Albany Together

Community Visit Report and Action Plan
February 2024

Produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development

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Vision for Albany's Future

Community members envision a future Albany where:

❖ the village is the focus and heart of town.

❖ the town's events bring the community together and draw people from outside of town.

❖ the Library and the Genny are places to find out what's happening in town and find needed resources.

❖ we have a school, a church, stores, a community center, and other gathering spaces.

❖ there are opportunities for everybody to connect, especially young people.

❖ there are economic opportunities because Albany's vibrant businesses employ locals.

❖ young people want to stay and live in Albany.

❖ the town is an attractive and wonderful place to live.

❖ the Town infrastructure adequately supports its residents and businesses.

❖ the town is tied into and collaborates with the resources and events of surrounding towns.

❖ the town is a welcoming and safe community; we all look out for each other.

❖ all community members feel engaged in community discussions and events.

❖ we know each other, respect each other, and give each other the benefit of the doubt.

I. Introduction

A small town with a wealth of assets, Albany is a scenic community and feels like a welcoming gateway to the heart of the Northeast Kingdom. Following community development successes of the past several years, when local residents approached VCRD, it was clear that the town was ready to consider what's next for Albany— what else can we accomplish when we come together across villages and across differences to continue to build on the strength of our relationships and history?

Throughout this Community Visit process, Visiting Team members and Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) staff were struck by the close-knit nature of the town and easy rapport between community members. The assets shared throughout the process reflect a deep connection to the land and to each other. Many voices recognized the strength of the neighborliness of this community, and many pointed to ways that the community can do more to bring others in, especially a new generation.

Many action ideas were identified throughout this process, and can be found in the "Opportunities" section of this report along with notes taken at the initial forums. Through careful deliberation, in the end, Albany residents voted to form task forces around two priorities:

- **Revitalize Historic Buildings**
- **Improve Community Communications and Connection**

These priorities reflect the needs and desires of the community today: a desire to preserve the architecture and gathering spaces of the past while working to build new connections for Albany residents now and in the future.

VCRD and all its partners look forward to working with the Albany Task Forces as they frame and implement these projects. They are already hard at work—please support their efforts, or join them by reaching out to their chairs (listed in the Action Plan section of this report).

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The Vermont Council on Rural Development helps Vermont citizens build prosperous and resilient communities through democratic engagement, marshaling resources, and collective action. VCRD is prepared to support the efforts of Albany as it moves forward and to provide follow- up help to the Task Forces as called upon. VCRD will also serve as an advocate for Albany projects with appropriate agencies and organizations in Vermont. Please call on us, and on Visiting Resource Team members (listed with contact information in the back of this report), when we can be of help.

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There are many people to thank for making the Albany Together Community Visit a success.

We would like to thank the Albany Select Board who invited this process and the Albany Community Trust for helping to encourage the process and for providing funds for the town-wide mailing and the Community Dinner at the first meeting, thank you!

We deeply appreciate the work and leadership of Planning Committee members who helped guide the process by identifying forum topics for discussion, developing the invitation process to start the effort, and helping with outreach: Kit Basom, Rob Dewees, Hannah Dreissegacker, Kristen Fountain, Brian Goodridge, Colleen Goodridge, Dylan Kinsey, Sonya Kittredge, Hannah Pearce, George Richardson, Nadine Richardson, Angela Ross, Charles Supernaw, Kristin Urie and Cathy Wilder. Thanks also to the many other community leaders and organizations who worked together to spread the word about the event and make sure everyone in town was invited and encouraged to participate!

We are very grateful to the Albany Community School staff, particularly for the use of the school to host the meetings. Thank you to Jessica Thomas and Wendy Little for helping with outreach, as well as to Jeff Potter and the custodial staff for help with setup, cleanup, and logistics.

Thanks to Lindsay Martin for championing input from the Albany school students. Miss Lindsay was essential in coordinating the middle school Youth Forum, as well as providing all grades with the opportunity to share their ideas. That input is included in this report.

Thanks to the vendors who provided dinner: Tatro's for catering the first meeting, and The Genny for pizza at the second and third meetings. Thanks also to Bailey Danaher for providing childcare for the meetings.

We appreciate the help of the UVM Office of Engagement and UVM Center for Rural Studies for producing a briefing profile of data points about Albany for the VCRD Community Visit Team.

Thanks must also go to the funders of VCRD's Community Visit Program who made this process possible: Northern Border Regional Commission, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Community National Bank, Lintilhac Foundation, National Life Foundation, Vermont Community Foundation, Vermont Humanities Council, and the Windham Foundation.

VCRD calls in support from state, federal and non-profit leaders to participate in the Community Visit Program. We are proud of the partners we get to work with—especially the Visiting and Resource Team members who came to meetings in Albany and are willing to serve as resources to the local task forces as they get to work. See the full list of leaders, agencies, and organizations in the back of this report.

Getting things done is all about leadership. On behalf of all who have participated so far and those who will continue to participate, our deepest thanks go to those who've stepped up to serve as chairs of the Task Forces: Lindsay Davis for "Revitalize Historic Buildings" and Leah Pettengill for "Improve Community Communications and Connection."

Albany is well positioned to move into the next phase of implementation. We are excited to support and celebrate the energy from these new initiatives, and look forward to seeing the good things to come for Albany.

II. The "Albany Together" Community Visit Process

VCRD's Community Visit program is a way for towns to engage and bring together their residents, set common goals and directions in a neutral and facilitated structure, and access resources that will help them take action on those goals. **Here is a snapshot of the 5-month process in Albany:**

Pre-Visit	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4+
Planning Committee	**Community Visit Day**	**Community Meeting Day**	**Community Resource Day**	**Implement Priorities**
	Visiting Team		*Resource Team*	
Planning meeting with community members who represent the diverse interests of the community	*Community shares challenges and ideas in focus forums*	*Community members prioritize action items and sign up for Task Forces*	*Task Forces create action plans and work with a Resource Team to identify next steps*	*Task Force groups continue to meet to take action on priorities*

Planning Committee Meeting: October 12, 2023

On October 12, 2023, 15 local residents met to plan for the launch of the Albany Community Visit process. This group came up with a name for the process – Albany Together – and helped to plan the kick-off. They decided on forum topics and an invitation process. Through calls, e-mails, flyers, and lawn signs this team worked hard to promote the kick-off.

The Committee included: Kit Basom, Rob Dewees, Hannah Dreissegacker, Kristen Fountain, Brian Goodridge, Colleen Goodridge, Dylan Kinsey, Sonya Kittredge, Hannah Pearce, Nadine Richardson, George Richardson, Angela Ross, Charles Supernaw, Kristin Urie, and Cathy Wilder.

Step 1 ~ Kick-Off Forums and Community Dinner: November 16, 2023

Albany Together kicked off with 4 brainstorming forums held at the Albany Community School. Over 80 participants shared assets, challenges, and ideas for action in the following forum topics chosen by the steering committee: Community Spaces & Connections; Housing & Infrastructure: cell, broadband, roads, water, sewer; Community Resilience & Meeting Family and Individual Needs; Businesses & Working Lands. Fourteen visiting team members participated, learning more about Albany and providing reflections to the community.

Visiting Team members included: **David Snedeker**, *Executive Director*, Northeastern VT Development Assn; **Jennifer Carlo**, *Executive Director*, NEK Collaborative; **Chris Saunders**, *Federal Co-Chair*, Northern Border Regional Commission; **Jenna O'Farrell**, *Executive Director*, NEK Community Action; **Mariah Noth**, *REDI Manager*, VT Housing & Conservation Board; **Michele Karode**, *Outreach Professional*, UVM Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships; **Ethan Avendano-Lawrence**, *Outreach Representative*, Office of Senator Sanders; **Patrick Shattuck**, *Executive Director*, Rural Edge; and **Casey Winterson**, *Director of Community & Economic Development*, NEK Community Action.

Vermont Council on Rural Development staff included: **Lauren Brady**, *Community & Policy Associate*; **Margaret Gibson**, *Operations Director*; **Alyssa Johnson**, *Community Visit Program Manager*; **Jenna Koloski**, *Community Engagement & Policy Director*; and **Charlie Smith**, *Interim Executive Director*

Step 2 ~ Community Meeting: December 13, 2023

After the kick-off, VCRD staff distilled the brainstormed ideas into 24 key areas of action. Over 30 community members joined at the Albany Community School to narrow the list of priorities for community action. After lively dialogue and a dot-voting exercise, 2 action ideas emerged as key priorities: **Revitalize Historic Buildings** and **Improve Community Communications**. Participants then signed up for task forces that will convene to move these priorities forward.

Step 3 ~ Resource Meeting and Task Force Launch: January 18, 2024

On January 18, 2024, over 25 community members along with facilitators, and resource team members came together to develop action plans, identify resources, and form task force groups that will work in the months ahead to implement the priorities. From here forward, all "Albany Together" action is focused at the task force level.

Resource Team members included: David Snedeker, *Executive Director*, Northeastern VT Development Assn; Jenna Lapachinski, *Field Service Representative*, Preservation Trust of Vermont; Monique Priestley, *President & Founder*, The Space on Main; Caitlin Corkins, *Tax Credits & Grants Coordinator*, ACCD, Div of Historic Preservation; Rose Friedman, *Executive Director*, The Civic Standard; and Tara Reese, *Community Director*, The Civic Standard.

Vermont Council on Rural Development staff included: Margaret Gibson, *Operations Director*; Alyssa Johnson, *Community Visit Program Manager*; and Jenna Koloski, *Community Engagement & Policy Director*.

III. Albany Together Priorities
Determined by Albany residents at the Albany Together Community Meeting
December 13, 2023

Through thoughtful conversation about the future of their community, Albany community members whittled down a list of 24 action ideas to 2 priorities that offer opportunities to enhance existing resources and strengthen the town. Residents concluded the meeting by signing up for Task Forces in the selected areas.

Albany residents selected two priorities for future action:

▶ Revitalize Historic Buildings

A group could form to inventory historic buildings in Albany such as the Town Hall, the Old School, and others, and to develop a plan to revitalize and repurpose these spaces. Uses for these spaces could include housing development, space for activities and events, a community kitchen, and more.

▶ Improve Community Communications

A group could form to create a more coordinated system for community and Town communications to advertise events, build transparency and engagement in community decisions, and share resources. Ways of communicating could include creating a newsletter and/or a Facebook page, increasing Front Porch Forum presence, and/or constructing and maintaining bulletin boards. The group could also work in coordination with the Town to explore the creation and maintenance of a Town website.

Other Key Opportunities identified by the community:

Along with the two chosen priorities, the key opportunities listed below reflect other potential ideas for action that community members shared on Community Visit Day. Though these opportunities weren't chosen as priority projects through this process, community members may find the list useful as they look to expand on current projects or take on new ones.

Improve Local Transportation
Expand local transportation options to provide rides within the community and to nearby towns and services. Some ideas include a local shuttle service or ride sharing that could serve all residents, especially youth and seniors. Other ideas relate to improving energy resilience and supporting alternatives to fossil-fuel based transportation such as bikes and electric vehicles in addition to shared transportation.

Open a Community Center
Develop a community center that can serve as a location to hold events and offer activities and connection for people of all ages. The space could provide youth-led activities, programming for seniors, a community kitchen, free Wi-Fi, and a place to share resources and hold events. A group could explore the use of an existing building or consider potential sites for new construction.

Expand Childcare Options
Create locally-driven solutions to expand access to early childhood care and education. A group could research what has worked in other areas and explore creative strategies such as a community based childcare center as well as working with the school to expand the number of families they are able to serve.

Expand and Improve Community Recreation
Albany residents of all ages expressed a need for improved and expanded recreational facilities and outdoor recreation options. A group could identify community needs and build a plan to improve existing facilities and/or develop new recreational options. Ideas brainstormed by students and adults include an improved ice skating rink, river access, a community pool, a waterslide, a new playground, bike and walking trails, a skate park, larger pump track, and more. The group could also focus on increasing the use of existing resources such as the school gym, Hartwell Pond, and the ball fields.

Improve Village Walkability and Safety
A group could work with municipal leaders and regional and state partners to improve the safety and walkability of Albany Village. This group could focus on sidewalks and crosswalks, traffic calming strategies, and walking paths, especially from the Village to the school.

Increase Access to Waste Disposal
Many Albany residents expressed a need for more access to waste removal services. Solutions could include expanding hours at the transfer station or exploring municipal trash pick up. A group could work with the Town and residents to find cost effective solutions that meet the needs of residents. The group could also consider starting a reuse center for people to exchange used items locally.

Build a Dog Park
Develop a local dog park where residents can walk their dogs as well as access trails and open space. The dog park could hold events that bring the community (and their canine friends) together.

Improve the Village Water System
A group could form to work with the Village to support the improvement and sustainability of the municipal water system. The group could help support work to identify and acquire a site for a new well and to access funding and other support to ensure the long-term viability of the water system.

Support and Expand Albany Businesses

A group could develop and implement a plan to attract and support local businesses that fit the needs and local character of Albany. Residents expressed interest in businesses such as more grocery options, a gas station, restaurants, a bakery, a brewery, lodging, food producers, and a hair salon. The group could work with the Town and other partners to develop a plan for upgrades and improvements to infrastructure to meet the needs of new or expanding businesses, such as water and sewer, roads, broadband, power, and more.

Expand and Improve Community Events

Expand and share local events to bring together community members of all ages. A group could plan and lead these events and enlist volunteers to help. Residents shared a desire to bring back or revamp past traditions including Albany Day, Labor Day and Memorial Day events, bingo, dances, and community meals. Residents shared other ideas such as music and dancing events, recreation events, movie nights, and more. Events could help to celebrate the history of Albany and encourage people to visit, and could include walking tours, plaques, and historical reenactments to showcase highlights.

Develop Affordable Housing Solutions

Develop housing solutions that meet the needs of the Albany community. A group could work with regional and state partners, including the 4-town housing group, to assess current needs and explore options including co-housing models, homeshare, shared equity programs, a community or housing trust, and more. The group could also identify solutions to support residents in making home improvements and repairs.

Maintain Open and Working Lands

A group could form to create and implement a plan to ensure the protection of open land and farmland in Albany. The group could lead a discussion on the future of land use in the town, and determine goals and strategies to strike the right balance between development and conservation. The group could identify key properties for conservation, and engage property owners in exploring potential strategies to further these goals.

Create a Shared Retail Space

Develop a venue in Albany that provides shared retail space for artisans, food producers, and other business owners to have a central place to sell their products. This space could help to support local businesses, and serve residents as well as attract visitors to town.

Start a Local Health Clinic

Work with local and regional health care providers to create a centrally located health clinic that serves Albany residents. People of all ages expressed a concern that health care – both urgent and preventative care – is not readily available to all residents of Albany. A local health clinic could serve local needs and reduce the need to travel to access quality care. The clinic could be a mobile model or could be located in a community space such as a community center, the Town Hall, or another location.

Improve Resilience and Emergency Response

A group of volunteers could form to work in coordination with the Town to develop and lead a renewed emergency response plan for Albany. The group could aim to expand access to shelter and resources during emergencies, and make sure that all parts of Albany are served when needed. Additionally, the group could help evaluate and improve infrastructure (such as roads, communication systems, food, heat, and power) to better cope with natural disasters in the future. The group could also lead in coordinating with other communities to cooperate when disasters hit. Finally, the group could proactively address energy resilience in the face of climate change by aiming to help the community transition away from fossil fuels, install electric car chargers, improve building efficiency, and more.

Expand the Albany Library

Many residents celebrated the value that the Albany Library brings to the community, but would like to see the space and services expand. A group could form to work with Library Trustees and the Town to identify a strategy to expand the library and services it provides to the community.

Revitalize and Utilize the Baseball Field

Many residents named the baseball fields as an underutilized community asset. The space is available for public use, but is rarely used today. A group could form to reimagine and revitalize the ball fields to serve an array of community needs including walking trails, a playground, concerts, markets or other events, or an ice skating rink.

Attract Visitors to Albany

Many residents talked about how people drive through Albany on Route 14 and barely notice it. A group could form to take actions to attract people to Albany for the first time, or to encourage people driving through to stop and visit. Strategies could include the creation of an informational kiosk or local directory to showcase local assets, as well as holding a large community event or two. Signage could help to point people to assets, recreation, and local businesses.

Expand Senior Services

A group could form to expand the availability of and access to activities, services, and resources for Albany's seniors. The group could address senior housing needs, put on events to build connection and reduce isolation, and help to build bridges across generations.

Improve Cell Phone Coverage and Broadband Access

Albany residents would like to have better cell coverage and broadband internet access. Albany could convene a committee to work with regional, state, and federal partners to bring improved cell and broadband coverage to the community, and to make sure that Albany's needs are met in the broadband buildout process.

Explore Ideas for School Improvements

Community members, especially youth, expressed support for changes to the school, including the potential for a middle school, additional field trips, more community involvement, expanded afterschool activities and recreation, and additional support staff such as a school nurse. A group could form a partnership with the school and relevant stakeholders to explore these possibilities and build strategies to address them.

Expand Municipal Staff Capacity to Pursue Resources

A group could form to work in coordination with the Town to develop ways to support community projects, Town projects, and/or businesses through grant-writing processes. Suggestions for how to do this include the Town hiring a grant-writing staff person, community organizations coordinating grant-writing consultation, or develop partnerships with regional and statewide organizations that provide this kind of capacity support.

IV. Task Force Action Plans
Resource Meeting, January 18, 2024

Albany Task Forces are comprised of community members and an appointed chairperson. On Resource Day committee members worked closely with a facilitator and a visiting resource team to develop step-by-step action plans and a list of human and financial resources to help achieve their goals. This final phase of the program marks the time when residents truly take ownership of the work, and begin the exciting process of turning ideas into action.

▶ Revitalize Historic Buildings

A group could form to inventory historic buildings in Albany such as the Town Hall, the Old School, and others, and to develop a plan to revitalize and repurpose these spaces. Uses for these spaces could include housing development, space for activities and events, a community kitchen, and more.

Community Chair:	Lindsay Davis, lindsporterdavis@gmail.com
Facilitator:	Jenna Koloski, *Community Engagement and Policy Director*, VCRD
Resource Team Members:	Caitlin Corkins, *Tax Credits and Grants Coordinator*, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development
	Jenna Lapachinski, *Field Service Representative*, Preservation Trust of Vermont (PTV); Dave Snedeker, *Executive Director*, Northeastern Vermont Development Association
Community Participants: and Task Force Signups	Susan Brown, Kasey Butler, Cindy Corkins, Jim Daniels, Lindsay Davis, Rob Dewees, Hannah Dreissigacker, Kristen Fountain, Lyman Gilman, Chris Jacobs, Sonya Kittredge, Brenda Machado, Lance MacKenzie, Ed O'Leary, Kelly Peters, Amy Poirier, Cliff Poirier, Leslie Rowell, Kristin Urie, Neil Urie, and Cathy Wilder

Overview of the issue today

- The key buildings that this group is interested in focusing on are:
  - Town Hall – owned by the Town.
  - Old School building – owned by the Historical Society.
  - Grange hall – owned by the grange.

- The Albany Community Trust owns the Genny and the shed behind it.

- Some pressing community needs include:
  - A permanent location for the Food Share.
  - A Library expansion.
  - Meeting places.
  - Places for events.
  - Community kitchen.
  - Emergency shelter locations.

- The Planning Commission has been leading on work on the Town Hall building which has included:
  - A report of the needs paid for with Preservation Trust funding.
  - The Municipal Energy Resource Program (MERP) focused on energy efficiency of the building.
  - Accessing Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP) funding for the Town Hall restoration.
  - Planning on exterior repair and painting this summer.
  - Some identified needs include heating, accessible bathroom, kitchen, restoration of historic elements including windows.

- The Old School building is currently used for historical society meetings. The upstairs is a large school room and the downstairs currently has artifacts and exhibits and is open to the public one day a year and by appointment. It may have functioning septic but does not have heat or insulation.

Priority Action Steps

1. Build a "cross-cutting" committee that will include representation from existing groups and other key stakeholders. Include municipal leadership as well as the Historical Society and Albany Community Trust. Make sure all are engaged who would need to be included in conversations regarding the future of these buildings.

2. Work with the State Office of Historic Preservation to conduct historical evaluations of each potential building as well as the potential for a village historic district.

3. Use the community visit notes as well as a public survey to determine what the community needs are. Focus both on the need but also a sense of how often people would use the spaces and for what. Some needs were identified in the meeting including the potential expansion or movement of the library as well as a community kitchen and location for the Food Share.

4. Finally – work as a group to build a "space planning" process to look at the community needs and the available buildings to create a visual design for what is possible in those spaces and then what it would take to get the buildings to a place where they can be used for the identified needs. This could include some sort of design work and charette meeting to bring the community in on the visualization.

Other potential actions

- Move the library to the Old School space and use the Town Hall space to expand that building to include accessible bathroom and kitchen.

- Update Albany's history book.

- Look into what is needed in the cemeteries – is analysis or documentation needed?

- Find a way to recognize and celebrate the value of the other historic buildings in town including privately owned homes and businesses.

- Explore Village Designation in South and East Albany and work on walkability and beautification in the villages.

Visiting Resources Team Recommendations

These recommendations for other potential actions and resources to consider were shared by Visiting Resource Team members representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, and encompass their experience, past success and consideration of the community's unique assets and needs.

Action Step Recommendations

Consider having someone be the lead/main contact for resource organizations and who keeps track of who has been met with and what other expertise is needed.

Work with Town committees and organizations and consider how you can collaborate to access resources.

Develop an organizational system for: tracking meetings, resources, planning, and project documents.

Consider applying for the Village Trust Initiative through Preservation Trust/Vermont Council on Rural Development when it launches in March 2024.

Visit with the Vermont Division of Historic Preservation to help conduct assessments and access technical assistance.

Conduct a survey of available or potentially available buildings in town and then do assessments to evaluate what is needed to improve and use each location.

Consider developing a capital needs plan for the building(s). Start a budget and "sources & uses" document for the needs/projects and potential resources associated.

Host design charettes with skilled architects/designers to share ideas and gather feedback from the community.

Work with Vermont developers/maker space creators to find creative ways to improve these spaces, making them sustainable and potentially profitable places for locals/visitors.

Technical Assistance/Peer Connection Recommendations

AARP has a number of useful guides. See https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2020/rural-livability-workshop-report.html and https://states.aarp.org/vermont/how-can-we-improve-vermonts-complete-streets-policy.

Connect with Northern Vermont Development Association who can be a partner in grant writing and project support as well as village designation and more. Contact Dave Snedeker at dsnedeker@nvda.net.

Ben Doyle, Jenna Lapachinski, and other Preservation Trust of Vermont (PTV) staff are key partners who can support this work with resources and technical assistance. Contact Ben at ben@ptvermont.org and Jenna at jenna@ptvermont.org.

Check out the Project Management 101 workshop, at vtrural.org/leadership-network/workshops, led by Jenna Lapachinski from Preservation Trust of Vermont.

VCRD has developed a Community Leadership Resource Guide that includes helpful suggestions on community outreach and engagement, facilitation of projects and meetings, and seeking technical assistance and funding. See https://vtrural.org/guide/.

The Village Trust Initiative, a partnership of VCRD and PTV, could be an excellent fit for this project which would help with anything from community engagement to developing a plan and seeking funding. Contact Nicole Gratton at nicole@ptvermont.org or Kaziah Haviland at kaziah@vtrural.org.

Potential Funding Sources

Donor fundraising can be an important funding source.

The Preservation Trust of Vermont has several grants that might be interesting to explore for historic buildings, including the Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization grant. Learn more at https://ptvermont.org/help/grants/ and contact Jenna Lapachinski at jenna@ptvermont.org.

Caitlin Corkins is the contact for historic evaluations as well as other potential support and resources through either the Department of Housing and Community Development or the Department of Historic Preservation. Caitlin.corkins@vermont.gov or 802-828-3047.

- Department of Historic Preservation's Certified Local Government Grants could be a potential funding source. Learn more at https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/funding/clg-grants.
- Historic Preservation Grants may be a resource. Learn more at https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/funding/historic-preservation-grants.

- Department of Historic Preservation's tax credit programs, and depending on the location of the building, the Village Center tax credit program may also be an option. Learn more at https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/funding/downtown-village-center-tax-credits and https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/identifying-resources/online-research-center.

Northern Borders Regional Commission is a potential funding source, specifically the Catalyst Program. Learn more at https://www.nbrc.gov/content/Catalyst.

USDA Community Facilities program provides grants and loans for a variety of community buildings. VCRD can provide additional support for developing and submitting an application. Learn more at https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program/vt and contact Alyssa Johnson at alyssa@vtrural.org or 802-222-6896.

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board Conservation has a Historic Planning program. Learn more at https://vhcb.org/our-programs/conservation/historic-preservation and contact Karen Freeman at 802-828-5067 or karen.freeman@vhcb.org.

The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) program can assist and help fund the grant writing process and some other predevelopment costs and tasks to achieve Federal funding. Learn more at https://vhcb.org/redi and contact Mariah Noth at Mariah@vhcb.org at 802-828-1098.

The Building Communities Grant Program through the State Department of Building and General Service offers 1 to 1 matching grants for shovel ready projects. Learn more at https://bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants.

Vermont Arts Council has cultural facilities grants. Learn more at https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/grants/organizations/cultural-facilities and contact Michele Bailey at 802-402-4614 and mbailey@vermontartscouncil.org.

Richard Amore at the Department of Housing and Community Development can help with Village Designation. Richard.amore@vermont.gov.

Consider identifying a project that would benefit from a Better Places Grant. Better Places is a "community matching grant program empowering Vermonters to create inclusive and vibrant public places serving Vermont's designated downtowns, village centers, new town centers, or neighborhood development areas. The program provides one-on-one project coaching, local fundraising support, and two to one matching grants ranging from $5,000 to $40,000 to make your community-led placemaking ideas happen." Learn more at https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/better-places. Additional information and project examples can be found at: https://www.patronicity.com/BetterPlacesVT.

Municipal Planning Grants are available for improvement plans and other future planning like developing a vision for walkability in the village or master planning for the Villages and/or the future use of the buildings Learn more at https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant.

The Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP) may be useful for the Town Hall Building or other projects led by the Town. https://finance.vermont.gov/content/municipal-technical-assistance. Contact Dave Snedeker at NVDA for more info, dsnedeker@nvda.net.

The Vermont Community Development Program could potentially be used to support planning or implementation work. VCDP funds must primarily benefit persons of low and moderate income, and the Town has to serve as the applicant. Funds could help with hiring a consultant, doing a feasibility study, public engagement, and more. Learn more at https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-

incentives/vcdp and https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/vcdp/applicant-guidance. Contact Nathan Cleveland at nathan.cleveland@vermont.gov. Specific categories of funding include:

- Planning Grants ($3,000-$60,000) - Examples: Conduct feasibility studies and marketing plans, produce architectural and engineering plans, etc.
- Accessibility Modification Grants - (Grant Range: $5,000-$100,000) - Example: Bring municipally-owned buildings and libraries into compliance with state and federal accessibility requirements.
- Implementation Grants - for projects that benefit low-to-moderate income individuals (Grant Range: $50,000-$1,000,000) - Examples: Assist businesses to create or retain jobs, create or rehabilitate housing units, build infrastructure, create or assist childcare and senior centers etc.

AARP Community Challenge Grant can fund permanent physical improvements, demonstration projects, and new or innovative programming or services. Visit https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2024/2024-challenge.html. Contact Kelly Stoddard Poor at 802-951-1313 or at kstoddardpoor@aarp.org.

If the group decides to pursue village walkability, the Vermont Bike and Pedestrian program could be a good resource. https://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/local-projects/bike-ped.

The Spark Connecting Communities grant program provides grants of $500-$3,000 for "grassroots work that builds social capital." Learn more at https://vermontcf.org/our-impact/programs-and-funds/spark-connecting-community/

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) created a Vermont Federal Funding Guidebook with potentially applicable grants. Learn more at https://vlct.org/sites/default/files/uploads/VLCT%20VT%20FF%20Guidebook%20V%201.0%20121522.pdf.

Review an overview of resources available at this link: https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/town-future.

VCRD is a continuing partner for resource connections, and has some seed funding that could be used to match grant funds or kick start early initiatives and pop ups. Contact Alyssa Johnson at alyssa@vtrural.org or 802-222-6896.

▶ Improve Community Communications

A group could form to create a more coordinated system for community and Town communications to advertise events, build transparency and engagement in community decisions, and share resources. Ways of communicating could include creating a newsletter and/or a Facebook page, increasing Front Porch Forum presence, and/or constructing and maintaining bulletin boards. The group could also work in coordination with the Town to explore the creation and maintenance of a Town website.

Community Chair:	Leah Pettengill, leah.pettengill1@gmail.com
Facilitator:	Alyssa Johnson, *Community Visit Program Manager*, VCRD
Resource Team Members:	Rose Friedman, *Co-Founder and Executive Director*, The Civic Standard; Monique Priestly, *Founder and Executive Director*, The Space on Main, Inc.; Tara Reese, *Co-Founder and Community Director*, The Civic Standard
Community Participants: and Task Force Signups	Caryn Brooks, Jim Collins, Jim Daniels, Hannah Dreissigacker, Brian Goodridge, Jen McKenzie, Bill Pearce, Leah Pettengill, George Richardson, Nadine Richardson, Marcia Brown Stricker, Davis Sutherland, and Sheila Wailonis

Overview of the issue today

- Some of the current tools that are effective for communication include:
  - Information boards for parades and events at the ballfield, the Board at the school, and the covered Bulletin Board by the Town clerk's office & at the Genny. There is a concentration of resources in the Village - South Albany does not have a posting location.
  - Social media posts from the Genny, Albany Community Trust Facebook page and monthly library email list are valuable.
  - Front porch forum is useful, and used for Selectboard agendas.
  - The Chronicle has opportunities for paid advertising, and a section that will include free community events for no charge.
  - Physical locations where folks can come together are important e.g. churches, Food Share, Post office, Genny, Library.
  - The school is an important hub for folks connected to it, and distributes flyers, emails, etc. Orleans Supervisory Union also sends recorded phone calls.
- Albany has an older population, and there are internet and cell phone coverage challenges. Consequently, many folks still have landlines.
- The Select Board had a discussion about a Town website, and is not moving forward with it at this time. There are concerns regarding Open Meeting Law, and the required timing for postings.
- The Albany Community Trust has a website. It is being rebuilt, and may potentially be taken down while this work happens.

Priority Action Steps

1. "Communicate about Communicating" – Bring folks together from key groups holding events to explain about the Community Communications group and work. Include folks from relevant organizations in conversation about next steps and needed resources.

2. Explore the model of a combined Facebook page/group for the Albany community. This would be a non-municipal, community page, modeled off of options such as Connecting Bradford. A combination of folks could be involved in moderating the page, and adding events to help get it started.

3. Research the need for a central resource hub. Compile "town basics" information about hours for the dump, regular meeting times, who to contact for additional information, etc. This could be a more static resource information sheet (potentially posted at the bulletin Board by the Town Clerk's office) and serve as a resource, especially for folks newer to Town. Also explore other models for more detailed community resource guides, and if it would be possible to compile existing resources, or a new one should be created. The resource guide would ideally include both printed and online options.

4. Evaluate the need for a physical location to share information in South Albany.

5. Explore the potential to leverage phone communication, especially for emergencies.

Other potential actions

- Research the requirements for a municipal website to gain additional clarity regarding the rules, requirements and related staffing needs.
    o Would it be possible to feed municipal information to another page?
    o Explore the creation of a municipal Facebook page (and relevant settings, such as not allowing commenting).
- Host additional events in Albany! A variety show is coming back to Albany! Save the date for May 18th.
- Create a free print newsletter that could be available at frequented locations.
- Create a community calendar.
- Learn from other communities doing this work (Michelle in Craftsbury).
- Digital display board signs are used in some communities.

Visiting Resource Team Recommendations

These recommendations for other potential actions and resources to consider were shared by Visiting Resource Team members representing a wide array of professionals from across the state, and encompass their experience, past success and consideration of the community's unique assets and needs.

Action Step Recommendations

Expand the number of local people involved in this conversation, planning and work.

If creating a town page on a social media platform, then you'll want to create submission guidelines or criteria. It's important to define and share clear rules of conduct to promote respect and civility, especially on the internet.

Consider making this part of a class at the high school - marketing, media, social content creation. It would then be consistently updated while also allowing students in the community to learn new skill sets. It would also allow the younger generation to be in the know and potentially attend events/create new ones for neighbors to join!

Develop specific action(s) for "quick wins" like a town website (NVDA may have resources) or community Facebook page. Check out the Alfred, Maine Facebook page as an example.

Best Practice Ideas from The Civic Standard:
- Communications is highly event specific – what is the thing you are getting the word out about? You use different communication for a kid centered family event vs. a cash bar at the Legion.
- Important to have events that can happen in spaces – so if a group is working on preserving historic buildings, consider what events are actually happening in those spaces. This is how The Civic leveraged municipal ARPA support for their organization.
- There are often common events where the community comes together. Figure out the events that access

Town pride and bring folks together to celebrate, and how to reinforce the human power to make those events happen.

- Experiment with ways to bring people together – you never know what is going to catch on!
- Consider reinventing ideas that used to exist – chicken supper, pie breakfasts, etc.
- Community elders often have a lot of expertise about events, and how to get the word out.
- Some events can be more passive to organize once they are up and running (e.g. bingo once a month). Once it's fun, people want to help!

Technical Assistance/Peer Connection Recommendations

If a teacher/class takes this on, UVM's Office for Engagement could be a resource for virtual connection with a UVM social media creator/marketing class if needed. Contact Michele Karode at michele.karode@uvm.edu.

Front Porch Forum may be able to offer support and guidance on how to expand engagement. They have a staff person focused on community engagement and connection. Reach out to Jason Van Dreische at jason@frontporchforum.com.

Connect with Michelle Warren, the Town Clerk of Craftsbury, who has been very involved in creating and maintaining their community calendar.

The Genny could act as a community hub for information and meetups – it is such a great community building/connections resource!

Continue to connect with Monique Priestly in Bradford and the Civic Standard in Hardwick as well as other organizations committed to community connection and communication for peer support and ideas.

Monique Priestley is willing to share templates and best practices from Connecting Bradford and the Bradford Resource directory. Contact Monique at mepriestley@gmail.com.

Connect with Northern Vermont Development Association. Contact Dave Snedeker at dsnedeker@nvda.net.

VCRD is a continuing partner for making connections and there are some helpful resources in the VCRD Community Leadership Resource Guide https://www.vtrural.org/guide/. Contact Alyssa Johnson at alyssa@vtrural.org or 802-222-6896.

Potential Funding Sources

The Spark Connecting Communities grant program provides grants of $500-$3,000 for "grassroots work that builds social capital." Learn more at vermontcf.org/our-impact/programs-and-funds/spark-connecting-community/.

For planning a specific event, ACCD's Better Places Program may be able to support. Better Places is a "community matching grant program empowering Vermonters to create inclusive and vibrant public places serving Vermont's designated downtowns, village centers, new town centers, or neighborhood development areas. The program provides one-on-one project coaching, local fundraising support, and two to one matching grants ranging from $5,000 to $40,000 to make your community-led placemaking ideas happen." Learn more at https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/better-places. Additional information and project examples can be found at: https://www.patronicity.com/BetterPlacesVT.

VCRD has some seed funding that could be used to match grant funds or kick start early initiatives. Contact Alyssa Johnson at alyssa@vtrural.org or 802-222-6896.

Arts Impact Grant from Vermont Arts Council. These grants support organizations, municipalities, and schools in their efforts to create a more vibrant quality of life by providing equal and abundant access to the arts. Learn more at https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/grants/organizations/arts-impact.

V. Albany Together Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held in-person and virtually with over 80 Albany community members and the VCRD Visiting Team on November 16, 2023, and through a paper and online survey.

Although the prioritization work of the Albany Together Community Visit Program requires a town to decide what is most important as it moves forward with Task Forces, nothing is lost in the process from the long list of concerns and ideas expressed in early community focus sessions. Many interesting and diverse thoughts are represented here, and are presented as a reminder of issues explored, and a possible foundation for future projects.

Community Spaces & Connections

<u>Visiting Team</u>: Jenna Koloski (FACILITATOR), Michele Karode (SCRIBE), Jenna O'Farrell, Ethan Avendaño-Lawrence

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Food share – Through the church during pandemic (running 3.5 years every week with 15-20 volunteers each time).
  - o Recipients and volunteers benefitting by meeting one another.
  - o Creates friend groups.
  - o Every Saturday working for betterment of community utilizing food from local farms.
  - o Volunteering gives you a sense a purpose.
  - o If you lose your job, the food share can help and the neighbors around you can be aware and helpful.
  - o Satellite of Hardwick community food shelf (maintains the feel of Albany's start up and desire to help community).
  - o +300 individuals (roughly 70 families) are apart of the food share: Half Albany, Half Irasburg and Lowell – those towns are away from.
  - o Customizable and personal.
- The Genny is a nice chatting space. The staff are great.
- Library is an asset, and they put on events and bring the community together.
- Albany community trust.
- Blueberry field, filling freezers for the winter.
- Outdoor recreation.
- Albany school – the building, grounds, people. Great communication and website; what is happening at the school.

- Albany general store. Able to purchase food, event with burger night and live music on Friday's.
- People. New neighbors, older generation passing away (new generations working for the community betterment).
- Gary is an asset as a first responder (being far from hospitals).
- Ecosystem the land offers; recognizing the difficulty if someone gets stuck that people know that good will come back around #neighborly feel.
- Music in town – bands play at events.
- Church gatherings, active congregation.
- PIES! "We make good pies".
- Workforce: Builders, carpenters, farmers are all bringing things to the table in our community.
- Former school, Historical society and town hall are beautiful.
- Hartwell pond – donated by Bucannons in the 50s; given to 4H. Litigation is because the bounds of purpose of usage is being questioned.
- 50-acre recreation. Groomed loops for cross country skiing. Field beyond woods no used.
- Town offices, fire station (2009), municipal.
- Albany Labor Day parade and 4th of July parade.
- Bands, cornhole tournaments, community activities.
- May 18th Variety show – talent on stage.
- Community dinners pre COVID.

What are the Challenges?

- School – broader world views. Harder to hire because the highway is further away (staffing gaps, like everywhere). Growth from school choice (13 students from other towns – 87 total enrollments at school).
- Connections to and from neighborhoods; building.
- Geographical challenges. Valley in the middle of a town. Little mountain splits town: between West Albany (Champlin Hill?).
- Post offices – there are 5!
- Townhall – not used during winter as it has no working heating.
- Shopping and socializing dependent on village, and Hardwick.
- Albany used to have 13 schools (Lake region high school is the only high school now).

- Labor Day is the biggest celebration (Memorial Day celebration went away – Pandemic stopped Memorial Day event).
- Premium tax credit? Homestead credit "grant" people don't pay attention to the voting; making huge impact on what people.
- Communications: town website; sharing and receiving what's going on in town.
- No big industry; lack of opportunities for young people.
- Aging population.
- Competition around homeownership with vacation homeowners. Many homes being sold for Air bnb's.
- Housing affordability for young families and people.

- Town meeting (~60 people the past few years – used to be around ~150 people attending). Should be recorded/done virtually so more can attend.
- Baseball field.
- Hartwell pond.
- 4H program anymore?
- Lack of informal spaces for people to come together (The Genny – but that's not enough).

- Not enough groups to put on community events; wanting a more!
- History/Methodology as an agricultural community and it is no longer that but wondering what the identity is of the town – lacking what the "current" identity of the town.
- Many people don't work in town so less time to connect, join events.
- Services for community members are located out of town and far.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Free, quality affordable childcare. There is a nonprofit childcare in the town over; Craftsbury Saplings.
- Work with geography up and over the hill – regional community spaces; dance hall/barn dances! Community kitchen for people to come.
- Have a town social committee to help put on events throughout the year.
  - Have a youth group to help with decision making and communication.
  - Have a senior citizen group to help with decision making and communication.
- Community Center (intergenerational); students can have fast Wi-Fi, high Wi-Fi spaces for gathering of young people, study, gather, cooking classes, ping pong tables, arcade, gaming space, sewing, tea party, activities in a larger space.
- Old school in West Albany owned by historical society – not owned by the town should be turned into community center (Wi-Fi is available downtown).
- Municipal trash pick-up; liter on side of the road (recycle center is only operated on Wednesday, Saturday meeting place is the dump). Odd hours of operation doesn't encourage those gatherings.
- A reuse "restore" should be added to the transfer station.
- Dog park; LOTS of interest here! Fenced in property as a meeting place. Food trucks added? Dancing added?
- Community based supported services for aging citizens for Northern rural communities.

- Public transportation. Could be shuttling between the kitchens / dance halls!
- Communication: Town website! (think Hello Burlington). Front Porch Forum.
- Select board meeting minutes / could be streamed virtually.
- Townhall.
  - Not being utilized; bring the community together to decide what the space should be used for.
  - Working on grants to get heating to be used in winter.
  - Need a kitchen – space in the back of townhall.
  - Bathroom needs to be redone.
  - Need an adequate sewer (town offices/fire dept share the sewer).
- House in town (Colleen Goodrich) that has been gutted would be a great place for the food.
- Healthcare desert, would love to see a healthcare clinic; hard to get providers, NP and chiropractor want to have a center to provide for their community.
  - Healthcare center in the community center so it easily accessible.
  - Could be school based clinic (trailer onsite).
- Community center placement – Find / Research the best place.
  - micro centers for all people to use (South Albany to West Albany is 14 miles). There is a division of Albany community members and a fear around if it would be used.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Valued relationships with neighbors, making calls to families to help with the lack of social services.
- Existing buildings could be utilized more.
- Geographical barriers: transportation (Windsor – Micromoo! Bus).
- Movement of ideas are interconnected.

- Interconnected, questions around decision making for Albany "wondering who owns power".
- Deploying resources are stronger together "serving children".
- Food share program is a wonderful success – wonderful model.
- Timing of events and gathering.

Community Resilience & Meeting Family and Individual Needs

Visiting Team: Jenna Koloski (FACILITATOR), Lauren Brady (SCRIBE), Ethan Avendaño-Lawrence, Michele Karode, Jenna O'Farrell

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Outdoor center which isn't in town but is close enough as a service and place of employment to draw community to Albany, and if you live in Albany you get free pass.
- The Food share is an important asset.
- During the "Promise Community Process" the Library became an important place for building relationships and support for

families. It also got new equipment and has high speed internet.
- Teachers wrote 25K grant to bring books into the community for the school and library, that was a big success.

- The church is where the food share started, then it got a grant through Promise Community and it expanded and is affiliated with Hardwick.
- The Church is welcoming and much used for fairs and funerals and other services for community members beyond the congregation.
- There's a craft fair at the church.
- The town has a big tent! Got it during 2020 but haven't used it much in the last couple years.
- The General Store.
- The fire department (the building is a 2009 construction).
- School is an asset (built in 1994).
- The school knows it's an asset and so feels the pressure of hosting 1 family/community event per month and have had ppl from other towns and home-school families come here. So it acts a community center.
- School is also an emergency shelter.
- Methodist church, town hall, and the fire station are all emergency shelters.
- Historical society.
- Albany community trust has done positive things like making it possible for the Genny to reopen.
- The way that the community can come together, like the wonderful pulling together to support the store.
- Renewed historical society in the old school.
- Food share provides real resilience.
- Neighbors helping each other out in floods to clean and rescue.

- Our road crew.
- The post office.
- The town clerk's office is new and is kind of a hub.
- The sense of resilience and independence from having lived here for generations, and neighbors helping neighbors is really common and ingrained in the town character.
- Because of the size of town, no matter where you live you know other people in town, so if something happens to someone that news spreads and help will come (this was not universal, but many people in the room agreed).
- Our people are an asset!
- Feeling comfortable calling people to ask for help.
- The library's collection development, activities for kids' afterschool and weekends, and informational programs.
- In the Genny there's a community room that anyone can use to gather.
- The Head Start program which starts at 3yo and is free for income-eligible families but available to all.
- Town forest near Hartwell pond and other municipal land.
- Craftsbury outdoor center trails come through Albany land and are easy to access.
- There's a pump track and something else at the school getting kids on bikes.
- There's public access to the Black River off the Delano Road.
- Craftsbury Mental Health Resource Group and NEK Mental Health Resources.
- School fields and courts are public property after hours.

What are the Challenges?

- Town is spread out which means that emergency or disaster access to resources is challenging.
- Most infrastructure is in village so when roads got washed out they didn't have access to emergency or other resources.
- Getting info in the midst of a crisis: people don't know what to do, what the town is doing and planning, who to call besides 911 for help or information. There isn't and there needs to be a chain of communication.
- Outreach is a challenge because everything is so centralized, only a handful of bulletin boards, household access to internet is kind of sparse and highly variable, and that makes FPF, Facebook, etc. not totally accessible.
- Poverty and lack of local jobs (most people work out of town) is a challenge to the vitality of town.
- Getting people to Town Meeting because they work out of town and work on that day.
- The Head Start program has a waiting list, like pretty much all childcare programs in the area.
- The flip side of the coin of lots of familiarity in town is there's a problem of burnout because the pool of people who volunteer and show up for town events and gatherings is always the same and it's not big enough.
- Isolation physically and socially.
- transportation if weather is poor, or your car broke down, or you're not able to drive.
- Road safety: signage, lighting, multi-use roads, enforcing the speed limit.

- More activities and community involvement for youth and parents, but also for elders.
- Tax base because there isn't any industry helping raise town funds.
- Having a community center, the library and the school both try to serve but limited by funds, staff, and space.
- Are the health, food, and emotional/social needs of elders living alone being met?
- During the pandemic, the Albany community mutual aid task force morphed into the food share. That was prepared to take calls as a mutual aid group, but they didn't get hardly any calls.
- How to get people to ask for the help they need.
- Not having a town website with calendar and resources.
- Location of town, the resources and services of Newport and Morrisville areas barely reach here.
- When individuals or families need services, they have to travel really far.
- Ppl view Albany as "the end of the earth… it's a joke, but it's also kind of true".
- Huge issue with connectivity so even things that go on websites or FPF or other places, not everyone can see that, need to have things on paper as part of mail delivery or flyers.
- Few people have heard of Craftsbury Mental Health Resources, and general lack of knowledge about local resources/services.

- Knowing what's available and what's happening in Albany, what is the town doing, when are events, who is hosting events or offering resources? etc.
- Childcare is a big issue, and employment is dependent on it. The school is trying to offer more childcare but running into staffing and funding challenges.
- We used to do more for Memorial Day and Labor Day and 4th of July and Albany Day, and we used to do various church events, etc. A whole lot of "we used to do" so why did they fall away? One of the challenges was the disruption of COVID, one is that there aren't enough young volunteers coming in to continue the traditions (the younger generation that is already involved is dealing with burnout).

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Have more infrastructure in other places in town like generators or emergency shelters.
- Emergency and disaster plans and communication so that the whole community knows what is happening and what to do in those situations.
- Albany could hold more congregant meals like neighboring towns do.
- Maybe more community evens to help with problem of geography. More of this kind of community meeting and event because people are interested and people want to be engaged, but there aren't many opportunities.
- Bring back Labor Day, bring back Memorial Day, historical society could hold a talent show.
- Having community events and getting people to show up will help people connect and be more engaged in wider community happenings.
- Senior meals? Meals on wheels? Bring the community together for different kinds of congregate meals.
- Bulletin boards in strategic places all over town for the people without easy access to the internet.
- Website is great, but someone has to maintain it… It turns out there were a few people who volunteered a while ago, so maybe they would still be interested. Maybe town communications is an employment opportunity.
- Bring back Memorial Day parade with a speaker and a band and the legion from Orleans.
- Get to know your neighbors, reach out and try to help, volunteer at the town places like the school, library, etc.
- A health clinic or a mobile clinic because it's hard for people to drive a long way and ask for help. Bring the dentist and the doctor into the school, bring the health providers here.
- District wide convos about new middle school under a consolidated model, if 3-4 grades leave, maybe that expands the preschool and day care capacity in the school.
- Employment is dependent on childcare; how do we bring childcare here? Someone suggested a district-wide childcare.
- Create a Senior center, Youth Center, and Community Center.
- Combine the childcare and the elder care programming so the youth and elders can engage each other.
- Senior living community.
- Develop a mentoring program.
- Get after legislators to make changes to help us develop businesses, create jobs, and fund school buildings.
- Residents should be able to pay property taxes in 4 installments, and get rid of the interest or penalties on paying late.
- A community resource center like NEKCA's drop-in center, had case managers and licensed psychiatrist. When you walk through their door you find all these resources and services under one roof and working together so that you don't get shuffled from one place to another and get burnt out just asking for help.
- A community center with heat, bathroom, a commercial kitchen so that you can host events, and also so you could make income off value added products from your garden.
- Hold Community dinners, bingo, barbecues, etc.
- Use the rec fields! Bring back the baseball team! Put an ice-skating rink there!
- Hold a Fourth of July fireman's competition maybe as a charity event and add it to the South Albany parade.
- Make a frisbee golf or mini golf course and every org/business can create a mini version of their building and put it up for Albany day.
- Every business and home could participate in some other create community activity like making a scarecrow or carving a pumpkin in the fall.
- A community center with a kitchen would make holding community events and dinners and so forth a lot more feasible, maybe then we could use the town hall, the church, the firehouse, and the tent more.
- Build an outdoor wood stove for pizza, hand pies, and hot cocoa, and Tuesday night live.
- Concerts on the green and block parties monthly, maybe at the ball field with the tent.
- More Parades.
- Take an all-town photo and put them up in the school or library.
- More organized efforts toward outdoor recreation.
- Municipal access to Hartwell pond.
- Walking trail and developing the ball field, maybe building a pavilion.
- Sidewalks in the village so it's safer to walk in town.
- Signage at the access point to the black river so that people know about it.
- A basketball court, a pickleball court.
- Open the school gym to weekend access for broomball, open gym, volleyball, basketball, etc.
- Have some safe concrete for skateboarding.
- Maybe the school kitchen could be used as a community kitchen?
- Delegating from other areas and seeking partnerships with other towns. We don't have to do these things alone.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Mentoring programs, bus pickup for elders.
- Website, maybe with a high school class.
- A mobile clinic through UVM.
- Big activities, tents, sports, parades town photo, is all awesome.
- You're here and you're energized.
- The school is clearly an awesome space already bringing community together, with help that could expand.
- Jenna: if you could do everything on your list who wouldn't want to live here!
- Your greatest strengths are the people who live in Albany, neighbors with talents and skills.
- The people who keep showing up are dealing with burnout, so that's important to address.
- Maybe there's a gap there, how does "all" mean all. How do you capture more people and increase inclusivity and bring people along as you build the community you want to be?
- Big changes don't start in DC, they start here with us taking care of each other and looking out for each other.
- Coming together for a meal leads to better understanding, building teams. Small changes lead to big changes.
- Dog park.
- Our schools are increasingly the place where we get our needs met for all ages for all families.
- Gratitude to the school and all the volunteers and community building.
- There are real challenges but also real solutions and all those things you "use-to-do" could be easy early steps.
- There are people missing from this room and other events.
- Pairing things like health needs and mental health and so forth with the fun community building ideas is a great strategy.

Housing & Infrastructure: cell, broadband, roads, water, sewer

<u>Visiting Team</u>: Alyssa Johnson (FACILITATOR), Lauren Brady (SCRIBE), Mariah Noth, Chris Saunders, Patrick Shattuck, Dave Snedeker, Casey Winterson

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Water for 78 homes in the village.
- A marvelous school.
- Fiber along Cheney Rd and Center Rd to Rte 14.
- No zoning so no barriers there.
- Rte 14.
- The Genny.
- New fire house.
- Town clerk's office --Lot of improvements in the last 25 years on the building.
- Marvelous town hall.
- Public library.
- Comcast access to internet which also enables cell service through wifi.
- Vermont Town internet broadband system.
- Poles for fiber or cable or anything.
- Good honest hardworking people.
- Library programming (including children's programs and death café).
- Proximity of outdoor center in Craftsbury.
- Outdoor center and general stores hosting events.
- 2 ATV trails.
- Great head start program which collaborates with the school .
- Vibrant food share serving hundreds of residents.
- Awesome volunteers.
- S Albany 4th of July parade.
- Albany Day.
- Grange hall (about the size of the arts room, has electric, no heat, and a porta potty).
- The old school buildings.
- The Historical Society which owns one of the old schools.
- The Methodist Church.
- There's a group that has begun to gather to talk about housing. They meet in the Methodist Church and included folks from Albany and surrounding towns.
- Local businesses and farms.
- The land in Albany is good agricultural and forest land.
- cheap property to develop.
- tourism.
- VT Electric.
- Center for an Agricultural Economy in Hardwick has brought in young people who start up businesses and engage in community.
- VT Home Share as state-wide org is getting active in this area.
- Incredible road crew, big shout out from several people.
- Efficiency Vermont for helping with home improvement.
- There's a river access pull off on the Delano Road near Rte 14.

What are the Challenges?

- Plugging into broadband access and installation is a challenge because of expense or lack of skilled contractors.
- Speeding on Rte 14, this is one of those "Blink and you miss it" towns, so tourists don't stop much.
- Town hall needs work.
- Comcast service is highly variable and expensive.
- Broadband accessibility (which companies offer service, where is that accessible, and what are they planning for the future).
- Don't know where fiber has been run and it's expensive to install, who can install it even.
- Communication about the infrastructure, especially cell, broadband, fiber.
- VPR doesn't reach the town.

- Cheap property to develop is attractive to people from out of town which inflates sale costs.
- If you live outside of the village, you're on your own for infrastructure systems.
- If you live in the village you're reliant on the municipal water system.
- Resources like the library, post office, school, town hall, etc. are less accessible from outside the village.
- Food share needs a safe permanent home that has heat, water, sewer (which grange hall doesn't have).
- Land in Albany is agricultural or forest which makes it hard to develop.
- Geographic layout: activities and community organization happen in village which is on one side of the geographic area of town. Several people echoed the feeling that they don't know what's happening in the town center, or sometimes can't get there if the roads get washed out or some other road problem.
- It's hard to get around all together.
- There's not enough housing.
- The housing available is majorly inflated price.
- No senior housing.
- No low income housing.
- No apartments or rental housing.
- No sewer in the village anymore.
- Folks living in unacceptable quality housing (some cases have no septic, water, horrible heat).
- Not much housing support or resources.
- Lack of communication about the resources available in general, several people echoed a sense that they didn't know about any resources being available or if they did know about resources, didn't know how to, or couldn't, make use of them.
- Albany doesn't have many jobs so people travel to neighboring towns (Craftsbury, West Glover, Glover, maybe Irasburg).
- Sports center, Pete's Greens, and some other major employers in neighboring towns, so Albany is a sort of "bedroom community".

- Relying on tourism.
- There's no business base.
- Costs and accessibility of home improvements which are necessary in order to keep up quality of life and value of the house.
- Buying even a fixer-up property is out of reach for young adults.
- Lack of young adults and young families in the area.
- Cell service for contacting neighbors, family, town, etc in urgent situations, for people with businesses to make calls to customers and partners/employees.
- Out of state folks purchasing homes sight unseen made it impossible for youths from the area to buy a home and stay where they grew up.
- Spaces and opportunities for the next generation (jobs, housing, opportunities to begin businesses).
- The village center is kind of on the edge of the geographical area of town.
- The town doesn't have a website and many people echoed that they didn't know how to find out what is happening in town or what the municipality is doing or when meetings are happening etc.
- Lack of knowledge about our town more generally, like the history of it, the size of it, what businesses are here, what's happening at the school?
- There used to be more community involvement.
- There used to be more businesses, like there use to be a diner in the village.
- The flooding showed how water impacts the roads and how the neighboring towns don't always communicate and cooperate on shared infrastructure repair and maintenance.
- Lot more traffic, dustier roads because trees are being cut back more.
- Village is at capacity housing wise on the water system, looking to build a new well and build a reservoir.
- Well that has dried up an has been offline for 12 years, another that's low on water, the one in use is behind the ball park.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Community participation in the 4-town housing group meeting at the Albany church.
- Put a speeding sign on Rte 14 so people slow down and notice the store.
- Bring folks from the 4 town area together to think about housing solutions and jobs.
- Think about new ways of housing like co-housing, home share, etc.
- Could cell service go up in the Kingdom Community Wind site in Lowell? Or another open spot?
- Think of the whole town as a cohesive geography for development and transportation.
- Improve town hall and the old school for community use.
- Legislation to help youth afford new homes.
- Increase business opportunities in town.

- Have a store with foods and milk open past 7pm.
- Centralize community development and activity but be sure to keep all parts of town involved and engaged.
- Increase resilience of infrastructure in all the villages so they can cope with and adapt to future disruptions like the floods. Especially resilience of roads, communication networks, access to food and heat, and emergency shelters.
- Town could be more involved in getting broadband.
- Inventory which businesses would benefit from broadband or cell service to make a case to providers to expand access.
- Town could develop a website to share info about the resources available to the town and what community events are happening.
- Put in sidewalks in the village that go all the way to the school.
- Develop a track or walking path around the ballfields, and a walking trail along the river.

- Clear the river from Craftsbury to Albany and have a Genny to Genny kayaking business that stops at each general store.
- Shared transportation of some kind for folks who can't or would rather not drive. Maybe a weekly shuttle or on call like rural transport or like RCT. Maybe use the school busses for rural transport like they do in Ludlow.
- Historical tour of Albany, like the farm tours of several years ago for the farm to school programs. Plaques or destinations that even the foliage tourists could engage in, or a ghost walk.
- Engage with Home Share program to take advantage of what they're doing to improve housing especially for seniors.
- The town could communicate through Facebook and FPF as well as a website, and hold more community forums.
- Local newspaper or a bigger presence in the chronical.
- On Albany Day, hold an historical re-enactment and ghost walk with community actors maybe through the historical society.
- Movie night.
- Involving the youth in community events more and bringing them into discussions of town issues.
- The Hackett store once had an apartment, maybe that building has some opportunities for housing the Food Share or something that could be proposed.
- Get the wind-tower lights to be plane-sensing so we don't have constant blinking lights.
- Find ways to develop/enable affordable housing in Albany, and perhaps in cooperation with the 4 towns.
- Community Land Trust/Housing Trust, or Shared Equity Housing programs, or a Revolving Loan program.
- Have a film festival or have some other big event annually that people come to see about. (host the eclipse in 2024) .
- Improve roads, more maintenance and raise awareness among drivers to slow down so that roads could be more multi-use.
- The town garage has 2 people only, maybe the town could offer a higher wage and benefits?
- Give community members a chance to talk with the folks, like the roads crew, who provide services that residents can understand the good work they do and get to share concerns.
- Do more with the community spaces, and revive the town holidays and other events with the various town institutions.
- Municipalities could cooperate on things like flood repairs and other infrastructure development and maintenance.
- Town community could be more engaged in the events we already have.
- Town could stop salting dirt roads (except where absolutely necessary due to steepness) for environmental reasons and because salting the roads seems to make them muddier and do more damage.
- Town Website is a great idea.
- Encourage broadband and cell service.
- Village is looking for property to add a well for the water system which would increase the ability to add housing capacity.
- Improve water supply to village water.
- Preparing for future of using electricity instead of fossil fuels.
- Build an affordable housing park/co-op.
- The regional towns should communicate on housing, infrastructure, and business development.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team
- Enthusiasm from the community about the community and the recognition of what valuable people live here.
- Historic buildings providing sense of place and as assets to the community's social fabric.
- The community welcomes and encourages housing and know we need to plan for that.
- These challenges are common to NEK roads, water, broadband and there are resources to help including NorthEast VT Development Association.
- Norther Boarders Regional Commission offers grants to deal with these kinds of challenges and achieve your goals, whether it's improving what you've got or planning for a different future.
- VT Housing and Conservation Board, these challenges are common, we've worked with communities who are making great progress. So as you continue, remember these things are doable, and there are so many resources available right thanks to Build Back Better, Inflation Reduction Act, flood recovery resources, and other federal and state programs.
- This room is so full of community members, and these folks are the folks who can get things done and be the ones to keep engaging in the community.
- Underscoring the assets of education, library, Head Start, you can really build off that to support the next generation.
- Sounds like land has been a challenge, but sounds like there are existing buildings to work with and imagine with.
- There's a whole community: the village is just one part and pulling the larger town together through events or putting things throughout the town in imaginative ways that bring the whole town together.
- How to pull people in: having anchor events or anchor places to draw in neighboring towns, local community, and tourism.
- Keeping the next generations here: can be done by improving connectivity for the age of tele-everything and leveraging NEK Broadband and other options.
- Housing: heard huge asset in new housing coalition to talk about the issues and come up with resources and ideas.
- Communication: the town wants to be more connected through different avenues and share info about what's available and what's happening.

Businesses & Working Lands

Visiting Team: Alyssa Johnson (FACILITATOR), Charlie Smith (SCRIBE), Mariah Noth, Chris Saunders, Dave Snedeker, Patrick Shattuck, Casey Winterson

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What are the Assets in this Area?

- Cedar trees.
- Lots of land is still being worked well after 200 years.
- Small farms is now aggregated but land is used. Not developed.
- Inn here that isn't being operated.
- Current use is an asset.
- Sugar makers – growing.
- Surprising number of hidden small businesses.
- Lots of visitors in foliage season.
- Snowmobiling brings people. Not much back to landowners.
- VAST trails are an asset- bring a lot of folks into the community.
- Water is a huge asset.

- Route 14 is an asset. Good road going right through town.
- Farmers market.
- Hinterland store – take out meals; south Albany.
- Overstock style store used to thrive in Albany.
- Adventure – part of the allure of getting to places like Hill Farmstead brewery.
- Beautiful lakes people don't know about.
- Campgrounds.
- Albany is fairly central – equidistant from Burlington and St. Johnsbury.
- High school is good academically.
- People want to be here.

What are the Challenges?

- 3 farmers has shrunk. Most remaining farms are large.
- Hay farmer – needs customers.
- Farms need to diversify its business; now maple syrup.
- Landowners don't see much benefit from the fall foliage tours.
- State incentives for landowners to open up access.
- Need high speed internet.
- Craftsbury – gets a lot of attention.
- Signage is a problem.
- Cell service is a problem.
- There used to be three restaurants in town, and all were busy. Now only one.

- Size and type of business will depend on water, power, sewerage and power. Also, a willingness to give up the land.
- Three phase power ends at water street.
- Barriers to putting in gas station at The Genny.
- Genny – needs more people coming through the store.
- Lack of grant writing and grant / project management capacity.
- Help farms to move to value-added.
- Need housing – But with a plan.
- Cluster development.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Easy pass for visitors!
- NH gives tax break to landowners for recreational use of the property; incentives.
- Give people a reason to stop while driving through.
- Create a shared outlet for local crafts, food, products, etc.
- Local directory – scavenger hunt?
- Campgrounds.
- You are here kiosk.
- Albany settlements could have a fun competition.
- No zoning in Albany.

- Get power down to the mill.
- Is there three phase power to the farms?
- State grant process is very slow.
- There is money from the state for a lot of things.
  - Challenge to get at the money.
  - Albany doesn't have the staff or expertise for this.
- Water and sewer expansion. Power.
- Repurpose the ball field for septic???
- Need land use planning in the town.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Knowing where to go for the resources. REDI program – cash for certain assistance. MTAP is a new source.
- Gas station opportunity. Community anchor events to draw tourists. Makers space; farmers market space.
- Specifically wants to support forest businesses. Traffic calming structures; slow the traffic down.
- Loves to help people apply for NBRC grants; sees an asset in the closeness of the community and the local knowledge of

roads, etc. Excitement about the Jenny and the third places – Albany is craving that kind of connection. Planning is an opportunity.
- Hearing themes he's heard from others; lands make for a nice place to live; tax breaks for leaving lands open, liked the idea of the Planners or trust doing a survey of businesses.
- Hears a great sense of space but hard to find those spaces. Albany is hard to find!!

Ideas from Albany Middle School Students

As shared in a group conversation facilitated by VCRD with Albany youth on November 29, 2023.

What do you love about Albany?

- The amount of support the community gets.
- I know most people in town.
- Having a general store is good.
- Physical Education Class.
- It's a small town so I know everyone.
- I feel safe because it's so small and I know everyone.
- The Genny (this was repeated 6 or so times).
- The Genny's Pizza.
- Church dinners.
- The school and teachers.
- Some students said there's nothing good about Albany.
- The woods.
- No traffic.
- Opportunities for hunting.
- Side by side trails.
- Haying.
- Albany feels calm and safe. I don't worry living here.
- Camping opportunities
- Lots of farmland

What is something you worry about or don't enjoy about living in Albany?

- Nothing good to do.
- Nowhere to hang out.
- There aren't good playgrounds or rec fields.
- The town needs to have more events.
- The adults need to organize stuff for the kids.
- There aren't any special sports or rec things.
- I don't feel challenged by my classes.
- Lunch isn't long enough.
- Recess isn't long enough.
- The water filler at the school keeps breaking.
- Small roads should not get closed just because you don't use them, like the road between New St. and Old St.
- There isn't an acting club, I wish there were school clubs.
- I'm tired of going to the same school already.
- The school doesn't have enough staff, no school nurse.
- The school and teachers.
- Boredom.
- The Genny is expensive, and I don't think familiar that live here can afford it.

What ideas do you have to make Albany a better place to learn, live, and play?

- Most students suggested having a longer lunch, many suggested seconds on chocolate milk.
- It would be good to have a separate junior high so the middle schoolers could have some independence and wouldn't have to keep going to the same school for so long.
- Several students suggested hiring more staff in the school and more professional development, one specifically suggested hiring a school nurse.
- Many students suggested having A/C in the school.
- A couple students suggested the school should have a telescope and they'd like to do more science projects.
- Most students suggested having a longer recess period.
- Many students suggested improving or increasing the sports and recreation spaces and opportunities in town. These suggestions included: better sports balls at the school, improve the baseball diamond, building a skate park, an indoor pool, a skating rink, better playgrounds, a disc golf course, more trails from the school or the baseball fields.
- Several students suggested improving the baseball fields in town to be a more active community area. Some wanted to be able to use them for sports, others suggested they could be used to host events like concerts or a farmers market or craft fairs.
- A student who lives in Irasburg suggested Albany should have a town common
- Several students suggested having a gas pump in town, possibly at the Genny.
- Create more events and things to do around Albany like drive-in movie nights, school dances, or after-school clubs
- Most students echoed a need for a community center where they and anyone in town can go to just hang out or can hold events or group meetings like a club. Students suggested the town should hold a fundraiser to make this possible.
- Many students also echoed a need for more community events where the whole community gathers like Halloween, or an Independence Day parade.
- A bigger library.
- New stores and restaurants. Specific suggestions included: Bass Pro Shops, Taco Bell, Get Air, Open Session, Dunkin Donuts, gun and ammunitionbgvt5 kk stores, shopping mall, Starbucks, lululemon, crumble cookie, a dollar store, Chick-Fil-A.
- Create a park.
- Create an ice skating rink
- More bike trails
- Another sledding hill
- Stay on top of fixing roads
- The trails shouldn't always be so washed out after floods because they get washed away
- More street signs to help people not get lost
- Better plowing on back roads
- Better road care
- Deer season all the time
- No homework
- Shorter school days
- A giant statue of a cheeseburger
- A pet in the schools
- More time outside

Ideas from Albany Students in Grades K-5

As shared in a conversation with Albany Community School staff.

What do you love about Albany?

- No traffic.
- Living close to the school (walking distance).
- Friends and family in town.
- Family.
- The views.
- Living in the country.
- Houses and barns.
- Having lots of pets and animals in my yard.
- Our community.
- Moose, rabbits, deer, wildlife.
- Genny store.
- Family.
- Big backyard.
- Good school.
- Friends at school.
- Everything.
- The snow.
- My house.
- The woods.
- How open the town is.
- The whole town.
- It's a Safe Town.
- Very quiet.
- Bob's.
- The Genny.
- Playing in the snow.
- Coming to the school playground on weekends.
- Hunting.
- Nature.
- Fresh food.
- Family.
- Yummy dinners.
- Sports - soccer and basketball.
- The school.
- I don't worry about being hurt or shot here like I did where I lived before.
- Food delivered to my house.
- Church.
- Summer Program.

What are the things you don't like?

- Traffic.
- Not seeing friends and family who live far away.
- Living far from the school (in Brownington).
- Coyotes.
- Bears.
- Dogs barking all night.
- The cold weather.
- Kids being mean and misbehaving at the school.
- Too many signs.
- How small the town is.
- Not much going on.
- Loud animals at night.
- Lots of Hills.
- Not a lot going on.
- More sports for LITTLE kids.
- Too far from Jay Peak.
- Can't afford skiing there or getting there.
- Genny is too expensive.
- Boring.
- Far from stores.
- Far from everything.

What would you like to see in the future?

- Parents coming into school to help.
- Seeing our parents during the school day.
- Roller skating at school.
- Bigger Pump track.
- Animals at school.
- School Farm.
- Caring and Kindness toward everyone.
- Everybody has all the money they need to live.
- Cats at school.
- More lgbtq support.
- Field trips to Santa's Village and the ECHO center.
- Emotional Support animals at school.
- More parent participation on field trips.
- Skiing.
- Dirt bike track.
- More snow days.
- Community Pool.
- 3D Printer at school.
- School pets or a petting Zoo in town.
- Water Park.
- More emotional support in town for kids.
- Public trampoline.
- More charities.
- More stores in town.
- Common area like Irasburg (Town Green).
- Better and cooler field trips.
- More support for my family.
- A shopping mall.
- Skatepark.
- Trampoline Park.
- More safety – lights.
- Hot tub in the Gym.
- Emergency Room at the school or in town.
- More money for families in town.
- Police station in town.
- Community Pool.
- Time to bond with animals.
- More sports fields.
- Skate Park.
- Community Center to play with friends.
- More Bikes and more Biking Trails nearby.
- Water Slide.
- School Pets.
- Bigger pump track at school.
- Rides for my grandparents.

Additional Action Ideas
Here are the ideas residents contributed through a paper and online form

- Improvements to the Town Hall to make it more useable for community events
- I really like the idea of a revolving loan fund for Albany. I started a business in Hardwick largely because of their revolving loan fund. Was able to get up to $50,000 with a low interest rate, which was critical to our ability to start Front Seat Coffee.
- More social gatherings, more community support groups, transportation.
- Return recycling to Saturday hours. A Selectboard member decided to move it to Fridays, noon to four, for his convenience, without any input from the community. Many people are NOT happy, especially those who work regular hours during the week.
- I'd like to see Albany embark on an initiative that supports the development of infrastructure to actively recruit businesses that will 1) employ Albany residents 2) attract visitors from outside Albany. Businesses like a brewery / distillery, stores, a bakery, hair salon, eateries (diner to fine dining), lodging, food producers especially cheese...
- I'd like the Albany Select Board to implement a town website or at least a Facebook page.
- The Craftsbury outdoor center brings lots of people and money into the area, but Albany isn't leveraging this much...
- some COC patrons certainly go to the Albany Genny, but there is always need for more lodging and services. An Inn, camp ground, guest houses, gas at the Genny, could all take advantage of the people coming to the COC.
- Some land use planning could be very helpful. A top priority should be conserving the undeveloped working lands (ag and forest) that define our town landscape. Working lands are generally struggling and need support or they will be gradually sold off into smaller parcels, existing public access and the ability to manage the land will be lost.
- We should be thinking about what areas of our town should remain undeveloped as a resource, and what areas we should be developing to bring money and housing into the town. Conservation easements, town forests, and state land acquisition should all be on the table for conserving the lands and rural feel that make our town special. The development is economically driven and will happen on its own, the conservation won't.
- An idea that we neglected to point out at meeting is protecting our current proportions of agricultural & forest land which is a wonderful resource and what most people in Albany like about it.

VI. Albany Together Community Visit Participants

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