

Plainfield Area
Creative Communities Program
FINAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN



MAY, 2007
Vermont Council on Rural Development

Plainfield Area Creative Communities Program

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Introduction

Plainfield joined the Creative Communities Program for work starting in early 2007. With a population of approximately 1,300, Plainfield is the smallest community to join this program. However, Plainfield and the Plainfield area clearly demonstrate the strong creative, entrepreneurial climate that we know exists in Vermont's villages along with her cities and larger towns. It is this climate that sets the foundation for creative economy work.

Small villages present an important component of the creative economy. These locations often retain a traditional Vermont landscape of clustered residential and commercial areas, with relatively undeveloped (often agricultural) lands surrounding. Home-based and start-up businesses may thrive with proprietors who seek a rural lifestyle. At the same time, both community and economic life face stresses from the number of residents who commute elsewhere for their work. Many villages worry that they will become simply bedroom communities for larger towns nearby, an outcome that would affect both cultural and economic life.

The Plainfield area has retained a unique personality. As the application to the Creative Communities Program stated: "How many other towns of just under 1,300 people can boast a Food Co-op, local dance troupe, monthly movie series, three quality restaurants, an art gallery (soon to be a second), a college, and a number of other establishments that already draw people from the region and even across the state?" Participants in the first public forum took this idea even further, with one visiting Resource Team member pointing out that the community has achieved not just a local reputation for creativity but a national one as well.

While Plainfield-area residents embrace the diversity, independence and free-thinking quality of their home, they also have concerns about appropriate ways to continue these positive aspects. As with many other Vermont towns, Plainfield faces an ongoing challenge of balancing the perspectives of different generations of residents. They are bridging potential gaps between new arrivals, people who have been there for several decades, and those who have lived there for the better part of a lifetime. Another question is how to establish systems for supporting creative developments without stifling that creativity through a formal structure. Several speakers referred to Plainfield's natural anarchy, which conflicts with strict organization.

One priority project, the **Creative Economy Association** (also known as Plainfield Area Community Association - PACA) will develop an initial platform for supporting future creative economy work. The original focus will be on information gathering to help area residents discover the resources that *already* exist in their own backyard and make connections for future collaborations and projects. Following that foundational work, this Project Team will be able to concentrate on best practices for encouraging proactive, creative economic work into the future.

Establishing Plainfield as a Learning Community is another priority project that celebrates existing assets by working with PACA to produce a resource directory of what the Plainfield area already offers for learning opportunities. The Learning Community goals also address multiple possible audiences – from those who have made Plainfield a permanent home to those who might visit for a single workshop or other learning experience. Furthermore, this group encourages everyone to identify their own creative skills and how those may be shared with the larger community.

A final project is **Making Downtown Plainfield More Welcoming to Pedestrians**. The initial project planning meeting for this group established that many possible projects exist, including traffic calming measures, pathways existing different areas of town, and conveniences for those on foot or bike (such as benches, more bike racks, downtown beautification, etc.). The number of choices available to this group makes it possible to take short-, medium-, and long-term perspectives and pair extensive projects with quick action.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development has enjoyed working with everyone involved in the Plainfield area’s Creative Communities Program. We would like to thank the Plainfield Town Hall, Twinfield Union School and Maple Hill School for providing meeting space. We would like to especially thank the Outreach Group that worked at a local level to build participation in the forums and Claudia Clark who provided initial forum refreshments. Alice Merrill Chaired this Outreach Group and will continue to provide leadership as all projects move forward, for which we are grateful.

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



Overview of the Creative Communities Program

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

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

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

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

The Creative Economy

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

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

•The Importance of Place:

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

•Creative Partnerships:

The 2004 *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy* report began to outline the breadth of businesses, individuals, and organizations that contribute to a strong

economy. These contributors include groups that have not traditionally been thought of as business partners, such as arts, heritage, place-based, and other (usually) not-for-profit organizations. They are core partners in economic development discussions. Who needs to be at the table to help build a strong local economy?

•Individuals’ Creative Skills:

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

The Creative Communities Process

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

February 21st, 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 Plainfield area and specific ideas for projects to advance local creative economic development. This list (p.11) formed the basis for the prioritization session in the second public meeting.

March 14th, 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. 14).

April 11th, 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

Plainfield Town Hall

February 21st, 2007

The first public forum in the Plainfield Area Creative Communities Program took place on the evening of February 21st at the Plainfield Town Hall. The forum brought in several speakers who have led creative economy work to provide background on the concept. Helen Labun Jordan, Director of the Creative Communities Program, and Paul Costello, Executive Director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development, gave a general description of the creative economy and the Creative Communities Program process. Alex Aldrich, Executive Director of the Vermont Arts Council, spoke about statewide work on the creative economy and its ability to bring together creative thinkers in every field. Finally, Ruth Wallman, Executive Director of the Lake Champlain Islands' Chamber of Commerce, spoke about the creative economy work happening in her region.

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

What does the creative economy look like in the Plainfield area? Why do people and businesses join the Plainfield-area community?

- Plainfield isn't just houses along the road, there is a "heart."
- Everyone believes that Plainfield is an artistic place. The actual level of artistic activity fluctuates, but that overall belief in being artistic makes the town an attractive place for creative people.
- The area has very diverse neighborhoods. Even with a small population, there is great personality to different sections. It's eclectic.
- Goddard College has traditionally drawn many different people to the community.
- There's a continuing ethic of progressive education, including the Montessori School and Maple Hill School.
- The Association of Vermont Recyclers (AVR) now based in Plainfield uses creative educational programs to deliver messages about the environment. AVR also provides technical assistance for dealing with waste & recycling issues.
- EarthWalk is another example of environmental education. EarthWalk runs programs at Goddard and Twinfield.



- WGDR is an excellent example of community radio and an aural connection between community members. The community support of the station has been recognized for several years by funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

- The Community Center encourages the creative and the entrepreneurial spirit.
- Marshfield has its own community center at the Old School House that includes programs for seniors and the local food shelf.
- The Marshfield Bandstand brings in musicians for a summer series on the green.
- Downtown Plainfield has good restaurants, a bookstore (which has been an anchor business), furniture store and the co-op.
- The Plainfield area has tremendous natural assets, such as the Winooski River and Spruce Mountain. The views are the reason why one speaker moved to Plainfield. It's simply a beautiful rural environment.
- The area has skilled naturalists in addition to its excellent natural places.
- The region is forward-thinking in stewardship.
- At one point, Plainfield was known for its mineral springs and the springs drew visitors to the region. They were later disrupted by road construction.
- The Plainfield area has "user-friendly" agriculture – farmers' market, Wellspring CSA, and organic farms. Interesting agriculture is increasingly a draw in a community and a basis for a "buy local" perspective.
- Many horse farms are located nearby.
- There is a high prevalence of home-based businesses.
- Accessible recreation is a real advantage. For example, railbed trails that connect area communities. The Groton State Forest is adjoining. There is a new town park. There are town recreation fields and an ice rink.
- Plainfield Village is self-sufficient. You don't have to drive elsewhere to meet basic needs.
- Some people are drawn to Plainfield for its reputation of being liberal and progressive.
- The Health Center provides a vital service.
- Plainfield is not a wealthy community but it is a generous community – they add money to the school budget, support the library at a high per capita rate, etc.
- Twinfield is an excellent public school.
- Rte 2 brings people through Plainfield and Marshfield. . . which can be good (people reach the communities) and bad (they drive right past, there's traffic).
- The culture of the area combines the "mythic rugged individualism of Vermont" with true community spirit.
- Downtown is vibrant, with an "amorphous vibe of anarchy."
- Wireless broadband coverage is much better than in other rural areas.
- Plainfield is a good location, close to both Montpelier and the Kingdom.
- The waterfall is an asset.
- Salaam Clothing is a successful Plainfield business.
- The area has a sense of safety, which is very important.
- Marshfield's covered bridge recently received a grant for connecting to the railroad trail and building a picnic pavilion.
- There are active historical societies in Plainfield and Marshfield. There is currently a partnership between Plainfield's historical society and the high school.
- Goddard has the Great Woods Garden.

- The Blinking Light Gallery is a cooperatively run gallery for area artists & craftspeople. The community has been very supportive of the gallery, including help with fixing up the space where it is located.
- Another way that Plainfield is forward thinking is in its current efforts to build hydropower downtown.
- Downtown Plainfield has classic architecture in buildings that are still used as normal residences and businesses, that aren't "gussied up." The architecture is recognized on the National Historic Register.
- Plainfield village is relatively compact. It fits the Vermont village ideal of concentrated downtown development surrounded by rural land.
- Lower downtown has moved to be mostly residential, but at one point it also had businesses.
- Plainfield has a revolving loan fund to support local projects.
- Plainfield has a national reputation for creativity.

What projects could strengthen the creative economy in the Plainfield area?

- Empty buildings or buildings that want to transition to business sites exist and should be better utilized.
- Some visitors have observed that the roadways and sidewalks look dirty. Work could be done on sprucing up downtown in general to show that Plainfield is nurtured by its residents.
- There could be a kayak course on the river.
- The area needs more after-school and vacation activities.
- The downtown is strong, but needs more pathways, pedestrian-friendly routes to reach it, and attractions for pedestrians. One particular area to target is pedestrian connections between lower & upper Plainfield.
- There needs to be a larger community space for non-profit, arts, and cultural activities.
- There are many creative, skilled residents in the Plainfield area, but information about what exists is needed to increase local buy-in. A directory would be a step in the right direction. Another step might be developing a local currency.
- Plainfield could be a destination for arts and crafts instruction, in the way that Yestermorrow and the Johnson Crafts Studio are destinations. The area would have to actively build that reputation. An apprenticeship program, for either short or long term apprenticeships, is one possibility.
- Frog Hollow in Burlington draws a lot of traffic with a Re-Use Showcase of art made from found and re-used objects. Plainfield should do the same.
- Old Home Days could be expanded with a festival showcasing local artisans, music, and food.
- There are spaces available for creative projects, but not necessarily a good way to



connect those places with individuals who could use them. For example, a farm field that could showcase sculptures, the old hardware store space, or barn space for exhibits. A town website could help make those connections.

- Entrepreneurs could flourish with access to low-risk commercial space in the downtown, with short-term leases and small office space for individuals.
- The area should find creative ways to meet basic needs. For example, a cinomat that combines a Laundromat and video rental. T.V.'s can show movies while people wait. There could even be food served. Wine is preferred.
- The existing trails networks can be expanded, particularly outside of the village center, connections to horse farms and to B&B's. The web of trails should include "special spots" to uncover – including natural features and letterboxing treasure hunts.
- The community needs to invest in local energy production (as with the hydro) and housing standards for heating efficiency.
- Creative programs could educate young children and connect them with other generations.
- A local Creative Economy Association could provide ongoing work connecting businesses and craftspeople.
- Traffic is an issue driving through Plainfield. Traffic calming measures, such as tree plantings, should be instituted. These calming measures should also signal Plainfield as a vibrant economy.
- Another way to deal with traffic is alternate transportation: better walking systems, community vehicles (like using school buses to shuttle), orange bikes.
- High speed Internet can be expanded, connecting community activities and also with WiFi hotspots in the downtown.
- Internet work should not replace in-person commerce and community connections. The farmers' market is an example of these in-person connections. That existing interactive market could be expanded to connect people with area home-based businesses.
- A network of hiking trails should link together historic houses / foundations and today's local crafters.
- A kiosk in the park should present information about the region.
- There should be better connections with Goddard students, drawing them into the downtown.
- WGDR is a strong asset but could be used more for community communication. For example, recording oral histories.
- There used to be a roaming Senior Center. Today, more effort is needed to network the aging and elderly population with younger people.
- The Winooski River should be tied into the trail system.
- There is a division between "old timers" and "liberals". . . more should be done with using the common base of caring about the community to overcome the divide.
- The Town Hall should host more regular activities.
- Towns are made attractive in two ways: 1.) offering the businesses that people need and 2.) offering cultural activities.

- A sidewalk project exists. It should move forward and incorporate art.
- Better signage is needed – especially a creative / artistic “Welcome to Plainfield” sign.
- Grace Church needs community involvement in maintaining the building.
- The co-op should be expanded into a larger grocery space and more room for activities.
- Plainfield should do more to capitalize on the Groton State Forest connection.
- In addition to expanding trails, Plainfield should expand services related to trails – equipment sales, bike repair, etc.
- There should be strong regional networking to deal with emergency situations.
- Plainfield and Marshfield should launch senior housing efforts that connect with East Montpelier and Cabot.



II. Initial List of Project Possibilities

The February 21st forum produced stacks of notes from enthusiastic discussions. The Vermont Council on Rural Development looked through these first forum notes to pull together the first draft of a projects list. The projects listed express the specific ideas presented in February, combining very similar ones and adding in considerations that came up during the background discussion. They block out ambitious concepts that could provide a starting point for project teams to research and refine. VCRD did not filter projects based on feasibility or how closely they relate to the creative economy. Instead, this process simply organized the notes, combined small ideas into larger ones, and connected general observations to concrete project possibilities.

Revisions to the initial list occurred at a public meeting, on March 14th, where participants added new topics, combined existing topics into single projects, and made corrections to each proposal. This public process produced the following, final proposed topic list.

Establish Plainfield as a Learning Community: Plainfield is already well known for progressive education, in part because it is home to Goddard College. The town could build on that reputation by actively promoting learning programs. For example, local craftspeople, artists, and food producers could lead apprenticeships for short- or long-term learners. Yestermorrow and the Studio Center in Johnson could serve as examples, and Plainfield can build its own learning center identity. Several spaces mentioned in earlier discussions, such as the Town Hall and Community Center, could receive more programming through the learning center development.

Make Downtown Plainfield More Welcoming to Pedestrians: Healthy foot traffic can be key to a vital downtown. Plainfield has several impediments to pedestrians, including busy traffic, lack of signage and roadsides that are often littered. New walking paths could be developed to unify the upper and lower village and make Plainfield pedestrian friendly. These trails can be expanded to reach outside of downtown, such as improving the walking connection with Goddard. A central kiosk could provide information. An artistic “Welcome to Plainfield” sign and pedestrian attractions could signal that this is a place to stop. Trees along the road could calm traffic. The existing sidewalk project could incorporate artwork to encourage pedestrians to explore the area. An overall goal is to allow Plainfield residents to access stores and services by foot.

Expand Recreation in the Plainfield Area: There are many options for expanded recreation in Plainfield. Some suggestions include establishing a kayak course on the river, extending walking and hiking trails, connecting trails with historic buildings / foundations or to special “letterboxing” sites, expanding rails to trails projects, and doing more with the Groton State Forest. Marshfield is receiving a large parcel for recreation. Recreation enhances community life and also can have a direct economic impact through measures like connecting trails to Bed & Breakfasts and eateries, and

supporting equipment / repair shops downtown. Trails can also extend from recreation areas into downtown where a better walking system is needed.

Develop Incubation Space for Art and Business Entrepreneurs:

Plainfield has a combination of entrepreneurs working from home offices or home studios and underutilized existing spaces that these entrepreneurs could use. The town should develop a plan for empty or underutilized downtown buildings that would encourage rental spaces of a smaller size and shorter lease terms to make them attractive to one-person creative businesses. Additional services, such as access to tools, teachers, and the college, would make this space a true incubator. There should also be a better mechanism to connect available exhibit spaces with interested artists. The Blinking Light Gallery offers a great start, and there are other possible collaborations like displaying sculpture in a farm field or art in a barn.

Launch Vermont’s First “Cinomat”: Pursuing the creative economy can also include meeting basic needs of residents creatively. Plainfield currently needs a Laundromat and video rental store. A Cinomat could combine those needs, with movies for rent showing on laundry room TV’s and local food for sale. This creative solution could set the standard for other hybrid businesses that make normal work more fun.

Strengthen the Community Center: The existing Community Center is a great asset to the Plainfield area. However, there is room for either revitalizing previous community programs, such as the teen center, or developing new initiatives. A particular interest was expressed in having more activities for children after school and during vacations. The Community Center’s goal should receive more support through this creative economy project. An eventual goal could be expanding the size of the space available for community use.

Form a Local Creative Economy Association: The Plainfield area has many great creative economy resources, but limited ways to organize and promote them. A Creative Economy association can provide this form of ongoing support. An initial project for this association could be development of a skills bank, providing information about local business, craftspeople, and arts. Another project could be a Buy Local Campaign and/or a marketing campaign for Plainfield. Both the skills bank and buy local campaign will require creative ways of getting out information to help area residents discover assets that exist in their own backyards. Finally, the association could provide assistance for future planning exercises around the creative economy after the Creative Communities Program projects have been completed.

Expand Local Energy Production and Efficiency: Some communities are establishing themselves as independent, forward-thinking towns by pursuing a strong local energy policy. Plainfield has already started in this direction by investigating the possibility of small-scale hydro. A more comprehensive energy plan should be developed and enacted. This effort can also address other community concerns, for example by instituting new standards for energy efficient homes to help families stay warm in the winter or reducing heavy traffic through town with alternative transportation options.

Better rideshare options are an example of these possible initiatives, which ties in with the concern of pedestrians in downtown.

Improve Internet Access: Through local wireless Internet service, Plainfield has surpassed many rural communities in broadband access. Still, more could be done. Coverage should be improved in outlying areas. In addition, public Wi-Fi spots should be easily available, and clearly marked, in downtown Plainfield.

Increase Programming for the Town Hall: The Town Hall is a great asset, but could host more events. A particular interest was expressed in finding a way to bring together lifelong area residents and more recent arrivals. The Town Hall could provide a good place for activities with this purpose. More events in the Town Hall may also be an impetus for resolving the parking issues in that area.

Strengthen Community Connections for the Older Population: The Plainfield area, like many regions in Vermont, is concerned with the welfare of an aging population. Four particular projects related to this issue were voiced by residents: reinstating the floating senior center with community activities that involve multiple generations, recording oral histories of the area in collaboration with WGDR, building stronger emergency networks (for example to help out after a blizzard) and jointly addressing senior housing needs, as has been done in East Montpelier and Cabot.

Assist in Maintenance of Grace Church: Plainfield has worked for years to develop a central town green. One success has been the new park that went in alongside the river. For many residents, Grace Church, particularly its yard and wall, have become a substitute town green. A community group should assist the Church's congregation in the maintenance of the Church building and its property.



Expand Old Home Days: Old Home Days offers an annual celebration of the Plainfield area, but it could include more activities and more showcasing of local talents in arts, crafts, performance, food and other areas. Several ideas for creative exhibits appeared during the creative economy discussion. One is to have an art exhibit of re-used materials (something which has been a strong draw for Frog Hollow in Burlington). Another is to highlight the history of the mineral springs in Plainfield. A committee could look at these, and other, creative ideas and experiment with new community activities as part of the Old Home Days celebration.

III. Priority Topics **Selected March 14th, 2007**

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

The first step in the evening was to review the list of ideas drawn from the initial forum in February. 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.

The three priority issues selected by the Plainfield area are:

Form a Local Creative Economy Association: The Plainfield area has many great creative economy resources, but limited ways to organize and promote them. A Creative Economy association can provide this form of ongoing support. An initial project for this association could be development of a skills bank, providing information about local business, craftspeople, and arts. Another project could be a Buy Local Campaign and/or a marketing campaign for Plainfield. Both the skills bank and buy local campaign will require creative ways of getting out information to help area residents discover assets that exist in their own backyards. Finally, the association could provide assistance for future planning exercises around the creative economy after the Creative Communities Program projects have been completed.

Establish Plainfield as a Learning Community: Plainfield is already well known for progressive education, in part because it is home to Goddard College. The town could build on that reputation by actively promoting learning programs. For example, local craftspeople, artists, and food producers could lead apprenticeships for short- or long-term learners. Yestermorrow and the Studio Center in Johnson could serve as examples, and Plainfield can build its own learning center identity. Several spaces mentioned in earlier discussions, such as the Town Hall and Community Center, could receive more programming through the learning center development.

Make Downtown Plainfield More Welcoming to Pedestrians: Healthy foot traffic can be key to a vital downtown. Plainfield has several impediments to pedestrians, including busy traffic, lack of signage and roadsides that are often littered. New walking paths could be developed to unify the upper and lower village and make Plainfield pedestrian friendly. These trails can be expanded to reach outside of downtown, such as

improving the walking connection with Goddard. A central kiosk could provide information. An artistic “Welcome to Plainfield” sign and pedestrian attractions could signal that this is a place to stop. Trees along the road could calm traffic. The existing sidewalk project could incorporate artwork to encourage pedestrians to explore the area. An overall goal is to allow Plainfield residents to access stores and services by foot.



IV. Action Plans **April 11th and May 2007**

On April 11th, community members from throughout the Plainfield 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 April 11th, committee members worked closely with facilitators and resource teams to develop step-by-step action plans, and to devise a list of human and financial resources to help achieve their goals. The following action plans also reflect a second community meeting held in early May to add details to the basic plans outlined in the April 11th forum. Project Team chairs facilitated the May discussions.

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 Plainfield as a Learning Community: Plainfield is already well known for progressive education, in part because it is home to Goddard College. The town could build on that reputation by actively promoting learning programs. For example, local craftspeople, artists, and food producers could lead apprenticeships for short- or long-term learners. Yestermorrow and the Studio Center in Johnson could serve as examples, and Plainfield can build its own learning center identity. Several spaces mentioned in earlier discussions, such as the Town Hall and Community Center, could receive more programming through the learning center development.

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Action Steps

1.) Inventory Assets

Gather together educational organizations, artists, craftspeople, etc. Determine scope of what will be included and how assets inventory will be used. Examples of possible uses:

- Kiosk to provide information in a central place
- Online catalogue of educational resources
- Serving as a link between different educational groups.

Work with Creative Economy Association to build a Resource Directory (see Action Plan for Creative Economy Association).

2.) Create a Blog or E-Group for Brainstorming

3.) Co-ordinate an Event

Possible Events:

- Host a monthly speaker series
- Host a movie series
- Hold community dinners
- Working with another group – for example, making Field Notes electronic or collaboration with Goddard or Earthwalk.

4.) Investigate Long-Term Projects

Possible avenues / things to learn include:

- Community Gardens / Community Composting
- Teacher Training
- Visit to Studio Place Arts to see if that environment might be created in Plainfield area.
- Apprenticeships (including children to elderly)
- Bioregional Focus



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Action Steps

1.) Select a Name

Choose a name that clearly communicates goal of the group to people who are not familiar with “creative economy” term. Suggested title: Plainfield Area Community Association (PACA).

2.) Partner with Non-Profit Organization

Partner with a non-profit organization to allow 501(c)3 status for fundraising.

3.) Have a Presence at Earth Day at the Coop

This event offers an upcoming opportunity to sharing information with the community about plans to form association, develop Skills Bank Directory, etc.

4.) Develop a Skills Bank

Develop "Skills Bank" or "Resource Directory," both for print publication and showcasing online. The directory would be a valuable resource -- a coordinated voluntary listing of folks in town and skills/talents they offer. Coordinate with the Learning Community project team. See cooperative Action Plan below.

A. Develop a Questionnaire

B. Test the Questionnaire Form with Creative Economy Group.

Some points to consider:

- Are instructions clear?
- What is the best way to collect information electronically? And is electronic easy to use?
- Is the right information being gathered – including information to be used by Learning Community group?
- Does introductory material make people want to provide information?
- How well does the Creative Economy group itself make use of electronic formats to stay connected? Again, what online strategies work? (see also “Marketing”)

C. Set Clear Outline of How Data will be Used

- Are there privacy concerns? And how should they be addressed?
- Do people feel it will be worth their time to provide information?
- Is the audience / end use clear enough to determine best format for publishing the information?

D. Select Online Format

- What format best fits needs – for example, well-organized, easy for individuals to navigate (including for updates), simple to set up.
 - Mary Niebling, Ben Graham, Janice Lloyd, Jason Lemieux
- What is realistic given resources – in donated time and funding.
 - Ben Graham will find out

E. Develop Two-Part Marketing Plan to Collect Data

- Phase I: Getting survey out (and getting it back). Options include e-mailing, providing at community events, town mailings, canvassing, etc.
- Phase II: Presenting wealth of information from Phase I to businesses and selling small ad space for future printed directory.

F. Develop Marketing Plan for After Directories are Published

G. Two-Phase Resource Directory Publication

- 1.) Online – the Resource Directory’s online presence will set the base for a town website.
- 2.) Hard Copy

5. Establish a Recognized Association

There is a desire to form an association that will be recognizable locally as driving force behind action steps listed above, and more. This association will work to coordinate

partnerships among local talent (e.g., website developers, skills bank directory producers, etc.) to produce project results beneficial to the community.

6. Identify Opportunities for Joint Marketing

This is something to be explored on an ongoing basis, in cooperation with local businesses and organizations, regional and State resources.

7. Conduct Outreach and Communication

An ongoing plan for multi-faceted outreach and communications will need to be developed once a long-term vision takes root and the Resource Directory is unveiled. Visits to local businesses to determine interest in/support of the Association concept and project plans would be one way of moving forward.

Make Downtown Plainfield More Welcoming to Pedestrians:

Healthy foot traffic can be key to a vital downtown. Plainfield has several impediments to pedestrians, including busy traffic, lack of signage and roadsides that are often littered. New walking paths could be developed to unify the upper and lower village and make Plainfield pedestrian friendly. These trails can be expanded to reach outside of downtown, such as improving the walking connection with Goddard. A central kiosk could provide information. An artistic “Welcome to Plainfield” sign and pedestrian attractions could signal that this is a place to stop. Trees along the road could calm traffic. The existing sidewalk project could incorporate artwork to encourage pedestrians to explore the area. An overall goal is to allow Plainfield residents to access stores and services by foot.

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Action Steps

1.) Gather Information:

- Timeline for Rte. 2 roadwork.
- Timeline for Town Plan process.
- Status of / availability of Historic walking tour.
- General Price Estimates and Rules for:
 - Bridges
 - Over Roads (eg Rte. 2)
 - Over River
 - Changes to Lights
 - Speed Bumps
 - Pavement Markings

- Crosswalks – Specific restrictions
- Tree Planting
- Placing Signs
 - State Signs
 - Homemade Signs
- History of Attempts to Resolve Rte 2 / Main St. Intersection
- Projects Undertaken by Other Communities for:
 - Appearance
 - Landscape of Downtown / Village Character.

2.) Overall Plan / Vision

Set a plan for establishing an integrated vision for pedestrian and bikeways in downtown Plainfield. Moving forward with this higher level planning can be combined with more immediate actions in the short term.

3.) Review Criteria for Selecting Initial Projects

- Acceptance in town
- Visibility
- Builds Public Awareness
- Builds Momentum for Future Projects
- Draw Volunteers (including from school)
- High Impact
- Lasting
- Ties in With Projects in Process (see notes at end)
- Affordability
- Doesn't Require Outside Approval

4.) Select Initial Priorities from Following List

Short-Term (could be accomplished quickly)

- Put up signage to slow traffic along Rte. 2 and signify that drivers are entering a village.
- Provide better maintenance and marking for the existing path connecting Goddard and downtown.
- Make the pole at Creamery and Brook Streets more prominent.
- Expand Green Up Day efforts, including mobilizations throughout the year.
- Find a better place for sandwich boards
- Give pedestrian and bike-oriented input to Town Plan.
- Complete Banners project
- Provide Clear Marking of the Cross-VT Bike Trail connections through town.
- Install more bike racks.
- Construct a kiosk with guides, walking maps, and the historic walking tour.
- Install benches / sitting areas along existing walking trails.

Medium-Term

- Slow traffic in the Fire Station area.
- Expand pathway connecting Goddard to downtown – currently the connection for the full walk is unclear.
- Work with the Conservation Committee to bring in more trees and keep existing trees healthy.
- Assist with improving appearance of downtown Plainfield to make it a welcoming place to walk through.

Long-Term (would take a relatively long amount of time to complete)

- Provide walking paths connecting new development to downtown and other gathering places.
- Connect downtown trails to a larger system of trails throughout the Plainfield area.
- Include bike lanes in any Rte. 2 improvements.
- Connect parks, and recreation field, to rest of downtown with trails.
- Eliminate overhead wires.
- Improve connections between the upper and lower village – particularly making the Rte. 2 and Main St. intersection more easily navigable.
- Slow traffic speed by the new Town Hall and Fire Station.
- Create more sidewalks (beyond the existing sidewalk construction plan).
- Build pedestrian bridges to cross the waterways that currently segment town.
- Construct a band shell for outdoor concerts.

Current Pedestrian Related Projects

- There is an 80% complete project of hanging banners of local artwork and photographs from streetlight poles.
- A grant has been received to install sidewalks in the lower village along Mill Street and Main Street. Trees are currently in the budget.
- A Street Tree fund exists.
- There is a partial pathway connecting downtown and Goddard.
- The Town Plan revision process is an opportunity to add pedestrian-related language.
- Plainfield area residents have an interest in walking.
- Goddard College has applied to the Getty Foundation for a grant that will include developing a walking tour.
- The town has plans to use antique lampposts from a resident who had them in his barn.

A follow-up meeting narrowed down the long list of possible projects to six primary interests:

1. Railroad Bed Trail Project: Connect the old Plainfield railroad bed trail with an unused part of the trail that runs to Montpelier.

2. **Downtown Trails/Bridges:** Connect Plainfield’s two parks in Plainfield by utilizing the land by the waterfall. A study of options and costs will help pinpoint how this is accomplished.
3. **Traffic Calming Pavement Markings / Bike Lanes on Road:** Place traffic calming markings on pavement in upper Plainfield – in line with studies currently being done in Vermont that show certain markings can slow traffic. Also, add a painted bike lane to upper Plainfield.
4. **Crosswalks on Rt. 2:** Seek approval from VT Agency of Transportation for Rt. 2 crosswalks at the Goddard College sign, the Used Furniture store, and Maple Valley.
5. **Plainfield Town Plan:** The upcoming revisions to the Town Plan will have an impact on zoning decisions made by the state. This group will work on the Town Plan revisions to ensure that its goals and objectives are in line with the Plainfield Creative Communities goals and objectives.
6. **Aesthetics:** The session brainstorming projects identified several smaller projects related to aesthetics. This priority will pull those ideas together, including lamp-post flags, antique lampposts, tree planting, a kiosk, and park and ride improvements.



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 Plainfield area Project Teams. Their recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the Plainfield 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 Plainfield as a Learning Community

Many options exist for establishing Plainfield as a learning community, and many examples exist within Vermont. The Resource Directory can be a good start for deciding a direction that fits in well with the Plainfield area's existing character. This Project Team can analyze information from the directory to determine what is missing for learning activities and what should be added. See recommendations for the Creative Economy Association for more information.

If the direction moves towards artists' residencies there are two websites representing an alliances of residencies that can give some ideas: <http://www.artistcommunities.org/> <http://www.resartis.org/>. **Triangle Arts** is an umbrella group for international artists' workshops (<http://www.trianglearts.org/>). These websites all show the diversity of forms an "artists' residency" can take.

Kathy Black, from the **Vermont Studio Center**, attended as part of the Resource Team and is available to brainstorm ideas, both about options for programs and about who might help outline a funding strategy. Contact her at: (802) 635-2727.

The new workforce bill, H.433, will provide funding options for organizations that set up and administer student internships. Look for applications from the **Department of Labor** starting this summer (2007): <http://www.labor.vermont.gov/>

Some institutions of higher learning offer ongoing educational opportunities that might be a good example, either for a partnership with Goddard or as stand alone projects. One popular program is the **Osher Lifelong Learning** program at the University of Vermont. Osher targets Vermonters over the age of 50 and reaches many communities around Vermont. The concept could be adapted to include other generations. More information is available at <http://www.uvm.edu/~learn/osher/>.

Some non-profit organizations offer help hosting learning activities. For example, the **Vermont Humanities Council** can help non-profits find new ways to engage people in town – there is a small grants program to support community initiatives of certain kinds. Call **Peter Gilbert** at (802) 262-2626 with questions.

A final option to consider is providing a crash course in running workshops and classes for local people who have skills to share. Some basic instruction in running a class would ensure a high quality experience for everyone. The easiest way to accomplish this training will likely be to tap someone nearby who is an experienced teacher – for example at Twinfield Union School, Goddard College or an organization with an education component, such as the Association of Vermont Recyclers.

Form a Local Creative Economy Association

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

- **Rutland** and **St. Johnsbury** chose to focus on building collaborations among arts and cultural organizations as part of their Creative Communities Program efforts. At the time of this report, Rutland has been working for a year on its collaborations (St. Johnsbury has just begun). The contacts for that effort are, in Rutland, **Patricia Kreitzer** (kreitzer@sover.net) and in St. Johnsbury **Jerry Aldredge** (catamount_jerry@charterinternet.com).
- The **Randolph Area** also selected ongoing creative economy organization as a priority Creative Communities Program project. They brought structure to this effort through choosing initial projects for collaboration related to online tools for building connections and (as with Plainfield) building a resource directory. Contact **Julie Iffland**: (802) 728-6014.
- The **Lake Champlain Islands** is building several community projects that bring together multiple businesses, organizations, and area residents around the creative economy. The **Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce** could offer ideas for building these connections. Contact **Ruth Wallman** at 802 372-8400.
- A well-known example of bringing creative and cultural businesses together is **HandMade in America**, an organization formed by Becky Anderson to focus on the economic value of craft and the handmade object in Western North Carolina. Using creative partnerships, HandMade in America has helped stimulate momentum to revitalize entire towns. They conduct workshops on rural sustainable creative economic and community development. Go to www.handmadeinamerica.com.

The Local Creative Economy Association will want to select short-term projects now, even as it continues to plan for long-term activities so that it builds successes that will help it hold and grow momentum. The group should set practical short-term goals as soon as possible.

For the Business Resource Directory project, the Plainfield area can learn from towns that have already done it. Middlesex is one such town; go to http://www.middlesex-vt.org/html/business_services.html to learn more. A phone conversation with the organizer of a successful project in another town can provide valuable time- and cost-saving tips. A particular question to ask is how to ensure that the database remains up-to-



date. Updating could require funding to pay someone, which might be met through business sponsorships.

Some towns, such as St. Albans, have started to think creatively about their creative economy assets through taking tours of other creative economy centers around the state. The **Preservation Trust of Vermont** has arranged these tours in the past. Contact Paul Bruhn at 658-6647. An upcoming opportunity to get an overview of activity around the state is the July 18th, 2007, **Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy** conference. Details are online at <http://www.vtrural.org>.

Businesses in the Plainfield area should consider listing themselves – for free – on the **Vermont Business Registry**, the Department of Economic Development's online searchable business database (<http://www.vermontbusinessregistry.com>). By taking advantage of this free listing, tourism-related businesses (and their websites) are also featured on the searchable **Vermont Travel Planner** at www.vermontvacation.com, the State's official Vermont tourism website.

Visit the **Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce** website at <http://www.central-vt.com/chamber/CVCtour.htm> to learn about regional tourism marketing programs and opportunities

In addition to adding local resources to existing online databases, some towns have also started their own free blog or wiki. **Pownal**, **Putney** and **Brattleboro** offer examples of these easily-started websites. One drawback of the free exchange made possible by wikis or blogs is a risk of attracting negative, sometimes personal, attacks online. A system for keeping the dialogue constructive should be in place before launching the site.

Finally, there are many ways to design surveys and use the final results. The **Center for Rural Studies** at the **University of Vermont** consults with non-profits around the state on survey techniques and also conducts the annual Vermonter Poll. Visit their website, <http://crs.uvm.edu>, to find out what tools they have available and for a list of contacts.

Make Downtown Plainfield More Welcoming to Pedestrians

Many towns are interested in improving their pedestrian-ways in the downtown, and so many guidelines exist to help plan. A first stop for references is: <http://www.aot.state.vt.us/progdev/Sections/LTF/LTF.htm>. This webpage brings you to the Program Development division of the Agency of Transportation, and the Local Transportation Facilities section. Guides posted here include:

- Pedestrian & Bike Facility Planning

- Vermont Safe Routes to School Program
- Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan
- Guide for Municipality-Managed Transportation Facilities
- Enhancement Grants Program

Information on Vermont State Standards for highway design is available at: <http://www.aot.state.vt.us/progdev/standards/statabta.htm>. These guidelines will include answers to questions about designing bike lanes, shoulders, and minimum distances for tree plantings.

Information on Traffic Calming is available at <http://www.aot.state.vt.us/planning/TCSandAP.htm>. This document provides an introduction to strategies for traffic calming. More detailed drawings of items that can help with calming are available from **Kevin Marshia**: (802) 828-2664

Steve Gladczuk at the **Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission** can answer questions about the history of Rte. 2 work in Plainfield. In 1993 CVRPC, VTrans, and representatives from Plainfield and Marshfield formed the Route 2 Committee. The committee charge was to identify issues concerning land use, commercial activities, safety, and traffic efficiency. A final report is available from CVRPC. The recommendation was to build a bypass around the Village, and rebuild Route 2 within the Village to address safety and aesthetic issues. In town votes, Plainfield narrowly supported the recommendation, and Marshfield strongly opposed it.

In 1999, the CVRPC completed a US Route 2 Corridor Conceptual Design for several intersections, including the US 2 and Main Street Intersection. In 2005 a detailed engineering evaluation was performed to determine the feasibility of improvement options. The Select Board didn't endorse the recommendation to turn the US 2/Main St. Intersection into a "T", remove the island, and signalize for pedestrians. They felt it had too great an impact on parking, and felt the traffic light would increase congestion.

The **Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program** offers grants for planning, planting and maintaining street plantings. They publish a book, *Recommended Trees for Vermont Communities*, which is a useful reference. Also contact **Kate Forrer** (katherine.forrer@uvm.edu) with UVM extension who is a wealth of knowledge with regard to street tree planting and programs. **Jane Brown** (jane.brown@state.vt.us), a landscape architect with AOT can provide information about setbacks along Route 2.



There are many options for designating village/town walks along existing paths. The most important step is to have something on paper – even if it's only photocopies of a simple guide. Local residents can organize theme walks of all sorts, some of which might get published or written up in a local newspaper, others just for those who attend on a weekend afternoon.

Kiosks came up as a concrete, useful starting project. Remember that the information provided by a kiosk can begin with something as simple as boxes similar to trail head sign-in boxes, attached to willing business entryways and containing pamphlets or a few notices of local events.

The new town plan is an opportunity to explore pedestrian enhancements at every level: enhancing the village as a focal point and vibrant walkable place and expanding out from there with a network of walking trails and pedestrian routes. AOT gives priority in **Enhancement Grants**, and funding generally, to towns that have a clear plan for where sidewalks and other amenities need to go. The planning process also provides an opportunity for greater public participation in identifying priorities and directions.

The Town Plan should address the characteristics that make the village an attractive place to work, shop, live and recreate, and to consider how changes proposed in the future might affect the character of the village either positively or negatively. **Jean Vissering** reminds us that this is not about paint colors and neatness, but about scale and pattern. Some useful references are

- *Above and Beyond: Visualizing Change in Small Towns and Rural Areas* by Julie Campoli, Elizabeth Humstone and Alex MacLean (American Planning Association)
- *Saving Place: A Guide and Report Card for Protecting Community Character* (National Trust for Historic Preservation)
- *The Roadscape Guide: Tools to Preserve Scenic Road Corridors* (Champlain Valley Greenbelt Alliance for the Vermont Forum on Sprawl)
- Publications by the Vermont Forum on Sprawl <http://www.vtsprawl.org>.
- See also the Vermont Agency of Transportation references mentioned above.

Consider inviting the authors of some of these publications to talk to the town as part of the Town Planning process.

The planning process for priority projects should also include cost comparisons. Having this information in place will greatly improve Plainfield's chances of obtaining transportation funds as well as directing future volunteer work.

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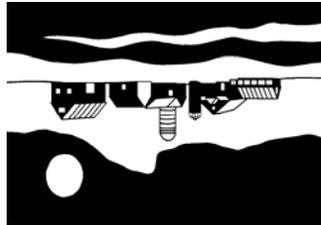
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