, the marketing Project Team should set clear benchmarks to measure their success, such as increased occupancy rates or retail sales.

**Provide Education for All Ages:** Manchester’s Burr & Burton Academy is consistently ranked as a top Vermont High School and is a great asset for the community. However, Manchester has less to offer for education at ages beyond 18. Adult learners need to continue refreshing their skills and learning new skills. Computers and languages were singled out as areas of interest. Arts, crafts, cultural and business offerings could be integrated. Manchester could meet these needs by either attracting a satellite campus for an existing higher education institution or starting its own program.

### **Create the Infrastructure for State-of-the-Art Communications**

**Technology:** Communications technology is key to many aspects of life in Manchester. Many workers rely on telecommuting; home-based businesses have customers outside of the immediate region; even businesses with traditional storefronts rely on the Internet and other technologies to be in touch with the rest of the world. Staying current with technology is important to young people who might locate in Manchester. Visitors on vacation increasingly expect to be able to remain in communication with their business or home communities. This Project Team should set a plan to keep Manchester at the forefront of communication technology.

**Establish a Local Foods Retail Center:** Manchester could be the Buy Local capital of Vermont. The town is easily accessible from Boston, Albany, and NYC. It already has a reputation for high quality shopping experiences. A year-round local food and wine center could introduce people from across the region to Vermont agricultural products. As with farmers' markets, the food center could also include crafts and other locally-made pieces, prepared foods, and an outlet for local value-added agriculture. This Project Team should keep in focus the larger goal of ensuring Manchester's future as an important retail center. The food center should serve a local customer base as well as attract visitors for a full shopping experience. This goal will require careful planning for what the center offers, a compelling marketing campaign, and strategies to stay in step with technologies, such as the Internet, that influence the character of shopping.

**Establish Manchester as a Leader in Sustainability and Green Business:** The Manchester town government has already attracted statewide notice for taking steps to reduce Manchester's carbon footprint. Manchester should move forward from this starting point to make itself a true leader in environmental issues, particularly where those issues open business possibilities. Possible overlaps between sustainability and a creative economy include building a LEED (green building) certified arts & business incubator, pioneering carbon trading markets, promoting development of renewable energy-production companies, and using entrepreneurial environmental work to attract young people.

**Teach Entrepreneurship:** Manchester is uniquely situated to act as a teaching laboratory for entrepreneurship. The already strong k-12 system could integrate this topic into their curriculum. Manchester could bring in college students to work in highly involved internships for Manchester's best-known businesses and organizations, from the Designer Outlets to Orvis. Retiring baby boomers could share their expertise by mentoring interested area residents as they launch new businesses. This Project Team could also set up an input system so that educators remain current with the new skills that the working world finds attractive.

**Host a Visioning Session for the Manchester Area:** Many of the projects listed as creative economy possibilities could benefit from a coherent, 10-year vision for the future of Manchester. Convening the public for a visioning session would provide guidance for planners. It will also provide a positive framework for airing concerns about policies that might hinder creative economic growth. This forum could improve feedback and cooperative efforts around contentious planning issues, such as zoning.

**Increase Downtown Summertime Activities:** Manchester neighbors other towns that have focused on making downtown a fun place for both locals and visitors in the summer. Manchester needs to look seriously at what can make summertime unique and exciting in its own downtown. Possible initiatives to increase this appeal are: outside dining, music, beautification projects, and even closing a portion of the road on a regular summertime schedule. A particular need identified by residents is places for music at night. Opening more music venues provides not only summertime activity, but activity that can spill over into the winter months in underutilized spaces, such as the bowling

alley or the Spiral Press Café after hours. This Project Team should visit other towns, like Burlington, Rutland and Saratoga Springs, to find out what has worked for them.

**Build Manchester’s Reputation as a Wellness Center:** Manchester has healers and wellness experts in both traditional and non-traditional fields. It also has a history as a wellness center, with the fresh air, outdoor spaces, and healthy local foods that have traditionally provided the backbone of good health. The community should reclaim this reputation and promote itself as a wellness center.

**Make Roadways More Welcoming:** Most people reach Manchester by car, and the roads into town do not always appear welcoming. Roadways provide the first introduction to Manchester and should be managed with this role in mind. Particular areas of concern are Rte. 11, Rte. 30 and Depot Street. This Project Team should consider not only traffic flow along these routes, but also how to upgrade their appearance. Another consideration is revitalization of less traveled roadways, such as the dirt road on the waterfront side of Main St. Route 7a.

**Improve the Town Green and Battenkill River Area:** The town green is not used as much as it could be. This Project Team should make improvements that will draw more people to the town green. A first step will be establishing safety for small children. The green could also offer WiFi, events, and other attractions to draw people to spend time there. Similarly, the center of town along the Battenkill is in disuse. Brush clearing, a pedestrian path, and unified green space can make Manchester a more welcoming environment for those outside of their cars. This Project Team will determine, and implement, key changes to put these central green spaces into better use.

**Develop Non-Car Transportation Options To and Around Manchester:** Visitors to, and residents in, Manchester rely on their cars for transportation. Manchester could take better advantage of nearby population centers if public transportation provided a connection. Local residents and visitors alike would benefit from public transportation in the Manchester area itself. Commercial, neighborhood, and downtown areas could be more effectively linked with bike routes and walking paths to provide another non-car option. This Project Team would move Manchester away from its heavy reliance on everyone using a private car for all daily errands.

**Revive the Film Festival:** Manchester used to host a film festival that drew attendees and also enhanced the town’s reputation as a culture center. However, the film festival grew too quickly and closed. A new festival should begin with a long-range plan for growth that allows it to stay manageable.

**Actively Recruit Jobs in the Manchester Area:** Manchester has a relatively high cost of living. Some residents commute significant distances (or telecommute) to reach jobs with wages that match this cost. The perceived lack of high paying jobs could discourage young people from settling in the area. This Project Team should set up a system for recruiting jobs in a range of fields to match the interests and talents of the

local workforce. It should provide a matching service between job seekers and job providers. Finally, this Project Team should maintain an open dialogue with business and business groups to keep up-to-date with their needs for doing business in Manchester.

**Generate More Downtown Housing:** Many towns have turned to downtown housing as part of their economic development plan. Creating more downtown housing space opens an opportunity for more affordable housing and a strong rental stock. Bringing residences into the downtown also gives it a new vitality, as it is easy for downtown residents to walk to goods and services, and take advantage of evening activities.

**Create a Community Performance and Arts Center:** Manchester has great performing arts, but lacks a central venue with year-round performance space that caters to the local population. This Project Team should identify this public space. A performing center can mean a lot of things to a community beyond the plays and concerts held there. For example, children might come to learn about theater, summer activities could engage young people during the vacation time, local writers / dancers / artists would have a venue to show their creations, and a large space could even reinstate the community dances that ended in Manchester many years ago. A performing center should be an anchor for further projects in the arts, providing a venue for displaying arts in many forms and potentially studio space for area artists.

**Open Farm Demonstration Areas:** Manchester's farming traditions reach beyond foods that can be sold in local retail. Farms provide an open, working landscape that makes Manchester, and Vermont, a unique destination. This Project Team should highlight the farming traditions in the region. One particular highlight is the strong equestrian environment in the region. Highlighting equine activities both catches attention and puts a spotlight on a distinct aspect of Vermont farming.

**Start a Local Mercantile:** Manchester has many retail options, but no system for acting on locally-identified gaps in available products. Some communities have addressed similar situations through starting a locally owned store that responds directly to local needs. The best-known example is the Mercantile in Powell, Wyoming. This Project Team should investigate a Manchester option, identifying what residents perceive as missing pieces in their retail environment and developing a solid business plan for a locally-controlled store.

**Revive the Manchester Area Train System:** Public transportation is a significant concern for Manchester area residents who want convenient local transportation and an option for visitors to come to Manchester without a car. However, public transportation systems also have a recreational aspect. The train system, in particular, has a history of touring rides and other pleasure trips. This Project Team should work to bring trains back to the region as a form of entertainment, not just a transit from Point A to Point B.



### **III. Priority Topics**

#### **Israel Congregation**

#### **Selected June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

The second community meeting for the Manchester area brought participants to the Israel Congregation's community space. This second 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. It 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 the final three priority projects:

#### **Establish Manchester as a Leader in Sustainability and Green Business:**

The Manchester town government has already attracted statewide notice for taking steps to reduce Manchester's carbon footprint. Manchester should move forward from this starting point to make itself a true leader in environmental issues, particularly where those issues open business possibilities. Possible overlaps between sustainability and a creative economy include building a LEED (green building) certified arts & business incubator, pioneering carbon trading markets, promoting development of renewable energy-production companies, and using entrepreneurial environmental work to attract young people.

#### **Create the Infrastructure for State-of-the-Art Communications**

**Technology:** Communications technology is key to many aspects of life in Manchester. Many workers rely on telecommuting; home-based businesses have customers outside of the immediate region; even businesses with traditional storefronts rely on the Internet and other technologies to be in touch with the rest of the world. Staying current with technology is important to young people who might locate in Manchester. Visitors on vacation increasingly expect to be able to remain in communication with their business or home communities. This Project Team should set a plan to keep Manchester at the forefront of communication technology.

**Establish a Local Foods Retail Center:** Manchester could be the Buy Local capital of Vermont. The town is easily accessible from Boston, Albany, and NYC. It already has a reputation for high quality shopping experiences. A year-round local food and wine center could introduce people from across the region to Vermont agricultural products. As with farmers' markets, the food center could also include crafts and other locally-made pieces, prepared foods, and an outlet for local value-added agriculture. This

Project Team should keep in focus the larger goal of ensuring Manchester's future as an important retail center. The food center should serve a local customer base as well as attract visitors for a full shopping experience. This goal will require careful planning for what the center offers, a compelling marketing campaign, and strategies to stay in step with technologies, such as the Internet, that influence the character of shopping.



**IV. Action Plans**  
**Maple Street School**  
**July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

On July 11<sup>th</sup>, community members from throughout the Manchester 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 July 11<sup>th</sup>, committee members worked closely with facilitators and resource teams to refine project goals and develop step-by-step action plans that lay an initial framework for reaching those goals.

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 Manchester as a Leader in Sustainability and Green Business**

The Manchester town government has already attracted statewide notice for taking steps to reduce Manchester's carbon footprint. Manchester should move forward from this starting point to make itself a true leader in environmental issues, particularly where those issues open business possibilities. Possible overlaps between sustainability and a creative economy include building a LEED (green building) certified arts & business incubator, pioneering carbon trading markets, promoting development of renewable energy-production companies, and using entrepreneurial environmental work to attract young people.

**Contact:** Beth Meachem, bmeachem241@verizon.net

**Project Team:**

Alan	Benoit	benoit_alan@hotmail.com
Bob	Borella	bob@friendsofsun.com
Carl	Bucholt	bucholt@sover.net
Jamie	Hand	jrhand@middlebury.edu
Jim	Hand	jimehand@yahoo.com
Jay	Hathaway	jhathaway@manchestercenter.net
Brian	Kukon	bkukon@hotmail.com
Bill	Laberge	laberge@vermonte.net
Abe	Madkour	dr.abe@verizon.net
Beth	Meachem	bmeachem241@verizon.net
Brett	Morrison	bmorrison91@verizon.net
Ed	Morrow	emorrow@northshire.com
Jenna	Pugliese	jpugliese@intrawest.com
Anne	Weber	webera@verizon.net
Diana	Wilcox	dwilcox_57@comcast.net
Cheryl	Young	cjyou44@yahoo.com

## *Action Steps*

### **1. Inventory Existing Sustainability Initiatives in the Manchester Area:**

Gain a broad sense of what is already happening / has already happened recently in sustainability efforts for the Manchester area. Past practices can build a framework for setting future goals. This inventorying work will also identify organizations that might be partners in this group's efforts.

### **2. Inventory Best Business Practices in Sustainability for the**

**Manchester Area:** In the context of the creative economy, green businesses and the "greening" of existing businesses in any field are a key part of sustainability discussions.

### **3. Build a Framework for Identifying Benefits of Best Practices in**

**Sustainability:** Develop a general sense of where benefits to individuals and organizations have occurred from sustainability initiatives and the relative size of these benefits. For example, the light bulb replacement initiative in 2006: how much electricity and how much, net, money was saved? What press did this bring to Manchester? How much did it build community spirit and cooperation?

Inventorying work around green businesses (step #2) could provide particularly good information for establishing possible benefits from sustainable practices.

### **4. Communicate Examples of Best Practices and Benefits /**

**Opportunities They Represent:** Spread the word about what was discovered in steps #1-3. Simple visual cues can be an effective way of catching peoples' attention. Local education is the first step to establishing a Manchester "brand" for sustainability.

**5. Identify Potential Projects to Demonstrate Sustainability:** Inventorying past best practices will help identify where future success stories might occur. Support projects currently in the pipeline and build a true demonstration project around sustainability.

**6. Offer Individual Sustainability Audits:** Help local residents and businesses translate lessons learned from earlier initiatives into their own sustainability projects either through audits performed by this group or connecting them with other resources that can provide the same service.

**7. Build a Sustainability "Brand" for the Manchester Area:** This brand should not only promote good work happening in the Manchester area, it should also target the originally stated goals of making Manchester an attractive place for young people and green business entrepreneurs to locate. Branding work should keep these audiences in mind.

## **Create the Infrastructure for State-of-the-Art**

**Communications Technology** Communications technology is key to many aspects of life in Manchester. Many workers rely on telecommuting; home-based businesses have customers outside of the immediate region; even businesses with traditional storefronts rely on the Internet and other technologies to be in touch with the rest of the world. Staying current with technology is important to young people who might locate in Manchester. Visitors on vacation increasingly expect to be able to remain in communication with their business or home communities. This Project Team should set a plan to keep Manchester at the forefront of communication technology.

**Project Chair:** Meaghan Meachem, mmeachem@gmail.com

### **Project Team:**

Nancy	Burzon	njburzon@vermontel.net
Steve	Burzon	s.burzon@vermontel.net
Lee	Krohn	vtplanr@sover.net
Meaghan	Meachem	mmeachem@gmail.com
Jean	Miller	vtjem@care2.com

### **Gaps and Challenges**

- Cell phone service is spotty in the region
- People don't know all the places where there is WiFi available—sites should be accessible and visible
- Visitors need broadband access
- There's no interactive TV
- Smaller and home-based businesses could use help expanding their use of web-applications and marketing

### ***Action Steps***

#### **1. Assess Existing Communications Coverage**

Evaluate existing services; what access is available, where? What parts of the area are currently served with broadband and with cellular phone service and where are the gaps? Where are the community wireless Internet sites (WiFi hotspots) including cafes, libraries, hotels, etc.?

- a. As part of this assessment, communicate with or meet with existing service providers in the area to discuss their plans for expanded services over time.
- b. Once WiFi sites are identified on a list, work to post that list in tourist guides, and town promotional materials, and work toward common signage for all WiFi hot spots (the state has signs that could be obtained)
- c. Investigate ways to expand WiFi blanket in the downtown, especially the opportunity to work with businesses toward a mesh network where signals from multiple business locations meld to provide downtown coverage at speeds that will meet most tourist and downtown visitor needs.

## **2. Develop Plans for a Public Education Center**

Assess the possibilities of developing a space in Manchester to serve as a technology education center to teach tech skills, computer skills, and tech applications to Manchester adults.

As a feature of the center (or a starting point) offer workshops in which leading Manchester businesses with Internet marketing expertise share their skills with entrepreneurs, start-ups, and existing businesses that would like to improve their web presence, use new applications, or market effectively through the web.

## **3. Bring a Vermont Interactive Television Site to Manchester**

An Interactive Television site can be a focal point for communications and Internet-based educational offerings. This site could be directly connected with the Public Education Center, or located separately. The task force will explore options for sites at existing studios at GNATV and Burr & Burton.

## **4. Expand the Committee**

Reach out to youth in particular for assistance and service.

**Establish a Local Foods Retail Center:** Manchester could be the Buy Local capital of Vermont. The town is easily accessible from Boston, Albany, and NYC. It already has a reputation for high quality shopping experiences. A year-round local food and wine center could introduce people from across the region to Vermont agricultural products. As with farmers' markets, the food center could also include crafts and other locally-made pieces, prepared foods, and an outlet for local value-added agriculture. This Project Team should keep in focus the larger goal of ensuring Manchester's future as an important retail center. The food center should serve a local customer base as well as attract visitors for a full shopping experience. This goal will require careful planning for what the center offers, a compelling marketing campaign, and strategies to stay in step with technologies, such as the Internet, that influence the character of shopping.

**Project Chair:** Mike Iglinski, mikescw@hotmail.com

**Project Team:**

Lilia	Browning	
Frank	Hanes	innkeepers@innatmanchester.com
Julie	Hanes	
Ruth	Harvie	rut.harv@verizon.net
Jay	Hathaway	jhathaway@manchesterchamber.net
Ben	Hauben	
Mike	Iglinski	mikescw@hotmail.com
Wendi	Iglinski	
Bill	Laberge	laberge@vermontel.net
Ali	Lopez	auntili3@yahoo.com
Brenda	Malkour	dr.abe@sovernet.com
Andrew	McKeever	amckeever@manchesterjournal.com
Brett	Morrison	bmorrison91@verizon.net
Ellen	Ogden	ellen@ellenogden.com

***Action Steps***

**1. Build Partnerships with Local Producers**

- Set a starting definition for “local” (this definition may need to be modified as business planning continues)
- Inventory foods being grown & raised locally
- Invite producers to join planning group
- Inventory local food producers who may or may not be using local ingredients.

**2. Identify Groups With Strong Potential Interest in Local Foods Center**

Identify who would have a vested interest in what happens with a local foods center. Some of these groups would be



natural partners in planning – for example Local First Vermont. Others would want to have significant input into the business planning but may not want to be on the planning group itself.

Examples of possible groups include:

- Farmers' Market organizers (both current and former)
- Area restaurants
- Local businesses
- Tourism-based businesses
- Town government & committees related to zoning, regulation, planning

As more detailed business planning begins, a specific liaison should be appointed to keep the groups identified in this step closely connected to the process.

**3. Conduct Community Surveying to Identify If / How a Local Foods Center Would Be Used** Many options exist for how to conduct the community surveys. Any option pursued should recognize the seasonal population in Manchester and be sure to identify interests of groups that do not live locally year-round.

#### **4. Gather Information About Local Food Sales Outside of Manchester**

This information gathering should meet two goals:

- Identify & visit successful local food centers elsewhere in the region.
- Study local foods interest in consumers outside of Manchester and whether visitors might be attracted to Manchester by a local foods center (including what type of customers are most likely to be interested).

**5. Start Initial Business Planning to Determine If and How a Local Foods Center in Manchester Can Be Successful** Initial discussions identified several issues to be resolved in business planning. Further discussion and input gathered in steps #1-4 can add to, and refine, these questions. They include:

- Does strong local support exist for this project? If not, what more needs to be done to gain this support?
- What interest in a local foods center exists outside of the immediate region? Who is this non-local audience?
- What is the proper scope for the first phase of a local foods center project?
- How can a local foods center close missing links between producers and consumers?
- How can this center strengthen both the local foods economy *and* the local economy overall?



- How will we determine “local”? What range of local products, beyond food, should be included at the beginning?
- Are the existing local farms enough to meet the demand this center would create? Should farm development be part of the plan?



- Is more education needed to help people know how to use local foods?
- What are the options for how a physical building would be built?
  - What does local zoning & regulation allow?
  - Should the center be a new building or renovated existing building?
  - Where are potential funding sources?

**6. Keep Local Foods in Public Eye While Planning Next Steps** This group has many opportunities to promote local foods regardless of the final outcome of planning for a physical center. Business planning can be matched by some activities that continue to build local consumer interest in food. One example is starting a Manchester Eat Local Challenge or simply building visibility for local foods currently available, such as by labeling on restaurant menus.

See below for a brainstormed list of existing local foods assets that could be part of this effort.

### **Existing Activities in Local Foods for the Manchester Area**

- Two natural foods markets
- Successful farmers' markets in the region – including in winter
- Consumers can access local food through CSA's and farmstands
- Statewide interest in local foods in general is growing and some groups are interested in Manchester in particular (e.g. NOFA, Agency of Agriculture, Department of Tourism).
- There is relatively diverse agriculture locally – produce, cheese, dairy, meat, orchards.
- In addition to primary producers, Manchester has strong specialty food producers.
- The Santé symposium has brought top chefs to Manchester for two years and will hopefully continue to take place in Manchester for future years.
- Manchester is close to urban centers (e.g. Boston, NYC, Albany); visitors might be interested in a more agricultural area and the food it produces.
- Manchester gardens produce food for the local food shelf.
- The Food Education Every Day program helps local schools connect with local foods.

## **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 Richmond area Project Teams. Their recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the Manchester 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.



### **Establish Manchester as a Leader in Sustainability and Green Business**

One challenge for this Project Team will be setting a manageable scope for sustainability work. 'Sustainability' is a tremendously broad concept. Some communities begin from a broad base by offering community forums around particular big issues. For example, Williston designed a forum where community members could speak with representatives from several groups about how to lower their carbon footprint. This event was co-sponsored by the **Chittenden Solid Waste District, 10% Challenge, Vermont Earth Institute, and Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District.**

Another place to look for groups tackling a broad perspective on sustainability is college campuses. Colleges have a contained community and often use this unique situation to pilot different approaches to being green. **Dartmouth College** recently hired **Jim Merkel**, a well-known sustainability expert and author of "Radical Simplicity", as their first college sustainability coordinator ([www.dartmouth.edu/~sustain/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sustain/)). **Middlebury College** has had several student groups complete sustainable systems projects. Visit their Department of Environmental Affairs:

<http://www.middlebury.edu/administration/enviro/>. The **University of Vermont** recently declared its intention to build a national reputation around environmentalism. Visit their Environmental Council at: <http://www.uvm.edu/greening/envcouncil/>.

Several other communities in the Creative Communities Program have undertaken environmental initiatives. **Randolph** and **Rutland** began with a general environmental interest. **Middlebury** is also undertaking environmental work tied directly to alternative energy. Their online reports will give background information on the projects and also contacts if the Project Team wants learn more. These reports are online at <http://www.vtrural.org>. Another community known for sustainability work is **Burlington**, particularly their legacy project ([www.cedo.ci.burlington.vt.us/legacy/](http://www.cedo.ci.burlington.vt.us/legacy/)).

The initial project description suggested green businesses as a starting focus for this Project Team. If the focus does land squarely on the business aspect, it will still be



important to narrow the project scope. The Project Team could focus on promoting sustainability within a particular industry, or on supporting new environmental businesses, or advertising existing green businesses as part of Manchester's image... or any one of a dozen other possibilities. One option for targeted action would be to partner with the other Creative Communities teams. A local foods center has clear environmental connections, and better communications technology could build a platform for almost any business – including ones tied to the environment.

A general resource for Green Businesses in Vermont is the **Vermont Environmental Consortium**, directed by **Daniel Hecht** (<http://www.vecgreenvalley.org/>; (802) 485-2455). **Marlboro Graduate Center** now also has an MBA in sustainable business. They could be a resource for both information and (if needed) interns [gradcenter.marlboro.edu/academics/MBA.html](http://gradcenter.marlboro.edu/academics/MBA.html).

Events around the state offer plenty of opportunities to network with others who are also tackling sustainability at a community level. To find out about major events, check the calendars of groups like the Vermont Environmental Consortium, Renewable Energy Vermont, Northeast Organic Farmer's Association, colleges and the Environmental Law Center at Vermont Law School.

Some sustainability projects don't require much funding. However, other projects will require start up investment and there are grants available for everything from a few hundred dollars to thousands of dollars. There are a few groups that can help sort out what is appropriate for this Project Team. The **New England Grassroots Environmental Fund** supports grassroots organizations with an environmental focus. Their website is: <http://www.grassrootsfund.org>. Another option is to talk with other recently formed groups about their strategies. Two successful organizations to talk with are the **Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN)** <http://www.acornvt.org> and the **Vermont Peak Oil Network (VPON)** [www.vtpeakoil.net/index.html](http://www.vtpeakoil.net/index.html).

## **Create the Infrastructure for State-of-the-Art Communications Technology**

This Project Team can start its investigation of local Internet availability by requesting a **Vermont Department of Public Service** map of existing services ([publicservice.vermont.gov/](http://publicservice.vermont.gov/)).

When gaps are discovered, this team has several options. A first step is to find out where Manchester fits into new requirements for telecommunications companies in the state. The Department of Public Service will know the up-to-date information on requirements for service providers to extend their coverage. This group can also identify high points from which broadband and cellular service could broadcast. Finding locations for towers

/ antennas with electrical service and an agreeable landowner can make entering a place much easier (and therefore more attractive) for the service provider.

**Laura and Al Duey** of **Duey Associates** and the **Vermont Broadband Project** can provide free consultation and assessment services for expanding high speed Internet coverage. Contact them at 802-467-1266.

Several other communities in the Creative Communities Program have worked on communications technology issues. A conversation with these organizers could provide useful information. Contact **Patrick Warn** in **St. Albans** (See Resource Team notes) or **Joe Boyd** in the **Randolph Area** (jboyd@rnbvt.com). Another example is the 5 Town (Tunbridge/Thetford/Chelsea/Royalton/Vershire) broadband project, contact **Janet Zug** at [janet@zugglass.com](mailto:janet@zugglass.com). Closer to home, Manchester could look at Bennington Long Trail Access, a mesh network, as a model.

In addition to community-based contacts, many statewide programs can provide assistance. State of Vermont resources include:

**Tom Murray**, Commissioner, Dept. of Information and Innovation, [Thomas.Murray@state.vt.us](mailto:Thomas.Murray@state.vt.us), 802-828-4141 – has responsibility for over-all telecommunications planning in Vermont.

**Charlie Kremer**, Dept. of Information and Innovation, wireless coordinator, [Charlie.Kremer@state.vt.us](mailto:Charlie.Kremer@state.vt.us), 802-828-3224 – works with wireless providers and project; coordinates state broadband grant program. Charlie can provide signs to mark current WiFi locations.

**Chris Campbell**, Director, Telecommunication Division, Vermont Public Service Department, [Chris.Campbell@state.vt.us](mailto:Chris.Campbell@state.vt.us), 802-828-4074 – author of the current state telecommunications plan; responsible for the regulatory side of telecommunications

The potential education center for using communications technology could draw on many local sources. Established Manchester businesses could lend expertise to help train entrepreneurs, including Mack Molding, Orvis, Vermont Country Store, Equinox Resort & Spa, R.K. Miles, Apple Jack. Additionally, many local and regional newspapers have become Internet-savvy. The Rutland Herald is one place to check. They have partnered with creative economy teams in Rutland around development of online community information.

Various programs around the state provide assistance to new businesses. The Project Team could look at their structure to determine what would work best for providing technology information in the Manchester area. Examples include:

- **Vermont Small Business Development Center**  
([www.sbdcvt.org](http://www.sbdcvt.org))



- **Champlain College’s BYOBiz Program.** The Bring Your Own Business program specifically targets young people who have started their own business. It is an example of meshing education with existing entrepreneurship. The contact there is **Charlie Nagelschmidt** (nagelschmidt@champlain.edu).
- **Business Incubators:** A new network for Vermont incubators can help this group get in touch with successful incubator programs - <http://www.vtbusinessincubatornetwork.com>. Additionally, it could help to check in with the Middlebury Creative Communities team that is tackling a business incubator concept for that town. The contact there is: **Steve Terry** (steveterry1@verizon.net).
- **Workforce Development Council and Workforce Investment Boards** do workforce skills training programs around the state. They will know successful strategies in engaging community residents in building new job skills. Contact **Chip Evans** at 802-828-4156.
- **College and University Programs:** Colleges and universities train their students in skills necessary for the future workforce. They would have a sense of how to stay current with technology trends and teach the skills individuals need to take advantage of those trends.

Finally, while this team builds the infrastructure for future communications technology, it should not forget to advertise what already exists. This marketing includes letting people know about wireless hotspots, their options for high speed Internet, and potentially creating an online presence for Manchester that shows the community is skilled in working with current technologies. For an example of a community developing a progressive, modern online image, visit St. Johnsbury’s new site at: <http://www.discoverstjvt.com>.

## **Establish a Local Foods Retail Center**

There are many options for developing community buy-in around promoting local foods. Already, assets like the farmers’ market, Local First Vermont campaign and statewide local foods promotion have sparked consumer interest in the concept. Previous work around the “buy local” theme has established familiar locations, such as natural foods co-ops and farmers’ markets, where this group can survey interest in a major retail center. On the negative side, it has created groups that could be hurt by competition from a new retail center, and so they will need to become involved early on to ensure as much of a win-win situation as possible. The Action Plan already notes these connections.

Broad based interest in local foods has also suggested creative partnerships. For example, tying in fish-cooking demonstrations with fly-fishing activities or offering local foods picnic baskets for visitors enjoying Manchester’s recreation. Many possibilities exist. It is important to keep in mind the *range* of reasons why someone might get involved with local foods, interest in the local economy, environmental concerns, finding fresh foods, community building, drawing in tourists. . . there are multiple hooks.

An early question that will come up is defining “local.” Since there is no single accepted definition, having a clear definition is the next best thing. Many groups use a 100-mile radius, this measurement is big enough to include a variety of products but small enough to be easily recognized as local. It also mirrors the work done in other regions of the country. To view a map of Manchester’s 100-mile circle, visit <http://www.100milediet.org>. Some adjust this measurement. For example, the Hannah Grimes Center uses 150 miles, which brings their territory out to the seashore. State organizations, like the Agency of Agriculture, tend to use state borders. Others take a more bioregional approach –local foods advocates in Lamoille, for example, emphasize eating from within their watershed.

The Project Team can look to several other models for how other groups navigate the questions around local foods and bring consumer interest to a higher level.

- **Tiffany Mannion** at the **Hannah Grimes Center** is a great starting place (see Resource Team information).
- The **Localvores** network spans Vermont and western New Hampshire. A central website provides contact information for the different local groups <http://www.localvoreproject.org>. A localvore group is easy to establish and might be an effective first step for Manchester.
- The **Northeast Organic Farmers’ Association** works with both producers and consumers. Their website is <http://www.nofavt.org>.
- **Vital Communities** provided an early foundation for the localvores movement and promotes local foods in the Upper Valley region. Their website is: <http://www.vitalcommunities.org/>
- The Randolph area has worked as a community on promoting local foods. The **Randolph Area Family Farms** organization formed after a visioning process with Vital Communities in 2001. Visit <http://www.raffarms.org>
- Another community-based group that promotes connections between local farmers and consumers closer to Manchester is **Rutland Area Farm and Food Link**. <http://www.rutlandfarmandfood.org/>

While many groups focus on connecting consumers with existing local food sellers, such as co-ops and farmers’ markets, others focus on bringing local foods into new outlets, including new retail spaces. Some of these organizations can provide a framework for this Project Team’s work. They will have an understanding of existing distribution systems, best ways to work directly with farmers, and how to deal with sourcing local foods in large quantities. Some places to explore are:

- **Hannah Grimes Center** (see above)
- **Vermont Fresh Network** connects local chefs with local products. **Meghan Sheridan** is director. Their website is <http://www.vermontfresh.net>.
- **Local Agriculture and Community Exchange** recently opened a store in Barre which specializes in local food and includes educational and community components. They are online at <http://www.lacevt.org>.

The groundwork already exists for the tourist aspect of the Local Foods Center described in the Project Team goal. Vermont has a strong brand reputation to begin with, particularly in food, crafts, and arts. Tourists tend to respond to phrases like “Vermont Produce”, “Vermont Made” and “Vermont Grown”. The **Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing** ([www.vermontpartners.org](http://www.vermontpartners.org)) and the **Tourism Data Center (UVM)** ([www.uvm.edu/~snrvtdc/](http://www.uvm.edu/~snrvtdc/)) have research on visitors’ interests.

Drawing tourists isn’t only a matter of marketing. This Project Team should check with the **Department of Tourism and Marketing** as any building designs move forward to catch important infrastructure details, such as providing space for bus tours. **Steve Cook** from the Department is listed under the Resource Team section.

There are several organizations that can provide an overview of the funding sources possible for the Local Foods Center. The agricultural and local foods angle might open up more options than another business. Four places to check with are:

- **Vermont Economic Development Authority** ([www.veda.org](http://www.veda.org))
- **Vermont Community Loan Fund** ([www.vclf.org](http://www.vclf.org))
- **Agency of Agriculture** (See Resource Team section)
- **Small Business Development Center** ([www.vtsbdc.org](http://www.vtsbdc.org))



## Participants in the Creative Communities Forums

Laine Akiyama  
Sal Ascitutto  
Alan Benoit  
Seth Bomgartz  
Bob Borella  
Ellen Boyer  
Guy Boyer  
Lilia Browning  
Carl Bucholt  
Nancy Burzon  
Steve Burzon  
Dave Citron  
Marie Ferrarin  
Ray Ferrarin  
Kelly Filippi  
Bob Fogelgren  
Jake Forester  
Richard Genser  
Joe Giolito  
Christine Glade  
Brian Gowen  
Al Gray  
Jamie Hand  
Jim Hand  
Kimet Hand  
Frank Hanes  
Julie Hanes  
Ruth Harvie  
Jay Hathaway  
Ben Hauben  
Lana Hauben  
Paul Hilliard  
Andy Holzman  
Mike Iglinski  
Wendi Iglinski  
Kerry Joffe  
Leslie Keefe  
Allison Kibbe  
Mike Kilburn  
Jean Kingston  
Lee Krohn  
Brian Kukon

Bill Laberge  
Linda LaCroix  
Deborah Lloyd  
Ali Lopez  
Abe Malkour  
Brenda Malkour  
Andrew McKeever  
Beth Meachem  
Meaghan Meachem  
Joe Miles  
Jean Miller  
Brett Morrison  
Chris Morrow  
Ed Morrow  
Paul Myers  
Welthy Myers  
Steve Nichols  
Sharon O'Connor  
Kelly Odiorne  
Ellen Ogden  
John O'Keefe  
Frank Ormando  
David Perkins  
Ray Phelps  
Bronton Pinkus  
Jenna Pugliese  
John Ringwood  
David Rosler  
Bear Scovil  
Ryan Scovil  
Mike Seely  
Ryan Shadrin  
Marlene Skulnik  
Dan Stannard  
Denise Tilley  
Anne Weber  
Diana Wilcox  
Wendy Woods  
Cheryl Young



## Resource Team Contact Information

Alex Aldrich  
Vermont Arts Council  
136 State St, Drawer 33  
Montpelier, VT 05633-6001  
aaldrich@arts.vca.state.vt.us  
(802) 828-5420

Steve Cook  
Vermont Department of Tourism &  
Marketing  
National Life Building, Drawer 20  
Montpelier, VT 05620  
[steve.cook@state.vt.us](mailto:steve.cook@state.vt.us)  
802 828-3516

Paul Costello  
VT Council on Rural Development  
P.O. Box 1384  
Montpelier, VT 05602  
vcrd@sover.net  
(802) 828-6024

Joseph Fusco  
Casella Waste Systems, Inc.  
25 Greens Hill Lane  
Rutland, VT 05701  
[joe.fusco@casella.com](mailto:joe.fusco@casella.com)  
802-775-0325

Helen Labun Jordan  
Creative Communities Program  
P.O. Box 1384  
Montpelier, VT 05602  
ccp@sover.net  
(802) 223-3793

Patricia Kreitzer  
Rutland Creative Communities  
Program  
kreitzers@sover.net

Charlie Kremer  
Department of Information and  
Innovation  
133 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633  
Charlie.kremer@state.vt.us  
802-828-3224

David Lane  
116 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05620  
David.lane@state.vt.us  
802-828-2430

Tiffany Mannion  
Hannah Grimes Center  
25 Roxbury St.  
Keene, NH 03431  
tiffany.mannion@hannahgrimes.com  
603-352-5063

Kevin Marshia  
VT Agency of Transportation  
National Life Building -- Drawer 33  
Montpelier, VT 05633-5001  
Kevin.marshia@state.vt.us  
(802) 828-2664

Patricia Menduni  
9 Giorgetti Blvd  
Rutland, VT 05701  
dunesvt@Comcast.net  
802-747-3521

Patrick Warn  
Digitumbra  
520 Mill River Road  
Saint Albans, Vermont 05478  
[patrick.warn@gmail.com](mailto:patrick.warn@gmail.com)  
802 527-9940



Vermont Council on Rural Development  
**89 Main Street, P.O. Box 1384**  
**Montpelier, Vermont 05601-1384**  
[www.vtrural.org](http://www.vtrural.org)

*Images Courtesy of Lee Krohn*