

# Sunderland Shines

## Report and Action Plan

### September 2025



Produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development

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# Vision for Sunderland's Future

*Compiled from vision statements shared during Community Visit meetings and supported by the majority of participants at the Resource Meeting and an online survey. The statements represent some of the broad hopes that the majority of responding residents have for the long term good of the Sunderland community.*

## Community members envision a future Sunderland:

- ❖ Where all are welcome and comfortable in the community.
- ❖ That attracts people to visit and live.
- ❖ Where neighbors get to know each other.
- ❖ That has a unique sense of identity and community pride.
- ❖ That is safe for families and kids.
- ❖ With a gathering place where the community comes together.
- ❖ With regular festivals, events, and gatherings in community spaces that all can enjoy, young and old.
- ❖ Where our outdoor recreation and other community spaces are accessible to all.
- ❖ Where residents come to community events and are engaged with what's happening in town.
- ❖ Where community members are civically engaged and serve on local boards.
- ❖ Where many people are engaged in preserving our Town's rich history and teaching our young people about it.
- ❖ Where local children have opportunities in Town for learning, recreation, and socializing throughout the year. Kids are cared for by the community.
- ❖ Where our roads are safe for walking and biking at any age.
- ❖ With woodlands and green spaces that are protected, including both private and public property.
- ❖ With a wide range of housing options, including options that are affordable to people who grew up in Sunderland.
- ❖ With local businesses like a restaurant or general store where residents and visitors can access local amenities.
- ❖ Where residents use their skills and passion to build up the community for the future.
- ❖ That is inclusive and equitable so that anyone can belong here and can benefit from all the things that are available in Sunderland.
- ❖ Where everyone is cared for and the community meets our needs.



# I. Introduction

Nestled among hundreds of acres of Green Mountain National Forest, Sunderland is a picturesque rural town with a rich local history and dedicated community members. The Sunderland Shines process illuminated the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm of community members, and the importance to residents of being together, getting to know each other, and spending time in the beautiful natural areas of town. While the community members who were involved in planning the outreach and forum topics for this process initially insisted that “nothing is happening in Sunderland,” it became clear through the process that the community cherishes opportunities to gather, and loves to show up for an event with dinner, music, and fun for all ages. The energy of the Sunderland Shines kick-off meeting, complete with a food truck and live music, exemplified this.

Visiting Team members who attended the meeting reflected on the immense opportunity available to Sunderland. The community’s placement along Route 7 and 7A, access to the Battenkill River, several buildings that could be community spaces, and a handful of diverse businesses were noted as key assets that could support the bright future that participants imagined for Sunderland.

A great example of this forward-looking attitude is the community’s approach to contemplating the future of the school building. While residents acknowledged the challenges and uncertainties of the closure, throughout the Visit the group was most interested in beginning to consider what the community would like to see in that building after the transition.

Visiting Team members also remarked on how achievable the action priorities chosen through this process are, given a number of existing assets to work with and build on. All of us were impressed by the number of people who joined the process and the energy and positivity they brought. Community members demonstrated that they are ready to roll up their sleeves and get to work for the future of their community.

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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.

After thorough deliberation, and multiple rounds of voting, Sunderland residents voted to form task forces around two priorities:

- **Create and improve community spaces and increase food access**
- **Expand outdoor recreation trails and access**

VCRD and its partners look forward to working with the Sunderland Task Forces as they advance these efforts. They are already hard at work — please support their efforts or join them by reaching out to their chairs (find details in the Action Plan section of this report).

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 Sunderland 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 Sunderland 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 Sunderland Shines Community Visit a success.

Thanks to the Sunderland Selectboard, who invited this process, and provided funds for the community dinner at the first meeting, the postage for the town-wide mailings, and drinks at all three of the meetings.

We also 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 at every stage. Thank you to Gordon Dossett, Avis Hayden, Jim Hayden, Scott Magrath, Andrew McKeever, Irene Nadler, Martin (Marty) Nadler, Tammie Reilly, Anthony Thompson, Ben Travis, Jenn Turner, and Dixie Zens.

Outreach is an essential component of a successful Community Visit, and many people helped make that happen. Thank you to Caroline Hartshorn for helping with the town-wide mailing, to Dixie Zens for helping with signage and banners in town, and to Andrew McKeever for distributing flyers. Thank you as well 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!

The Sunderland Elementary School was a key partner throughout this process. An enormous thank you to Principal Jenn Turner, administrator Katie Murphy and custodian Bill Amatruto for helping to coordinate the use of the school for all three of the meetings. We also appreciated the opportunity to meet with fifth grade students for a youth forum; their input and suggestions are included in the notes section of this report.

GNAT-TV was a strong partner throughout the process. Thank you to Tammie Reilly, and the entire team with helping with the production of the video announcement, and two subsequent videos. GNAT-TV is an incredible community resource, and we are so thankful for their support!

Andrew McKeever was a tireless champion for Sunderland throughout the process, and well before. His advocacy, and above and beyond efforts, including putting up posters throughout process, chair setup, and consultant. Sunderland is so lucky to have Andrew, and we are enormously grateful for his immense support.

Many thanks to Irene Nadler for coordinating childcare for the three meetings, and to Emma Daley and Chloe Gordon for providing childcare at the meetings.

Thank you to Anthony for coordinating the Hound Dogs food truck to prepare the dinner at the first meeting and to Dixie Zens for organizing the many volunteers to provide potluck dishes. Thank you to Sunderland's own Patrick Sargent for playing music during dinner at the first meeting.

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 Sunderland for the VCRD Community Visit Team.

Thanks must also go to the funders of VCRD's Community Visit Program who made this process possible: the Northern Border Regional Commission, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, National Life Foundation, Vermont Community Foundation, Wisdom Connection, and VCRD supporters and donors. Front Porch Forum serves as an outreach sponsor for the Community Visit program.

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 and our gratitude goes to the Visiting and Resource Team members that supported Sunderland's first and last meetings. The full list of leaders, agencies, and organizations that offered their expertise is in the back of this report.

Getting things done is all about leadership, so on behalf of all who have participated in the process so far and will continue to going forward, our deepest thanks go to those who've stepped up to serve as chairs and leaders of the Task Forces: Scott Magrath for Expand outdoor recreation trails and access and Casey Annunziata for overall communications. These leaders have already demonstrated their leadership in supporting the work of the community, and we are excited to see their efforts continue to grow.

Sunderland is well positioned to move these priorities forward. We are excited to support and celebrate the energy from these new initiatives, and look forward to seeing the good things to come in Sunderland.

## II. The Sunderland Shines 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:**



### Planning Meeting: May 13, 2025

On May 13, 2025, 12 local community members met to plan for the launch of the Sunderland Community Visit process. This group came up with a name for the process – Sunderland Shines – and helped to plan the kick-off. They decided on forum topics and an invitation process. Thanks to Tammie and GNAT-TV, the group filmed an invitation video, and through calls, emails, flyers, banners, and lawn signs, this team worked hard to promote the kick-off.

The Committee included: Gordon Dossett, Avis Hayden, Jim Hayden, Scott Magrath, Andrew McKeever, Irene Nadler, Martin (Marty) Nadler, Tammie Reilly, Anthony Thompson, Ben Travis, Jenn Turner, and Dixie Zens.

### Step 1 ~ Kick-Off Forums and Community Dinner: June 18, 2025

Sunderland Shines kicked off with brainstorming forums held at the Sunderland Elementary School. Over 100 participants shared assets, challenges, and ideas for action in forum topics chosen by the planning committee and attended the free community dinner. Forum topics included: Community & Identity; Recreation; Schooling & Family Resources; and History & Progress. Nine visiting team members participated, learning more about Sunderland and providing reflections to the community.

Visiting Team members included: Ted Brady, *Executive Director*, VT League of Cities & Towns; John Castle, *Executive Director*, Vermont Rural Education Collaborative; Bill Colvin, *Executive Director*, Bennington Regional Commission, Julia Connell, *Community Development Specialist*, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Rebecca Ellis, *State Director*, Office of Senator Peter Welch, Peter Fairweather, *Principal*, Fairweather Consulting, Scott Grimm-Lyon, *Regional Planner*, Bennington Regional Commission, Amanda Gustin, *Director of Collections and Access*, Vermont Historical Society, and Trey Martin, *Director of Conservation and Rural Community Development*, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.

VCRD staff included: Lauren Brady, *Community Engagement and Policy Coordinator*; Alyssa Johnson, *Community Visit Program Director*; Dani Parkins, *Technical Assistance Associate*; and Nick Parker, *Community Programs Associate*.

## Step 2 ~ Community Meeting: July 16, 2025

After the kick-off, VCRD staff distilled the brainstormed ideas into 16 key areas of action. On July 16, over 60 community members joined at the Sunderland Elementary School to narrow the list of priorities for community action. After lively dialogue and a dot-voting exercise, two action ideas emerged as key priorities: 1) **Create and improve community spaces and increase food access** and 2) **Expand outdoor recreation trails and access**. Participants then signed up for task forces to move these priorities forward.

VCRD staff included: Lauren Brady, *Community Engagement and Policy Coordinator*; Alyssa Johnson, *Community Visit Program Director*; Dani Parkins, *Technical Assistance Associate*; Jessica Savage, *Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives*; and Denise Smith, *Executive Director*.

## Step 3 ~ Resource Meeting and Task Force Launch: August 13, 2025

On August 13, over 40 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 Sunderland Shines action is focused at the task force level.

Resource Team members included: Mark Anders, *Senior Transportation Planner*, Bennington County Regional Commission; Scott Grimm-Lyon, *Regional Planner & Solid Waste Program Manager*, Bennington County Regional Commission; Mariah Noth, *Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Program Manager*, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board; Steven Pytlik, *Recreation Planner*, US Forest Service; Dara Zink, *Regional Planner & Emergency Management Program Manager*, Bennington County Regional Commission.

VCRD staff included: Alyssa Johnson, *Community Visit Program Director*; Jessica Savage, *Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives*; and Denise Smith, *Executive Director*.





### III. Sunderland Shines Priorities

Determined by Sunderland residents at the Sunderland Shines Community Meeting on July 16, 2025

*Through thoughtful conversation about the future of their community, Sunderland community members whittled down a list of 16 action ideas to these two priorities that offer opportunities to build on existing resources and strengthen the community. Residents then signed up for Task Forces to move them forward.*

#### **Sunderland residents selected these priorities for future action:**

##### **► Create and Improve Community Spaces and Increase Food Access**

Community members are interested in creating a space in town that could be used for formal and informal gatherings and rented by community members for events. Types of spaces could include a pavilion, improvements at the town hall or Union Church, a community center or youth and senior center, and more. A group could complete an inventory of community buildings in Sunderland, including those owned by the Town or others that could be open to the public. The inventory could assess and prioritize ways to improve these buildings to meet community needs, especially a space for people to gather. This group could also work to make fresh, local produce available by starting a community garden and supporting year-round local food programs. The garden could also be a place for neighbors to connect and for kids to learn about their food..

##### **► Expand Outdoor Recreation Trails and Access**

Community members could work to create new or expanded recreation trails in Sunderland. The group could explore possible new trail locations including the town hall property, near the covered bridge, or the National Forest. The group could also make a map of the existing trails and recreation locations in the community.





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## **Other Key Opportunities identified by the community:**

*Along with the chosen priorities, the key opportunities listed below reflect other potential ideas for action that Sunderland community members shared through community and student forums, and an online and print survey. 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.*

### **Increase local civic engagement**

A group could form to get more people engaged in community decision making and with local boards and commissions. The group could explore why residents haven't been participating, consult other towns and statewide partners for advice, and find ways to encourage more community members to volunteer in town government and other opportunities. The group could explore payment options or other incentives to increase volunteerism.

### **Collect and showcase Sunderland's history**

A group could form to gather, celebrate, and publicize Sunderland's history. The group could collect and catalogue stories and history from longtime residents. The group could partner with GNAT-TV to record stories, host Sunderland history talks or storytelling nights, and explore creating a Sunderland Historical Society. The group could create interpretive signage for historic sites in town, as well as a map, brochure, and/or walking tour of historical sites in Sunderland. The group could explore partnerships with local businesses and organizations to help visitors learn about the area's history, and create events to celebrate parts of Sunderland's unique history, like the Randall cattle.

### **Increase road safety for pedestrians and bikes**

Residents expressed interest in improving the safety of bikers and walkers in Sunderland. A task force could work to add or improve bike lanes, sidewalks, and other solutions to make the town more walk and bike friendly. The group could add signage, improve visibility by cutting back plants, and run educational campaigns to raise awareness. The group could partner with existing groups in the community already focused on this work.

### **Re-imagine the school**

A group could form to explore ideas for how the school building could be used in the future. This group could work with the school district, Selectboard, and other partners to learn about the process and what comes next with the ownership and use of the school building. They could also reach out to other communities who have had school closures for their expertise and advice. The group could engage the community about what types of activities and programs would be a good fit for the community and for the building. Ideas include a makerspace, retail space, community center, community garden, continued use of the playground, and an afterschool program.

### **Improve access to the Battenkill River**

A group could form to help people access the Battenkill River more easily. The group could inventory public access points, consider ways to improve them, and explore the possible new sites. The group could also hold events to celebrate the river and offer educational opportunities, such as classes on how the watershed works or how to fish.

### **Bring businesses to Sunderland**

Residents of all ages said they want more local businesses in Sunderland. Specific ideas included a general store, coffee shop, other small retail stores, more healthcare providers, and places that sell food for the community. A group could form to understand what residents need and want, and work to bring those businesses to town. The group could research various strategies, including tax incentives, that could encourage businesses to locate in Sunderland.

### **Create spaces and events for youth and families**

Many Sunderland kids participate in afterschool and summer activities in other towns, and both parents and students expressed a need for a “third space” and youth programs in town. A group could form to expand opportunities for families and youth to connect outside of school. The group could offer activities and events for kids such as “Touch a Truck” day, fishing and biking clinics, or a trick-or-treat event. The group could work on making dedicated spaces for youth, such as a kids’ space within a larger community center, expanding youth recreation spaces, a shared youth and senior center, or a dedicated youth center.

### **Create a bike path in Sunderland**

A group could come together to plan and build a bike path in Sunderland. The group could work with the community and regional partners to develop a clear vision for the path and figure out how to connect to existing bike paths in Manchester and Dorset. The group could work with regional, state, and federal partners to identify and utilize funding sources.

### **Increase community events**

Residents expressed an interest in additional opportunities to connect with neighbors. A group could form to plan events for people of all ages in Sunderland. Ideas include creating an annual Sunderland Day, hosting a winter lights event, organizing game and cards nights, starting a Farmer’s Market, bringing back pub nights at Hill Farm, and holding more music events like concerts or open mic nights.

### **Advance housing solutions**

Residents expressed concern about limited options and rising costs of housing, especially for young families and seniors, and the increase in short term rentals. A group could form to assess current housing needs and expand strategies to increase affordable options such as fixing up local homes and buildings, adding accessory dwelling units, and more. The group could investigate how short-term rentals affect the community and explore ways to address any undesired impacts. The group could also identify solutions to help residents make home repairs and improvements.

### **Improve community communications**

A group could form to inventory how the community shares information about Town and community news and events and find ways to improve. The group could suggest improvements to websites, increase the use of Facebook pages, community websites, and Front Porch Forum, and/or launch a town newsletter.



### **Increase recreation amenities and programs**

Sunderland could expand recreation amenities and programming for residents. Community members expressed interest in additional indoor and outdoor recreational amenities, especially for kids. These might include a skate park or pump track, walking or hiking paths, and more. The group could also look into providing programming such as classes to teach kids to fish or ride bikes. This could include hiring a town recreation coordinator.

### **Advance village development possibilities**

Community members described several assets in town that may not be used to their full potential, including land and buildings owned by town, the former Orvis office building, and the designated village center along Route 7A. A group could form to learn about these areas and help the public understand the development possibilities. The group could do public outreach and engagement to find out what the community wants and then explore partnerships, funding or other strategies to support the types of development and business growth that the community is seeking.





## IV. Task Force Action Plans

Resource Meeting, August 13, 2025

*Sunderland 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.*

### ► Create and Improve Community Spaces and Increase Food Access

Community members are interested in creating a space in town that could be used for formal and informal gatherings and rented by community members for events. Types of spaces could include a pavilion, improvements at the town hall or Union Church, a community center or youth and senior center, and more. A group could complete an inventory of community buildings in Sunderland, including those owned by the Town or others that could be open to the public. The inventory could assess and prioritize ways to improve these buildings to meet community needs, especially a space for people to gather. This group could also work to make fresh, local produce available by starting a community garden and supporting year-round local food programs. The garden could also be a place for neighbors to connect and for kids to learn about their food.

Community Chair	<b>To Be Determined</b>
Facilitator	<b>Alyssa Johnson</b> , <i>Community Visit Program Director, VCRD</i>
Resource Team Members	<b>Scott Grimm-Lyon</b> , <i>Regional Planner/Solid Waste Program Manager, Bennington County Regional Commission</i> <b>Mariah Noth</b> , <i>Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Program Manager, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board</i> <b>Dara Zink</b> , <i>Regional Planner/Emergency Management Program Manager, Bennington County Regional Commission</i>
Community Participants and Task Force Sign-ups	Casey Annunziata, Catherine Borman, Virginia (Ginny) Dexter, Jeff Dexter, Gordon Dossett, Kendra Ericson, Megan Gault, Toni Gray, Avis Hayden, Andy Holzman, Julie Hutchinson-Smith, Samuel (Sam) Liss, Andrew McKeever, Irene Nadler, Martin (Marty) Nadler, Margot Page, Kimberly Pinsanneault, Aleks Rutins, Nancy Schuller, Steven Schuller, Anthony Thompson, Suzanne (Suzy) Thompson, Phyllis Warren, Catherine White, Gary Zack, and Dixie Zens

### Current status and overview of the issue today

- The Sunderland Elementary School will be open for the upcoming school year and then be closing.
- Per the original school merger agreement, the Town would have the option could buy the school building, land and assets for \$1.
- Town would have to hold for 5 years before they can sell (can they sell for a profit?), in case district needs to reopen because of increased student population.
- Previous evaluations were done of the school building and indicate a need for repairs.

- Aside from school building, other aspects of the property – 12+ acres, playground, parking - are included, although if the building remains vacant, it could be liability to use of those other parts.
- The Union Church building is an asset, and has constraints.
  - Can't move the church, very little property around the church, and no parking,
  - The Town attorney determining if they can find an heir of the people who owned it. If not, possibly the state will buy.
  - Northshire Community Land Trust interested in buying. \$118k estimate for construction work. Environmental analysis needed as well. The Land Trust wants to buy, preserve, use for rental for events as long as they can break even. Challenges include: no septic/water capacity and a leaking oil tank.
  - BCRC had a grant to work with an attorney, and based on their review thinks that the state is the owner. That information has been taken to the Secretary of Administration and a response expected from state soon. Once official then know what next steps are - if state will give to town or do something else with that.
  - Current study for future uses of the area based on the constraints.
- Energy committee working with a MERP grant of \$206,000.
  - Part spent to find out what they can do with the 10 acres by town hall; there may be challenges with that land like wetlands, etc. Dubois and King survey is happening in next month.
  - Other outcomes of the MERP grant include: heat pump for the meeting room, sealing up the garage, and a solar array that will take care of electricity needs for town hall and garage.
- The Town has \$250k funding that it received from ARPA and has moved to reserve fund, and will determine how to allocate based on community input.
- Possible new Pavilion construction project - where to put to support synergy and connection?
- Landowner next to the town office – home to Randall Cattle, a landrace rare breed. There are only 1000 in existence, and it is the state heritage breed of Vermont. Manage farm at Hildene. Collaborated in conservation of cattle. Working with Conservation District for silvopasture and infrastructure at personal farm and Hildene. Working on a historic marker for the Cattle.
- There is a historic marker commemorating Lucy Prince, earliest recorded African-American poet and who lived in Sunderland, on Hill Farm.

## Priority Action Steps

1. Inventory and update community communication channels including the town website, email lists, Front Porch Forum to keep momentum going and be able to share updates and seek input about the work of the group.
2. Inventory available spaces and sites that could be renovated or built on in Sunderland. Review findings from the study of the land at Town Hall and the clarity on next steps from the school after the Sept. 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting. Investigate examples of what other towns have done that agreed to buy school buildings after a closure. Consider public and private lands in Sunderland in this analysis.
3. Create a matrix of locations and rankings, including criteria such as:
  - Potential uses
  - Limitations, including soil testing
  - Improvement needs
  - Costs and potential funding sources
  - Logistical considerations: management structure needed, insurance implications, etc.
  - Time horizon
4. Work with the Parent Teacher group to hold a community event – could rent a tent, host at town hall or at the school.

## Other Potential Action Ideas

- Could locate the future pavilion at the School site.
- Brainstorm options for quick wins as part of this work – maybe the pavilion? Important to have a visible sign of doing something.
- Have quotes for the pavilion. Could contact people who would assemble (has a sawmill that can cut the lumber and reduce cost) great opportunity for community event “barn raising”, kids involvement. But, want to make sure they identify costs before getting too far down the road with ideas.
- Investigate funding sources - taxes, state/fed, grants and other fundraising.
- Community center considerations - bathrooms, parking, who is in charge of coordinating/cleaning.
- Brainstorm events - concerts, farmers market, community meal, etc.
- Review regulations for a community garden, for example allowed proximity to neighbors for composting. Brainstorm sites for gardens with water.
- Explore establishing food hub, would need due diligence of research on what it would take.
- Explore connecting with the Bennington County Food Hub - aggregation, freezing, value add and processing. Conservation district would assist, and potentially have it be an option for school.
- Determining whether to hire someone for directing pavilion space?
- Talk to landowners adjacent to church about whether they would sell a small parcel to accommodate developing the church into a community space.
- Investigate what next steps are for Orvis building – is housing an option? What are the limitations?
- Know what’s happening with the Union Church group and support them – connect for status update and requests.

## 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 Recommendations

Creating an inventory list is a great place to start! Look at underutilized buildings, vacant spaces, available spaces, and potential parcels to construct.

Continued cultivation of community partners is essential.

Look at other communities/projects around the state that have been successful and something the community could replicate. See “Technical Assistance / Peer Connection Recommendations” section below.

Attend the Vermont Community Development Association (VCDa) Conference in Wilmington on September 24th which will be focused on "Repurposing Civic Buildings into Community Assets." A great to network, hear about successful projects, and get ideas on where to start! Learn more and register at

<https://www.vtcda.org/fallconference2025.html>.

Establish steering committee to study possible uses of school building should it cease educational operations.

Explore ways to leverage location and views of town office by adding amenities such as pavilion, cookers, playground, hiking trails.

Continue evaluation of possible acquisition and community use of Union Church.



Apply for a Municipal Planning Grant to conduct feasibility work and identify space and programming to turn the idea into reality: <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant>

## **Technical Assistance / Peer Connection Recommendations**

Connect with municipal officials in Johnson about how they use Legion Field - a community gathering space where they just moved the town library to.

Visit the Old School Community Center in Wilmington and meet with the Old School Enrichment Council to learn how this grassroots non-profit organization started. Learn more at <https://www.osccvt.com/> and contact Meg Streeter, Vice Chair at [megstreeter.realestate@gmail.com](mailto:megstreeter.realestate@gmail.com).

Connect with Food Connects in Brattleboro to see if there are supports for the type of community food focused activity Sunderland is considering. Learn more at <https://www.foodconnects.org/> and contact Lee Halpren, Executive Director, at [lee@foodconnects.org](mailto:lee@foodconnects.org).

Connect with Jon Ramsay, Executive Director, Center for an Agricultural Economy at [jon@caevt.org](mailto:jon@caevt.org) and 802-472-5362 ext 110.

Anything that involves an old building can turn to Preservation Trust of Vermont for Technical Assistance in knowing the building better, developing a strategy for rehabilitation, ADA and Code upgrades, explore funding opportunities, meet with other funders, etc. Contact Nicole Gratton, Field Services Community Support Specialist and Visiting Team Member, at [nicole@ptvermont.org](mailto:nicole@ptvermont.org).

Visit Hardwick and learn how the community rallied around turning Atkins Field into a community gathering space for all sorts of community gatherings.

Connect with the Manchester Village Land Trust, especially to learn more about their interest in the Union Church.

Bennington County Regional Commission could continue planning coordination for Union Church reuse. Contact Scott Grimm-Lyon at [sgrimmlyon@bcrcvt.org](mailto:sgrimmlyon@bcrcvt.org).

The Conservation District is an important resource. Contact Michael Fernandez, Executive Director, Bennington County Conservation District at [michael@bccdvt.org](mailto:michael@bccdvt.org).

Connect with local partners, including the Arlington Lions, to learn how they manage their pavilion, and the Arlington Commons, regarding the programming they already offer.

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns can be a resource for planning for ARPA funds, school purchase, insurance for events, and other examples of towns working with schools. Contact Ted Brady, Executive Director at [tbrady@vlct.org](mailto:tbrady@vlct.org).

UVM Extension Master Gardeners could support gardening efforts.

Vermont Community Garden Network could be a resource. Learn more at <https://vtgardens.org/>.

The Legal Food Hub at the Conservation Law Foundation may be able to provide legal support for food hub related initiatives. Learn more at <https://www.legalfoodhub.org/>.

Vermont Community Development Program maintains the Community Development Consultant list (on our website) which the community could contact folks for grant writing and technical assistance as needed. Consultants can sometimes be paid by certain grants. Contact Julia Connell at [Julia.Connell@vermont.gov](mailto:Julia.Connell@vermont.gov).

## Resources and Potential Funding Sources

The Regional Planning Commission/Regional Development Corp should also be involved! They have resources/technical expertise that can assist with this project. They can also support the use of brownfields funding. Contact Scott Grimm-Lyon, [sgrimmlyon@brcvt.org](mailto:sgrimmlyon@brcvt.org).

Vermont Community Foundation has a Spark Grant program that may be relevant to some of the action ideas identified. Learn more at <https://vermontcf.org/funds/spark/>.

VCRD's *Community Leadership in Action Guide* contains a chapter called "Develop a Community Center" with ideas and resources relevant to this topic: <https://www.vtrural.org/guide/>.

VCRD has a Climate Catalyst Innovation Fund are open until October 20, 2025 and provides grants off \$500-\$4,000 to support local Vermonters that are working toward reducing energy use, improving climate resiliency, and supporting communities working together in the face of a changing climate. Learn more and apply at <https://www.vtrural.org/climate-economy/climate-catalysts-innovation-fund/>

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) has a Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) which can pay for grant writers once you've identified funding sources. Learn more at <https://vhcb.org/redi> and contact Resource Team member Mariah Noth at [mariah@vhcb.org](mailto:mariah@vhcb.org) or 802-828-1098.

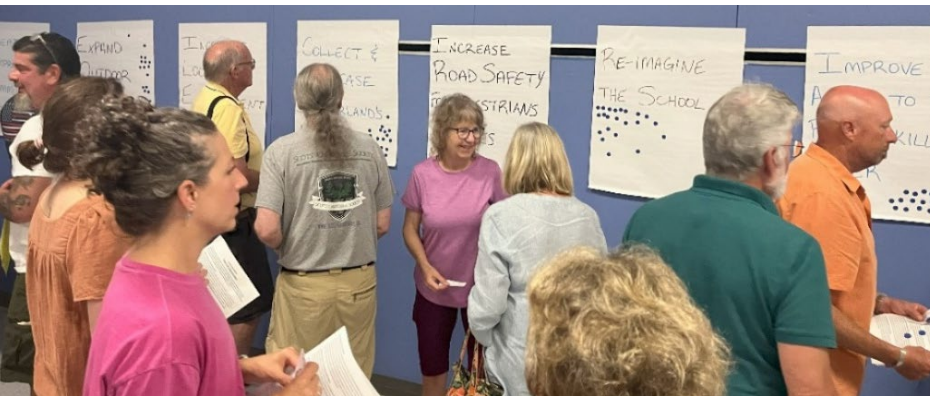
Municipal Planning Grants and Vermont Community Development Program planning grants can help the community get started with identifying a space and/or identifying updates needed once a space has been identified. Learn more at <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant> and <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/vcdp>.

The State of Vermont Buildings and General Services Communities Grant program has regional economic development and Recreation Facilities Grants that may be relevant. Learn more at <https://bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants>.

USDA Rural Development Rural Business Development Grant: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/rural-business-development-grants-8#>. Contact Ken Yearman, [bpvtnh.inquiry@usda.gov](mailto:bpvtnh.inquiry@usda.gov) and (802) 828-6083.









## ► Expand Outdoor Recreation Trails and Access

Community members could work to create new or expanded recreation trails in Sunderland. The group could explore possible new trail locations including the town hall property, near the covered bridge, or the National Forest. The group could also make a map of the existing trails and recreation locations in the community.

Community Chair	<b>Scott Magrath</b>
Facilitator	<b>Jessica Savage</b> , <i>Director of Programs &amp; Strategic Initiatives</i> , VCRD
Resource Team Members	<b>Mark Anders</b> , <i>Senior Transportation Planner</i> , Bennington County Regional Commission <b>Steven Pytlik</b> , <i>Recreation Planner</i> , US Forest Service
Community Participants and Task Force Sign-ups	Beverly Anderson, Lawrence Anderson, Gabe Borman, Leah Davidson, Virginia (Ginny) Dexter, Kendra Ericson, Sam Galeota, Peter Garcia, Dina Garcia, Scott Grimm-Lyon, Avis Hayden, Jim Hayden, Erin Lyons, Scott Magrath, Steven Pytlik, Tammie Reilly, Aleks Rutins, Mia Smith, Anthony Thompson, Heather Toupin, Ben Travis, Michael Welther, Shane White, and Robert (Rob) Zeif

### Current status and overview of the issue today

- Much of the town of Sunderland lies within the Green Mountain National Forest; some of this is Wilderness Area designation.
- Attendees noted that there is a lot of local trail, forest road and gravel road recreational assets in the town, but many of these assets are unknown even to local residents.
- The town does not currently have any active recreation or trail groups or committees.

### Priority Action Steps

1. Inventory and map trails and outdoor assets. Assess what maintenance is needed, who owns the land, and who are the potential trail users. Includes reaching out to primary stakeholders (residents, landowners, kids, state & federal agencies, businesses, etc.).
2. Develop a mission statement for this group.
3. Prioritize projects and trails to create a working action plan.
4. Communicate with the broader community: reach out for help, survey what community wants, share progress.
5. Host a community volunteer trail maintenance day.

### Other Potential Action Ideas

- Increase trail maintenance of existing trails.
- Distribute trail maps (paper & digital on town website and AllTrails or other platforms).
- Make trails in the National Forest.
- Start a VT Mountain Bike Association chapter.
- Categorize trail use to make them safer – prioritize non-motorized trails.
- Budgeting with town, state and federal government for specific trails that they have an interest in.
- Find funding.

- Conduct a survey to find out what the community wants – what kinds of trails.
- Involve the elementary school students, and children in general.
- Invite representatives from the school to the committee.
- Ask school to invite parents and kids to the committee – it is an opportunity for community service.
- Start a Little Bella’s chapter (national girls mountain biking organization).
- Make accessible trails on the school property to get kids out in the woods.
- Identify trail stewards to take responsibility for specific trails.
- Explore utilizing the school after it closes as a trail resource center/hub with bikes and kayaks etc.
- Work with Burr and Burton to expand mountain bike trails.
- Identify river access points and make sure they are accessible.
- Create clear parking areas at river access points.
- Burr & Burton has service days that could be used for trail maintenance.
- Could get local businesses to sponsor sections of trails.
- Include the Long Trail School and Arlington High School in outreach.
- Reach out to Orvis or future owners about public access to trails that start at their headquarters campus.
- Explore economic opportunities and benefits of expanding outdoor recreation.
- Expand bike lane network.
- Improve trail marking and improve signage on existing trails.
- Organize walks so people can get to know the trails better.
- Need to message and figure out what mission is to communicate and build relationships with property owners.
- Promote trails that are ready for the public on All-Trails and other apps.

## 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 Recommendations

Conduct a survey of community members early in your work: knowing what your neighbors want from a trail network makes your efforts much better and easier for them to support! You can find examples of trail surveys with your peers in other towns: see below for specific ideas or contact Sharon Plumb at the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council: [sharon@vermonttgc.org](mailto:sharon@vermonttgc.org).

Trail assessments, trail standards and trail building and maintenance practices are skills that can be learned and in some cases are best done by a professional. Consider what skills your group already has, and which ones you need. Identify skills that might require a professional to lead such as trail design and trail building. You can find best practices and examples as well as where to find trail professionals here: <https://vermonttgc.org/design-build-and-maintenance/> and here: <https://www.americantrails.org/resources> and here: <https://www.trailbuilders.org/>.

Consider reaching out to other communities who have done work around trail expansion and outdoor recreation: see below for specific ideas.

Purchase, rent or borrow trail traffic counters to gather insights on trail usage and preferences; create a schedule for data collection across all the trails participating in the Task Force. BCRC might have trail counters to lend or know where to find them for lending/renting. Contact your RPC at [manders@bcrvt.org](mailto:manders@bcrvt.org).

Post all publicly accessible trails on TrailFinder: <https://www.trailfinder.info/>. This site is made up of trail manager approved mapped trails and it's free to get your trails on it! Contact Claire Polfus to learn more at [claire.polfus@vermont.gov](mailto:claire.polfus@vermont.gov).

## Technical Assistance / Peer Connection Recommendations

Woodstock did a trail expansion project a few years ago. This group could also meet with other area trail groups (Hike Dorset: <https://dorsetvt.org/hike.html>, Bennington Area Trail System (BATS): <https://batsvt.org>) to gain knowledge on trail creation and maintenance; recent Community Visit towns to connect with include Lunenburg, Poultney and more. Contact VCRD for introductions: [alyssa@vtrural.org](mailto:alyssa@vtrural.org).

You can reach out to VT Parks & Recreation Association for ideas and maybe what other communities have done. Contact Jessica Brodie at [jessica@vrpa.org](mailto:jessica@vrpa.org).

Consider scheduling a meeting with Jackie Dagger at VT Parks & Recreation, VOREC Program Manager, to discuss how the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative might be able to help Sunderland. Contact Jackie Dagger, VOREC Director at [jackie.dagger@vermont.gov](mailto:jackie.dagger@vermont.gov).

It might be helpful to have regular conversation with the Green Mountain National Forest Supervisor to identify opportunities for collaboration. Contact John Sinclair, Forest Supervisor at [john.sinclair@usda.gov](mailto:john.sinclair@usda.gov) and 802-747-6704.

Contact Gary Holloway at the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development to hear examples of what other towns have done and to inquire about state funding resources including the Better Places program. Contact Gary at [gary.holloway@vermont.gov](mailto:gary.holloway@vermont.gov).

The Vermont Trails and Greenways Council (trail development and maintenance) and the Vermont Recreation and Parks Association (municipal recreation) can provide resources that may help. They co-host the Vermont Conference on Recreation and Trails Symposium together every fall. Contact Sharon Plumb at [sharon@vermonttgc.org](mailto:sharon@vermonttgc.org), and see <https://www.vrpa.org/Conference-Overview> for information about the annual conference.

Drew Pollak-Bruce at CRO Planning & Design is a consultant who also could be a resource around recreation trails. Contact Drew at 303-859-2370 or [drew@CROplanning.com](mailto:drew@CROplanning.com).

The local Chamber of Commerce may be a partner for community development projects. See <https://www.bennington.com/>.

Jessica Savage, VCRD's Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives, worked for the Vermont Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation for many years and would be a great resource for strategizing and planning next steps. Contact her at [jessica@vtrural.org](mailto:jessica@vtrural.org) and 802-227-2790.

Contact the Green Mountain Club's area chapter: <https://www.benningtongmc.org/>

Connect with the Velomont folks. Learn more at <https://vermonthuts.org/the-velomont/> and contact Angus McCusker at [angus@velomonttrail.org](mailto:angus@velomonttrail.org).

Connect with the Vermont Mountain Bike Association (VMBA) chapter for the area. Contact Jon Mowry, President, Northshire Area Trail System (NATS) at [natsvmba@gmail.com](mailto:natsvmba@gmail.com).



## Resources and Potential Funding Sources

A Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) Planning Grant can assist with planning for rec trail expansion. Learn more at <https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/vcdp> and contact Julia at [julia.connell@vermont.gov](mailto:julia.connell@vermont.gov) and 802-828-5215

Better Connections Program <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/projects-programs/better-connections>.

The Recreational Trails Program provides annual funding to Vermont communities for the development and restoration of public recreational trails. Applications require a 20% match. Learn more at <https://fpr.vermont.gov/recreational-trails-program>.

The Recreational Trails Program provides annual funding to Vermont communities for the development and restoration of public recreational trails. Applications require a 20% match. Learn more at <https://fpr.vermont.gov/recreational-trails-program>.

Recreation Economy for Rural Communities: [epa.gov/smartgrowth/recreation-economy-rural-communities](https://epa.gov/smartgrowth/recreation-economy-rural-communities).

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) has a Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) which can pay for grant writers once you've identified funding sources. Learn more at <https://vhcb.org/redi> and contact Resource Team member Mariah Noth at [mariah@vhcb.org](mailto:mariah@vhcb.org) or 802-828-1098.

The Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Program offers grants with no match requirements for projects that create measurable success supporting and growing their local economies through leveraging outdoor recreation. Learn more at <https://fpr.vermont.gov/recreation/recreation-grants/vorec-community-grant-program>.

Vermont Community Foundation has a Spark Grant program that may be relevant to some of the action ideas identified. Learn more at <https://vermontcf.org/funds/spark/>.

The Department of Health offers Healthy Community Design resources that may be relevant. Learn more at <https://www.healthvermont.gov/wellness/physical-activity-nutrition/community>.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund supports the development of public outdoor recreation opportunities across Vermont, with a focus on creating parks and open spaces, enhancing recreation areas and facilities, and protecting wilderness areas and forests. Learn more at <https://fpr.vermont.gov/land-and-water-conservation-fund>. Applications require a 50% match.

The State of Vermont has a Recreational Facilities Grant, which requires matching funds for shovel-ready projects. Learn more at <https://bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants>.

The Vermont Natural Resources Council has small grants that can help with community engagement. Find information here: <https://vnrc.org/small-grants-for-smart-growth/>.

The Nature Conservancy in Vermont has a Vermont Biodiversity Fund which can purchase and conserve land: <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/vermont/stories-in-vermont/vermont-biodiversity-fund/>

The Vermont River Conservancy supports river access projects: <https://vermontriverconservancy.org/>

VCRD and BCRC will write letters of support for grant applications. Contact Alyssa Johnson at [alyssa@vtrural.org](mailto:alyssa@vtrural.org) and Bill Colvin at [bcolvin@bcrcvt.org](mailto:bcolvin@bcrcvt.org).

VCRD's *Community Leadership in Action Guide* contains a chapter called "Advance Outdoor Recreation and Trails" with ideas and resources relevant to this topic: <https://www.vtrural.org/guide/>.

# V. Sunderland Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held with over 100 Sunderland community members and the VCRD Visiting Team on June 18, 2025, through a paper and online survey, and a youth forum.

*Although the prioritization work of the 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.*

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## Community and Identity

Visiting Team: Dani Parkins (FACILITATOR), Lauren Brady (SCRIBE), Bill Colvin, John Castle, Peter Fairweather, Rebecca Ellis, Amanda Gustin

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### What are the Assets in this Area?

- Great Forests and open spaces, that's most of our grand list, it's vast acreage and we take pride in it and seek to protect it.
- Covered bridge, the union church, the historic cemeteries, and the school are the 4 things that identify Sunderland.
- Many nearby assets in the surrounding towns and a close relationship with those towns.
- Hiking cycling, forest, four season activities, shopping, grade schools, great services, libraries, arts, rec parks.
- Great neighbors who come out, with potential for a lot more.
- Bike lane, WHERE?
- More families in town these days.
- Battenkill River, somewhat hidden but a great kayak or canoe ride down it.
- Tributaries, and the watershed as a fresh water source supporting ecosystems and recreation, and education, swimmers, fishers.
- Kelly stand Road is a great place for recreation, can get to Grout Pond, the AT, and Stratton. Brings a lot of people from all over hiking fishing etc. It's part of the Green Mountain National Forest.
- Easy access to the highway "Super Seven" and 7A as well, asset for tourists, commuters, and others.
- Home to historical figures like Lucy Prince, Ira and Ethan Allen.
- The school is an asset, major connection to others in the community especially for newer community members.
- Marc Johnson and the road crew - they keep the roads clear and in good shape all year round! We know they're on top of it! They do such a good job, they keep the roads beautiful even in the winter mix.
- There are a lot of dirt roads in town which are so well maintained here.
- Healthy proximity to Bennington Hospital and Manchester clinics.
- Families. It's nice to have a mix of ages and demographics.
- Lack of congestion - road traffic, very easy to get around.
- The view from town hall is spectacular, and it's a new building in good shape!
- You can see the stars in the sky here.
- Facebook group for the town "Sunderland Vermont."
- There's also a Sunderland Front Porch Forum - used a lot in town.
- GNAT is an underutilized resource, that is your community resource.

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### What are the Challenges?

- No town center and no meeting place, so there's no common gathering place that attracts people to come together, so people stay dispersed and don't have a sense of a center.
- Have talked about having a pavilion or a walking trail, something that people could gather.
- The lack of a town center means we aren't bumping into our neighbors to talk about what's going on and share information with each other.
- Lack of interest in Town Meetings, the elected and appointed officials would like more engagement and involvement from the community.
- Communication throughout town, and getting info about the municipal meetings is a big challenge.
- With a lack of gathering places, the school building is the only place that the community can gather. The school closing in the next few years will be a big loss of an asset to town.
- Historical Church is crumbling, trying to revive it, we're putting in a good effort, but it's such a big project that it's been difficult.
- Distance from the state center and those employment opportunities, and industry in general. That's a barrier to rural development and just young people being able to live and work here.
- The under current in our community is hunger. People don't realize how much exists. The yellow Barn Gardens grow for the Food shelves and the federated church, and on the Veggie Van Go Board. Have identified a large pocket of hunger that isn't talked about. The Arlington food bank is only open twice a month. There's not enough time or room in town to serve everyone in town who needs food.
- Especially with the school possibly closing, and lack of industry, there's a lack of a draw for young people in the

community. Not having a young vibrant population puts a strain on the community.

- Planning for pedestrian safety, walking or cycling on the roads. More people on the roads these days, especially during rush hour all year round. Scary to walk on Hill Farm Rd and others, just myself or with my three dogs. Our State Road is also dangerous for pedestrians, and have previously talked with BCRC, but so far no luck.
- No access to public transportation.
- A runner has been chased many times by the dogs on the roads in town. This feels like a big danger both to the people and the dogs.
- Safety while walking down the road, across the tracks and 7A, and back. There's no way to do with the speed that people go.
- Lack of connection between socioeconomic populations in town, that might be related to some of those challenges like dogs loose and hunger in town.

- Small population and high property taxes and a lack of affordable housing.
- There are folks living in town who are multiple generations living here and it's hard for them to stay as taxes go up. Land in this part of state is very expensive, more so than where I grew up in Addison County. Building is very expensive and there's no housing stock.
- Taxes have recently exploded and I want to see that controlled. Want to see the Town watch the budget as well as the school watch the budget.
- Affordable Housing - there are either really wealthy people here or really poor people.
- Nobody has rules for Airbnbs and a lot of people are buying investment properties and not moving here.

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

- Hiking trail or something like that as a central focus for gathering in town.
- Some sort of community food garden to grow fresh organic vegetable for/with the community. Build the garden and they will come. Find land that would be suitable, need startup volunteers and a water source, and then people who will take care of it. It's a huge undertaking but would be such an asset.
- HOW TO IMPROVE Young Population???
- Putting up more road signs and cutting back vegetation to increase pedestrian safety.
- Take the land next to town hall and put a community garden there.
- The land and the building of the school could be sold and be a commercial property or be a gathering center, or divide it up. There's 12 acres of land as well of the building.
- The Orvis space is also a building where we could have mixed use.
- The village center could be moved uphill and closed to the Manchester boarder.
- Could have a mixed use neighborhood in the village center or near one of the big buildings.
- Look into the ownership of school building if it's closed, who would it go to?
- Town website section about road safety and pockets of hunger.
- Advertise the communications that exist like the Facebook page.
- Do a town-wide evaluation of the buildings that could be good assets for some of the Town's needs.
- Use the communication resources in town, the front porch forum could use more information and conversation.
- Would like a community newsletter to get emailed and sent to everyone in town.
- Build a pavilion on the Town Office Land with a little parking area and that would give us access to that field, could be a town garden bordering the wetland. Dixie's got a plan for this and there's a group working on this. It would provide a gathering place, could do family celebrations there, it's got a beautiful view.
- Hiking trails around the town center.
- Feasibility study on pedestrian safety working with the Planning Commission. What delivers the most benefit? Include the state highway and advocate to the state about how to make Route 7 a safer place to recreate.
- Improve community communication.
- The bike lane should be extended, to the school.
- Want to see a pavilion, would be great to see some amount of sports field or other things to draw people together.
- Maybe some speed management - those signs that tell you what speed you're going, the speed bumps.
- Consider ways that we can bring young people and families into town.
- Investigate how to bring affordable housing into town.
- Would love to have a coffee shop in town.
- Would love to have an event to bring people in, what about a Pumpkin Chunkin event (Pumpkin catapulting event) and have a whole festival about it. It could be a fundraiser to bring in cash. That event needs a lot of land, cause pumpkins can really fly!
- Develop some local rules about short-term rentals. What's the right limit for this community? There are cons to losing year-round community members, but it is a way that local folks also make it affordable to live here, and we should get creative about how we address it.
- Affordable housing that is actually affordable.
- Work to get more people to show up to selectboard and planning commission meetings to share more of the community feelings and interests on all of the issues.
- We could host events and if we publicize them well then we can attract people from all over and it will make those of us who live here proud and will give us fun reasons to gather and get to know each other and give us a sense of identity and community.
- Build community so that neighbors can meet each other and get to know each other. A festival, a potluck on a regular basis, can be cheap and low-key, maybe a community block party.
- Could do some work on our community identity and brand, evaluate how we fit amongst all the surrounding towns, why



this town rather than the other surrounding towns? Many moved here for school choice, but we could do new things and get picked up in the news and draw people to visit, they might even move here. Make this a desirable place to live.

- Think about what is the right type of development for our Town Plan.

- Find ways to encourage small businesses and entrepreneurs, now it's not hard but we could do more to encourage that.
- Rupert Village Trust has been working to rehab their building and put in a coffee shop there, we could learn from them
- Set up a calendar of cultural events to see what assets we can build on and draw people.

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## Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Helpful to Bennington County Region Commission (BCRC) as we engage with Sunderland to revise its Town Plan. Few themes were communication amongst residents (newsletter, social media, calendar), events kept coming up, vitality meaning commerce and community activity, concern and opportunity around what happens with the School building, lots of concern around road safety, could learn from the town of Bennington on the Town-owned roads, BCRC is certainly a resource there. Pride and Opportunity around the natural environment. One thing I didn't hear about was broadband and cellular access, how is that in town and is that an asset to entrepreneurs and families? Or a challenge to all.
- Seems that there is still ambiguity about the direction of the school building. Understand your articles of agreement, certainly some of that is in play with the new education legislation. Encourage more community engagement with the school board and more proactive thinking about how you might want to use it as a community space, start those

conversations as soon as possible. Wilmington is an excellent model of that.

- There were many assets and ideas that you identified. You talked about baby steps, and for this to happen it just requires a vision and persistence. This community can succeed with persistence. Impressed with the number of people who came out tonight, so you have a lot of great people. You also have a lot of great ideas. While there are many ideas, there are those 6 or so broad themes. Any of those are possible it just depends on what you want to do. A pleasure to listen to your love for the community, I heard a lot of linkage between assets and challenges. There's space for community gathering and a garden and that could address some of those challenges around connection and recreation and events. Perhaps building spaces for connection to happen is a theme of this discussion. You've already started the path of connecting with your community and building a path for you.

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## Recreation

Visiting Team: Alyssa Johnson (FACILITATOR), Scott Grimm-Lyon (SCRIBE), Ted Brady, Julia Connell, Julia Keeton, Trey Martin

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### What are the Assets in this Area?

- Applied for a grant in 2013 and built a 1 ¾ mile of bike path on Sunderland Hill Rd (completed in 2018).
- Safe Streets Committee.
- Kelly Stand Rd. connects to the National Forest (no bicycle/foot access).
- Great for Fly Fishing.
- Winter Season – Mixed use trails great for X country skiing
- Campgrounds off of Kelly Stand Rd
- Battenkill River – Canoeing and Kayaking
- As a small community the information is available and easy to access.
- Natural beauty is wonderful.
- Clean up day has a fantastic turnout.
- Many people also clean up through the rest of year – a lot of pride.
- Community pride.
- Trout Unlimited SW VT Chapter River Cleanups.
- Mt. Equinox Toll Road.
- There used to be a Marathon – not happening any more.
- American Legion (Arlington) and VFW (Manchester).
- Woodford Snow Dogs maintain multi-use trails in national forest.
- Arlington Commons and Arlington Rec Center/Pickleball courts.
- Access to the park in Arlington for sports and recreation, golf etc.
- Playground at the Elementary School.

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### What are the Challenges?

- Programs for kids are few and far between, we have to travel out of area.
- We're small and we have to tag onto that towns to access opportunities/we do not have a say in their management
- No organized sports for children (leagues Mt. Equinox Toll Road.
- Because we are small, we only got a 50/50 grant for bike lane and did not qualify for 80/20 grant
- Was not able to build bike lane as wide as Safe Streets committee desired.
- No longer have Scouts in Town (troops are in ARL and MAN)
- Lack of volunteerism
- Hills make cycling to destinations difficult nowhere to bike in town.
- Kids rush to get license because they need to go other places to do things.
- No real spots to hang out, no parks w/ benches.
- No Town Center or Gazebo to hold events.
- No coffee shops or markets.
- Used to have races up Mt. Equinox Mountain (bike and car).

- No Church that holds services.
- Playground at the Elementary School future is uncertain with school potentially closing.

- Fishing trails maintained by Hill Farm Rd.

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

- Skatepark or pump track.
- Pump track is doable (closed circuit course with hills)
- Dorset Mountain Bike & Foot trails are a good nearby model.
- Elementary building could be a community asset after closing.
- We need to be a more bike friendly town.
- Should connect bike paths to Arlington and Manchester.
- Battenkill River Access could clear out space and promote use of it.
- Undeveloped Village Center District is an opportunity area.
- Kids fishing derby like the Duck derby in Arlington.
- They used to put tubes in water in town – closed after Irene; privately owned.
- Connection to Orvis as a potential sponsor for community events.
- Colebrook Rd. /Colby Cobbs camp Rd. hiking trail is beautiful Public Access, but a private road.
- Tree preservation in national forest area.
- Appalachian Trail – better trail system could be taken advantage of.
- A published map of local trails could be useful – it would help invite people.
- Marking trails would make them more welcoming – current trails don't look much like a trail.
- Trails are hidden treasures (unclear).
- If town had central gathering place – (w/parking).
- Annual Sunderland Day – some kind of Community event to celebrate Sunderland Social community atmosphere, multigenerational gathering.
- Pavilion to rent out for birthday or anniversary parties.
- Should have a Town Recreation coordinator.
- Recruit a rich benefactor.
- Music event (Arlington attracts from across state)
- Even a few events a few times a year could be simple and maybe generate revenue.
- Indoor playground and/or trampoline park with a coffee shop to bring babies so it can be used year round.
- Indoor pool (not one in region).
- Hill Farm Inn might be able to coordinate with Town to host events.
- Thursday at Hill Farm Inn used to be Pub night for locals with an open mic.
- Historic Church on Hill farm Rd. could be a venue for music
- Church reimagining acquires nearby lots for parking - Some activities used to be at church/fundraiser put bathrooms in church needs parking, river access gazebo and connection to bike lane.
- Local volunteers to teach kids how to fish.
- Offer some kind of incentive to help people step up maybe a tax break for businesses or something else.
- The Area where Sunderland Church is, also has the best access area for fishing in Town (Also the Village Center District).
- Sunderland should do a survey to figure out what land it owns, and then determine which of it could be useful.
- Bring a Farmers Market to Sunderland look at available spaces (school).
- Consider what the town could potentially do with the school space – land can accommodate a lot of the suggestions.
- Splash pad at school playground.
- Indoor vibes for winter activities at School building.
- Housing that might be different than what is already available when redevelop School area.
- Area adjacent to Town Hall could serve potential uses (may be a wetland).
- Significant recreational activity opportunities can improve property values (bike infrastructure in particular).
- Hold events to teach kids about bikes fixing etc.
- Find a way to turn the school closing from a negative into a positive.
- Indoor/outdoor recreational space will need volunteers, but can start small.
- Sunderland could connect to trail networks in Manchester and Dorset.
- Community gardens to bring people together.
- Another Town does an annual plant sale to benefit town Citizens buy perennials and funds go back to the community. Other flowers are used to decorate town properties.
- Build more trails in the national forest and connect them to the Orvis Property off Rte. 7.
- Continue some kind of music and art program in the school space.
- Open Jam space music for the arts/ with music lessons for kids/a space to wait on instruments.
- Who is going to be the point person to make these ideas happen? How do we foster people to take these ideas to the next level?
- We need winter activities, weather for skiing is getting worse, we need to plan for snowless related winter activities too.
- Identify sledding hill in Sunderland for the kids kiosk w/hot chocolate.
- Winter lights on some kind of a public walking trail (with no snow required).
- Indoor space where kids can move and be wild rock climbing wall laser tag.
- Turn school into some kind of recreation hub for year-round activities have trails connect here.
- Organizing a 5K or 10K race could raise money and display recreation opportunities for the town.
- Some kind of parade or activity where kids can be the center of it.
- Events for kids like touch a truck/classic cars, events should offer snacks, coffee etc.
- Connect with the forest service to develop trails/trail friendly administrator at the moment.

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## Reflections of the Visiting Team

- The Town feels like a piece of unmolded clay – not inhibited by past infrastructure.
- River and Forest special combination and opportunities for outdoor recreation.
- The degree of selectboard involvement in this process is unique and an asset.
- Something emerges out of these.
- In a unique spot where Sunderland is growing; that means something special is going on.
- Age demographics are younger than other towns in VT which offers an opportunity.
- For an Outdoor recreation Town, this is the most kid-focused and public focused I've seen, great foundation to build on
- When you plan around families, the dynamism explodes.
- Do you have business and hub destinations you want to grow? What is the carrying capacity for this as a tourist destination?
- Randolph could be a good model for working with first service to improve trails.
- Focus on year-round recreation and winter recreation that will be good even in a changing climate.
- The elementary school property is untapped potential.
- Seems like there is a lot to do here that could be broadcasted to the rest of the state.
- The variety of age groups participating is special here.
- The family focus for activities is unique.
- Sunderland is not well known but the suggestions are giving me a reason to come back.
- Tap into resources and training, there are opportunities for the Town to have assistance, and we can utilize the people in this room.

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## Schooling and Family Resources

Visiting Team: Lauren Brady (FACILITATOR), Julia Keeton (SCRIBE), Ted Brady, John Castle, Julia Connell, Trey Martin

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### What are the Assets in this Area?

- For a small town, organized town structure, zoning board, town board, elated people that help the town to coalesce ideas and move it forward.
- School is fantastic, move when didn't think they would have kids, and love the school.
- Great community at the school.
- Best test scores, teachers doing good job.
- School is welcoming, small school, small community, small size is good.
- Family resources: beautiful place to raise a kid, fireflies, birdsong.
- Kids can be free, she comes from Berlin, big town, but here so much opportunity to go outside, be themselves.
- New to Vermont, comparing long island grandchildren to those in Vermont, she's in awe of what kids up here do. Freedom growing up. Critically think about the world around them. Great problem solving skills. Kids elsewhere don't have the outside world we do.
- Learn self play in this environment. On long island, if not in organized activity, on their screen, can't play by themselves.
- Wonderful school, town has supported connection to the school.
- Town pays stipend to support local childcare, thankful when that passes on town meeting day.
  - Supports financially Northshire daycare.
- Leverage resources that are outside of Sunderland like preschool, kids at BBA still have availability to go elsewhere, other options.
- Kids are exposed to lifelong skills and recreational opportunities, arts programs etc.
- Town has developed in a way that supports families. Enough zoning for it to be nice, but still freedom to live how we want to live.
- Government struck a good balance to benefit families.
- Connections made at school are phenomenal, as soon as kids went to school, he's made so many more friends in the community.
- Intrinsic to rural living, don't have a ton of resources but because community is so tight knit and school is so welcoming – have created strong relationships and support each other.
- Town at town meeting vote to support variety of organizations that help families like Northshire day care. They have created opportunities to access resources in other towns, credit to the community that vision is such that if you can't have it in town, provide it in close proximity.
- Arlington Rescue and Fire reach out annually to connect with students on fire safety, consider Sunderland part of the area they cover.
- Battenkill Valley health care center and Stratton foundation great organization that looks out for Sunderland.
- Students don't have their own sports league, but go north to be part of Manchester rec and go south to participate at Arlington, more options on where you want to go for your leagues. You have choices.
- During Covid, experience with her kids, very different from friends in Brooklyn because they had space to roam, going on hikes, building a bunny trap. So many wonderful things to create in this free space.

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### What are the Challenges?

- Beautiful church and a lot of people in town, but not a lot of people come to church – would love to see more people.
- From the sentiment of the room, continuance of the school seems like consensus. But is it worth it to pursue that if the



ship has sailed and it is not likely to happen? Do we want to put energy into it?

- Last board meeting that occurred (school board), superintendent proposed, lots of energy and work went into the proposal, school administrators, considering their own communities and ideas. We all came to a consensus with the proposal put forward to the board. Find proposal in agenda packet online.
- Board did not accept proposal as it was, did not move forward the proposal as outlined:
  - Move process of closing Sunderland elementary forward for 2026-2027 school year and beyond. But steps we have to take first, can't close it without going through process
  - Moving forward a regional middle school to be created in the future. It is a process that must be followed.
- Worried about students transition from school of 50 to school of 480. Understands class sizes will be the same, but school still bigger overall.
- Losing small town, small community, everyone knows everyone else community.
- Plan tentatively developed to where kids would go, regional school.
  - Dorset stay as is, consume courier. Madams (not sure spelling on this) would consume us. Not what administrators feel is best path forward.
- Lose core stone of community, only gathering place here. Working with VCRD and with new village center designation to come up with new gathering place, replace what we're losing.
- School currently the "community space" and there is the town hall as well, losing not just education but community side of it is a concern.
- Challenge that there aren't other places to gather as a community.
- Current challenge is that a small rural school is lack of resources and lack of people available to fill resources available, such as therapist, school nurse, librarian etc.
- In a public school environment, hard to teach to the individual, more effort to teach to the individual. Challenge that exists everywhere.
- As move to bigger number of students in the classrooms, problem seems to grow.
- Being isolated and not having downtown or business, got to go to Arlington or Manchester to access anything.
- No quick shop to run to.
- Can also be an opportunity to not have downtown business, special to have to this tiny little town and have these resources just down the road. Best of both worlds?
- Remote distance to get healthcare is difficult, difficult to get into a pediatrician, had pay off five people to get in, on waiting lists. If moved to Sunderland today would be 3 years before kids could get dental and teeth checked.
- Urgent care not vital option if not great insurance.
- Not much veterinary care as well.
- Waited a year for first physical appointment to see physician.
- For families hard to watch bear cubs run through backyard and know that six year old wants to go outside and play. Have to be careful of these wildlife dangers.
- Close family connections, but would not let daughter bike to a friend's house. Bike path only on steep hill which 6 year old can't access. Not safe elsewhere for kids to bike.
- Lack of industry, not ton of people seeking out this place to build careers.
- Shortage of healthcare, son needed a specialist. How do we access that?
- Financial advisers, few accountants, everyone is retiring, few young people moving into those positions. Retiring generations of businesses.
- Housing is challenging, trying to get other families to live here but no houses to buy. People are renting and want to leave that space, but no options.
- Concerned about costs.

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

- If going to have bus kids, could Sunderland have a center for kids being bused back. Have a core of people to work with kids after school. Areas of interest or expertise, cool add on. Don't want people moving Sunderland to see that kids are bused to Manchester and decide to just live there instead. If we had this cool after school learning center where kids learn after school, may be something cool that attracts people. Someone used to teach math works with kids.
- Look at kids as they grow up, opportunities at BBA, sports, music, but kids like to hang out with one another and there is nothing for them to do. Special place for kids might broaden scope and include seniors, young adults. Old town hall in Windhall, one mom who made that happen. All kinds of activities in that building.
- Halloween trick or treat.
- Adults playing cards.
- Open up sense of community more, everyone here is together and talking and we miss that.
- Bike path would be great to connect to one that goes from Dorset to Manchester.
- What to do with space if no longer a school here.
- Climbing wall and gym for kids.
- Card room.
- Jam room.
- Art room.
- Community center: not school but something important for youth.
- Pool tables and ping pong.
- Afterschool spot.
- Events for seniors during the daytime.
- Dentist office and veterinarian and coffee shop that also sells tacos.
- Lots of people who love it here, grew up here and left because of not much opportunity. However we can inspire people to do the thing they want to do here is good. She had to start her own business to remain in Sunderland. Community classes to offer for kids and adults to inspire them.
- Personal finance class.
- Dental van that comes and visits schools throughout the district for kids that qualify.

- Community garden and teams based here after the school closes. Farmers market.
- Ask for FAQ on what would happen if school closes, build relationships with school board to get information.
- Convene neighboring communities to see what can do together, lean on each other.
- Develop committee of partners, selectboard, town members, school board (mixed response from the room).
- People are feeling burnt out though.
- Don't know what we're fighting against.
- Wait and see what the state does if it's going to expand districts, may have access to other schools. Don't know yet. Wait for action from the state before form committee.
- Talk to Rochester and other communities that have done this before, understand what worked.
- People in the room feel like this could be valuable but not right now.
- Housing at low cost in this area, little different from rest of the town.
- town houses or condos, coupled with area for kids to play.
- Farmers market into this area.
- General store.
- Use of land around the town building, sports field, soccer field. Having something here would be awesome.
- Community booklet of resources.
- Hiking trail map.
- Speed limit signs around town to slow down traffic.
- Parenting classes at elementary school, he found that helpful when he had a young kid. Building community, helping kids.
- Believes already a local dads support group.
- Local volunteer rotating master class, whether that's gardening or whatever someone is skilled at.
- Map out resources with other schools, is another community planning to repurpose their elementary school as a community center.
- Get a group to meet with people in Rochester (did he say Roxbury?), their school just closed, learn how that went, what opportunities are there. Learn from that experience.
- Don't put everything on your selectboard. Recognize that this is a financial burden and the selectboard knows that. Look outside government structures to make something like this works. Don't make selectboard raise taxes.
- Talk to other communities that have gone through this, what did their school board do. Understand the timeline, roles and responsibilities for the school board in any transition, what will happen to the building. Roxbury, still operating childcare in their old school through 2026, had to figure out how to make it a community asset. Have the community do research to what could happen for this building, don't put it all on the selectboard.

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### Reflections of the Community Visiting Team

- All incredibly passionate about this, important to develop this space. Very easy to get burnt and be overwhelmed by all the opportunities you have here. Participate where you can and when you can. Other communities going through similar paths, there are unknowns, but figuring that out will make you a stronger community.
- Most important thing a community does is raise the kids in that community. When that's the only thing you identify as Sunderland, that's hard and complicated. How you keep this sense with or without this school? Communities have fought school closure and those that didn't, found a way to repurpose that school.
- Community is like our help. It takes work. When you don't have a school, it takes more work. Have to be intentional about how you form those connections, be intentional about how you build community. Will have to be intentional about fostering community. Maybe there are elements of the school that can retain. Maybe town will run harvest dinners as an example instead of the school
- Inspired by hearing ideas on how to use space. Thinking about private organizations, don't have to have public childcare to have childcare for example. Think about revenues to stack together. This is happening all over Vermont, people are scared about it. Hurt in people's hearts. Impressed by how positive this was. At an age where it's so easy to be angry at each other, noticing that here community is positive and mindset of "we're going to do this and get this done."
- Partnership, school district and board have a responsibility to help you navigate through this. They have resources and capacity to help you through this. Develop FAQ. They have office staff. Develop a community committee that can look at all these options. Don't assume that selectboard wants to take ownership. It is an asset and a liability. Could be costs associated with the building.
- Engage the school district, provide FAQ, community forums. Can't over engage community. Build on that momentum.

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## History & Progress

Visiting Team: Alyssa Johnson (FACILITATOR), Scott Grimm-Lyon (SCRIBE), Rebecca Ellis, Peter Fairweather, Amanda Gustin

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### What are the Assets in this Area?

- Sunderland Thank You for visiting signs at the borders and the
- Chiselsville Historic Bridge signs.
- Historic Markers.
- New sign going up for Lucy Prince a famous African American Female Poet in Sunderland.
- Sunderland Church is one of our greatest assets.
- Recognition of Important Historic Figures, Allen Brothers.
- Mills and Surrounding areas.
- Are there historic artifacts, Chisels etc.
- Slides of residents of the Town couple married 75 years, The Thompsons, The beagles – They are open to those who want them.

- Stanley Steamer in Barn.
- Russell collection in Arlington Library – Ledger book of Sunderland Store the collection is interested in paper Items and Photographs and other ephemera (church bulletins, etc.)
- Old general Store (Now a residence) where old Texaco sign is.
- 85% of the Town is National Forest – Hotel and Other historic sites inside.
- Daniel Webster spoke on the Kelly Stand.
- Kelly Stand – several mills with stone walls are remaining and a 200 year old sawdust pile.
- Access to historic experts in Manchester and surrounding towns is excellent.
- A lot of collective knowledge in the area.
- In the Glastenbury wilderness, wagon wheels, sawblades, large chunks of iron in the McEntire area, border near of Town near south fork of roaring branch, wood stoves.
- A lecturer at Benn museum spoke about history of Kelly Stand Rd/has done the research.
- In Mt. Pleasant Cemetery is Veteran of Battle of Bennington (Samuel Pierce?).
- Ira Allen Inn, historic house.
- The historic Cemeteries are an asset.
- Chiselville Bridge.

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### **What are the Challenges?**

- Church needs a ton of work but it is a beautiful asset.
- There's a committee that's working on it right now. Biggest challenge is Ownership of Church, see if state can take it over.
- Lack of community pride and communication.
- Private collections of things should be in the Town Hall, and there's not enough.
- Indifference about our community identity with historic assets displayed we could inspire pride.
- We don't have adequate avenues for promotion of our town and identity.
- Same Zip Code as neighboring communities.
- I'm a neighbor to the church – what has the feasibility of the building based on lot size etc.
- Challenges are fundraising, to meet significant challenges. Church needs plumbing heating septic and parking.
- How do you preserve hard to maintain things like the Church and the Chiselville Bridge?
- If no one jumps in to do anything the Church will sit for another for 200 years.
- Lack of a visceral sense of why this is a community. If we as a community become more of a community, it will be easier to get money and volunteer hours because people will chip in because they are part of the community.
- Housing challenges, housing is expensive and It's hard to find anything, the people need housing for the future of the community.
- Jeremiah Evarts – activist for Native American rights is from Sunderland some of his work inspired Civil Rights.

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

- An email list where people can share their historic resources.
- There are lots of ways because of the history for us to promote Sunderland.
- Legacy gifts be made to the Town.
- Landgrove Meeting house is an example of an unheated historic asset and possible model for the Church
- Digitize early Town records -It would be great if they were accessible to the public. Documents signed by the Allens.
- There is already a number of people traveling to the Chiselville Bridge.
- Map and historical site poster board signage at Chiselville bridge.
- Brochures of area located at historic sites, walking map/tour maps.
- Digital archive, or website for locals to put their information and put it together on line.
- Add the next two signs in the town garage Welcome to Sunderland signs, where they need to go.
- We want to start small and get some low hanging fruit, more things like the signs is appealing, build on the small successes.
- We have the old school houses that have been turned into residential homes, they should be put on a map with information about what one room school houses were.
- Highlight the Randall Cow (Heritage cattle breed from the region).
- Make simple signs and markers at Town roads that people can see historic sites – keep it simple and not too long or hard to understand.
- Use Town Hall to exhibit our town treasures on a rotating basis.
- Signage like the sidewalk markers in downtown Bennington, with photos across the street so you can see a photo of what it used to look like from the spot you are standing.
- Tap into Hill farm and other places in Town with guests to promote the historical sites in Sunderland.
- Make sure Sunderland sights are on historic trails, African American Trail etc. Where applicable.
- Community Storytelling Events – possible partnership with GNAT.
- Older residents of the community, record what it was like
- Hayden Family on this side of the Chiselville bridge for oral history.
- 25 years ago there was an Revolutionary camp and battle reenactments, tis could happen again.
- Use older residents as an asset to identify buildings and things in historic photographs and add to oral history project.
- Finds a way to map the people in cemeteries, have names of people in Cemeteries associated with a Town map to show where they lived and where they are buried.
- The town is full of stories like Comstock showing up barefoot at Battle of Bennington, figure out ways to integrate these stories into the signage idea.



- Get a local historian (Bill and/or Avis) to do a Sunderland Series of Talks, it helps build a sense of community.
- Branding and Promotion – Travel groups, can we connect with them and tell them what makes Sunderland special - Sunderland, we're not just a Bridge.
- People volunteering can get frustrated from a lack of help.
- Create a Sunderland Historical Society.
- Dr. Russell's collection (located in Sandgate) doesn't serve as a historical society, but has a series of resource that could start one.
- People who are seeing our historic sights will need services in town, water, bathrooms, coffee, food trucks, etc.
- Pave the last mile of East Road and Flynn Hollow Road.
- Town village, the only commercial strip in Town.
- The Town should create zoning areas on Rte. 7a that will be more like a village and not allow things like storage areas.
- Get engaged in the zoning process, so the Planning Commission can serve residents.
- Redevelop the old Basketville into a bistro or café use.
- We could petition and get funds too.

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### Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- A Historical Society would be a good umbrella for a lot of the ideas here and provide an institutional structure to help move these things along, lecture series, newsletters, markers, etc.
- The strategic and approach of doing the building off of the small wins.
- Building the visceral feel and response, community development is like building a joint work of art, maintain focus on why we love this place to keep momentum.
- There is tremendous history here in Sunderland, both physical assets and ephemeral things like stories, access to that knowledge and the ability to share it, identify audiences and the way to convey the information, we can't use Sunderland to connect with each other, those who have come before us and also those who are just arrived. History as a tool for those connections.

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## Additional Action Ideas

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

- Make the municipal depot and sheds at the corners of Sunderland Hill Road and Hill Farm Road nice. They are in desperate need of a facelift.
- Repurpose a section of Sunderland Elementary for a Makerspace in the case that the school closes.
- Arlington area childcare in here to support Sunderland is very important to us and anything summer program or afterschool wise we can help with I would love to partner if there is room at the table for me.
- I'd like to see sidewalks, bike paths, or trails so that the people (including children) of Sunderland can get out and move. The roads are narrow and without shoulders.
- Depending on what happens with the school, there is a great playground at the present school and if that facility is no longer used as a school, it could be turned into a common-use building.
- I am very concerned that Sunderland's history is not well known and what we do have cannot be preserved for lack of a space to do so.
- Finish MERP work on town garage.
- Improve bike and walkability.
- The old church on Hill Farm Road is a great asset and it seems important to obtain the ownership of that building (contact living heirs) and then funding for operational use.
- It will be interesting to see what becomes of the old Orvis HQ building -- and see if there is a way to develop eateries etc. at the south end of town.
- Finish work on Sunderland Church.
- Better recreation access to The Battenkill.
- Install remaining "Welcome to Sunderland" signs on Rt. 7A.
- Start a town newsletter.
- Home energy audits (at a reduced/free cost).
- Energy efficiency demonstrations, DIY projects, info seminars (at Town Hall or the school).
- Community solar projects like many towns are doing to provide solar power to residents who can't afford their own or whose homes aren't conducive to solar panels.
- Become a Button Up Vermont town <https://buttonupvermont.org/>.
- A mailing (snail mail or email) to all residents about the many Efficiency Vermont projects, resources and incentives.

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## Youth Forum

These are notes from a forum with 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade Sunderland students conducted by VCRD staff at the Sunderland Elementary School on June 3, 2025.

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### What are the Assets in Sunderland?

- Friends live close by, walk to their houses, hang out and go somewhere.
  - Know where everybody lives and can hang out easily.
  - Close knit community, people are nice and thoughtful.
  - Can always find something to do in the woods.
  - Everyone really supportive, like school.
  - Quiet and wilderness.
  - Forests and greenery, hiking, big backyard.
  - Refreshing river - swimming and fishing.
  - Hunting, wildlife, birds.
  - Walking on the road with cousin.
  - Beautiful mountains!
  - State forest protected and public.
  - Neighbors OK with kids playing on property.
  - Daycares in Manchester.
  - Take a book leave a book.
- 

### What are the challenges?

- Camps and classes in Manchester - hard to keep in touch.
  - Unpredictable weather.
  - Small town no one knows about.
  - Speeding on small roads, not expecting.
  - Get lost on private roads.
  - Lots of friends live in other towns, hard to visit.
  - Have to be careful in the woods, dead trees.
  - Conventions and mall all an hour drive!
  - Planes fly low and a lot!
  - Wildlife population - deer damage.
  - Things are too far, have to drive, far to walk or bike and NO sidewalks.
  - Visitors don't know hunting areas.
  - Not a lot of shops, grocery store.
  - When rains, lake, swamps flood roads and farms.
  - Lots of bears getting into trash.
  - Camp fire risks forest fire.
- 

### What are your ideas for the future?

- Community Center.
- Sidewalks on more roads, more safe and crosswalks.
- 'Beware animals' signs - bear signs.
- Welcome to Sunderland (add this).
- Local Rec. park for sports and other camps.
- More doctors (eye doctors).
- Address flooding (maybe dam or other ideas).
- Live music - research options and invite musicians
- Cheaper places to eat.
- Super center - groceries, recreation, stage, have it all in one area so don't have to go to 5 different places and so we can play while family shops.
- Sunderland daycare.
- Take a book leave a book, library and bookstore.
- Make park different from other town parks so it stands out.
- Store like Target but smaller.
- Little bit of everything.
- Maybe a community store.
- Share extra garden produce or have a community garden.
- Outside area to hang out.
- Closer, cheaper, middle of town.
- Friendship Park (stage, gardens, wildlife).
- Jobs for kids at store or volunteer.
- Community food drop off/share.
- Community parks, dog park, pet friendly areas.
- Gas station (with store?).
- Sidewalks.
- Signs near house and roads where people and pets are.



## VI. Sunderland Community Visit Participants

Beverly Anderson	Sam Galeota	Samuel (Sam) Liss	Ed Surhan
Lawrence Anderson	Dina Garcia	Marie Litowsky	Anthony Thompson
Adam Annunziata	Peter Garcia	Liz Lizca	Suzanne (Suzy)
Casey Annunziata	Megan Gault	Erin Lyons	Thompson
Todd B	Nick Gault	Scott Magrath	Rick Timmerman
Merrill Bent	Wayne Godfrey	Brenda Massaro	Heather Toupin
Frazier Blair	Irene Goyette	James McCarthy	Ben Travis
Catherine Borman	Mark Goyette	Andrew McKeever	Jenn Turner
Gabe Borman	George Gray	Linda McKeever	Lily Van Haverbeke
Andrea Brophy	Toni Gray	Liz Miller	Peter Van Haverbeke
Bill Budde	Alyson Gryzb	David Monk	Melanie Virgilio
Gabrielle Carpenter	Laura Hammler	Katie Murphy	Lynn Wachtel
Jeni Chui	Caroline Hartshorn	Irene Nadler	S Eric Wachtel
Simm Chui	Avis Hayden	Martin (Marty) Nadler	Brenna Warren
Rachael Clementa	Jim Hayden	Karin Nicholson	Phyllis Warren
Gavin Cornell	Kevin Hewes	Margot Page	Harriet Welther
Meg Cornell	Andy Holzman	Perk Perkins	Michael Welther
Marilyn Coutoure	Dan Houghton	Kimberly Pinsanneault	Catherine White
Danielle Crosier	Ginelle Hunter	Dan Reilly	Shane White
BJ Dahl	Julie Hutchinson-Smith	Tammie Reilly	Jonathan Wolff
Lea Davidson	Christy Johnson	Sherry Risley	Colleen York
John Dawson	Kathy Johnston	Leslie Roberts	Scott York
Jeff Dexter	Marc Johnston	Aleks Rutins	Gary Zack
Virginia (Ginny) Dexter	Daryl Kenny	Eric Salat	Kathy Zack
Michael di Monda	Leslie Kielson	Patty Sargent	Loree Zeif
Gordon Dossett	Dave Kiernan	Rick Sargent	Robert (Rob) Zeif
Rep. David Durfee	Kim Knapp	Nancy Schuller	Dixie Zens
Linda Dykeman	Jackie Kutzer	Steven Schuller	and many more...
Tom Dykeman	Kelly Langlais	Adrienne Signor	
Kendra Ericson	Todd Lawrence	Mia Smith	
Chris Filipkowski	Liz Liecd	Heather Snow	





## VII. Visiting Resource Team Members

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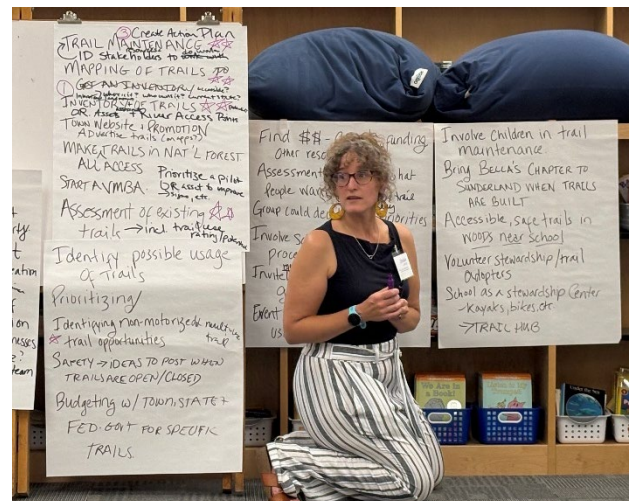






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