

Westford's Future

Report and Action Plan ~ November 2019



Produced by the Vermont Council on Rural Development
in partnership with the Vermont Community Foundation

Table of Contents

I. The Westford’s Future Community Process	1
II. Westford’s Future Priorities	2
III. Task Force Action Plans	4
Action Steps, Resources, Task Force Members	
IV. Community Forum Notes	10
V. Community Visit Participants	17
VI. Resource Team Members.....	18



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I. The Westford's Future Community Process

A scenic community surrounded by rolling hills and farmland, Westford is a town with abundant assets from the strong local schools and numerous community events to the new Town Forest, a large and inviting town common, two recently revitalized historic buildings that host local events, and a culture of volunteerism and engagement.

In the Fall of 2019, the community came together to engage residents in reviewing these assets, addressing challenges, and setting and advancing key priorities for the future. Through the Westford's Future process, community members identified and prioritized goals, fostered local leadership, connected to resources and developed achievable action plants. **The Westford's Future process consisted of two phases:**

Phase 1: Over 120 residents came together for community forums and community potluck at the Westford School on **September 19th** to review assets and challenges and brainstorm action ideas around two topic areas: **Village Revitalization & Economic Development** and **Gathering Spaces, Communications, & Events**.

Phase 2: Over 100 residents attended a community meeting on **October 22nd** to review action ideas shared in September, discuss what is most important, vote on top priorities, and then build action plans to advance those priorities. At the end of the evening, community members signed on to continue to work in these key priority areas. Local leaders Mark Drapa, Pat Haller, Julia Andrews, Eric Ford, and Tara Pereira have stepped up to chair the new task forces.

It is not easy to choose priorities, but in the end, Westford selected solid priorities for action, listed in the report below, that will lead to a stronger and more vibrant community and economy for all Westford residents. These initiatives set challenging but strategically achievable goals, and there is much work to do, but Westford is a town that is ready to take action.



II. Westford's Future Priorities

Determined by Westford residents at the Westford's Future Community Meeting

October 22nd 2019.

Proving that those who live, work and raise their families in a community are best qualified to understand its needs and potential, Westford community members whittled down a list of 13 issues through discussion, reasoned arguments and thoughtful reflection. In the end, voting with red and green stickers, over 100 participants chose 3 action ideas that offer opportunities to enhance existing resources, and to strengthen the town through exciting new ventures. Residents concluded the October 22nd meeting by building initial action plans for each task force and signing up for Task Forces in the selected areas.

Westford residents selected three priorities for future action:

✓ Improve Traffic Safety, Walkability, and Bike-ability

A task force could form to plan and implement strategies to calm traffic and boost bike and pedestrian safety in Westford. The group could work with the Town and State agencies and partners to improve sidewalks and crosswalks around the Common and other key intersections in town. Additionally, the task force could develop community paths, walkways, and trails in Westford to provide alternative routes for walkers and bikers to avoid busy main roads. The group could work with residents and outside experts to develop a traffic and pedestrian safety plan to inventory what is needed, explore the cost, and seek out funding and technical assistance to implement the plan.

✓ Boost Local Business and Economic Development and Improve Broadband and Cell Connectivity

Westford has many economic assets including a central Common, proximity to large economic centers, a growing business community, and zoning and municipal leadership that is favorable to business development. An Economic Development committee could form to leverage these assets by creating and implementing a focused and strategic economic development plan for the town. The group could look at business incentives, tax credits and other financial tools to stimulate development and reduce barriers, while ensuring that development and business growth align with the character, values, and desires of Westford residents. This group could also work with regional, state, and federal experts to advance strategies to improve connectivity to high speed internet and cell service in the area.

✓ Advance the Arts, Community Events, and Communications

A task force could come together in support of existing community and arts events and to expand offerings to include concerts, recreational events, arts shows, comedy events, volunteer days, events for local teens, recreational events, and more. The group could collaborate with other community groups and organizations to support events and could create a template and improve local guidelines and ordinances to make it simple and accessible to pull off great events that bring people together. Additionally, the task force could work to promote and share events as well as recognize local crafters, artists, musicians, and others. At the same time, the group could be working to better communicate with each other and to stay more deeply connected to what is going on in town by developing a platform for community communications. The platform could include a website, a community calendar, and a newsletter or bulletin.

Other Key Opportunities identified by the community:

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

Improve Shared Transportation Options

A task force could form to implement ride-sharing opportunities such as the development of an improved local park and ride and a network to encourage carpooling.

Start a Tool and Gear Sharing Program

Westford could start a tool and gear sharing program. Residents with tools, outdoor gear, event equipment, and more to share could contribute, or funding could be raised to purchase equipment for community members to borrow as needed.

Build a Community Playground on the Common

A playground could be developed on the Common with slides, swings, and other modern playground features that could make the green the center play space of the community. Youth could help and share leadership.

Market and Share Westford's Assets

A task force could form to identify and implement strategies to compile and share Westford's key assets. Strategies could include an eye-catching welcome sign on the way into town, an informational kiosk that shares businesses, amenities, and other assets, maps and signage pointing to recreational opportunities, signage, and website to direct locals and visitors to points of interest.

Create a Co-Working Space in the White Church

A task force could work with the White Church Committee to develop a co-working space in the upstairs portion of the building to foster and encourage local entrepreneurs and residents that work from home. The space could include shared resources and utilities and provide mutual support and a sense of community for those that need work spaces or lead businesses remotely.

Create Educational and Skill Sharing Opportunities

Westford residents would like to see more opportunities for community members to access education and skills training. A task force could come together to develop a program, in partnership with the school, library, and other community groups, to draw on local talents and skills to provide workshops, classes, and trainings to other residents. The group could also build a mentorship and apprenticeship program for adults and youth to connect with and learn from area business owners and entrepreneurs, writers, artists, tradespeople, and others to provide lifelong learning opportunities.

Develop and Improve Housing

Many residents see a crucial need for more affordable housing for young people, employees of local businesses, and seniors in Westford. A task force could form to work with local, regional, and statewide experts to explore alternatives to boost housing opportunities such as new development in Westford, revitalization of existing properties, co-housing or home-sharing, or other multi-family development that could offer affordable housing for mixed-age and incomes.

Moving Forward Today with Planning Commission Leadership (No need for Prioritization):

Build Community Wastewater Infrastructure

Westford lacks the wastewater infrastructure needed for new businesses and homes around the Common, and many residents believe that developing this infrastructure will be essential to a sustainable economic future for the community. A group could come together to develop a plan for a new wastewater treatment system. The task force could work with regional, state, and federal partners to survey current infrastructure, evaluate what is needed for desired growth, identify funding sources, and work with the Selectboard and Planning Commission to design and implement Westford wastewater solutions.

III. Task Force Action Plans

Action Planning Meeting, October 22, 2019

Westford Task Forces are comprised of community members and an appointed chairperson. At the May 16th action planning meeting 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. Next, residents will truly take ownership of the work, and begin the exciting process of turning ideas into action.

✓ Improve Traffic Safety, Walkability, and Bike-ability

Chairperson: **Pat Haller** will convene the task force to confirm the chair role

Facilitator: **Jenna Koloski**, *Community and Policy Manager*, VCRD

Resource Team Members: **Rick DeAngelis**, *Associate Director of Housing Policies*, VT Housing and Conservation Board
Regina Mahoney, *Planning Program Manager*, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

A task force could form to plan and implement strategies to calm traffic and boost bike and pedestrian safety in Westford. The group could work with the Town and State agencies and partners to improve sidewalks and crosswalks around the Common and other key intersections in town. Additionally, the task force could develop community paths, walkways, and trails in Westford to provide alternative routes for walkers and bikers to avoid busy main roads. The group could work with residents and outside experts to develop a traffic and pedestrian safety plan to inventory what is needed, explore the cost, and seek out funding and technical assistance to implement the plan.

The Issue Today:

- The Town is establishing a Roads Committee that will work on roads and traffic safety. They could be a partner.
- There are no bike paths in town.
- There are backroads with no car traffic – class 4 and ancient roads – some even connect all the way over to Underhill. The Planning Commission and Conservation Commission have done some work on these.
- There is a map of Class 4 roads on town website
- VAST trails in the winter, but not for year-round use
- Speed is a challenge – especially on dirt roads
- There are trails now on public land
- Signage is limited for traffic and speed control
- There are trails at the school and the new town forest, but they are used only for walking and not biking. Sometimes they are wet and not well suited for hiking or biking.
- There is an easement that could lead to a path from the school to the common, but one property is missing from that connection. The PC and CC have been working on this.
- Communication is key – right now many people don't know what the trial opportunities are.
- There could be potential to connect north-south roads east-west.

Priority Action Steps:

Traffic Safety and Walk/Bike-ability on Roads:

- Consult with the Regional Planning Commission, Local Motion, and other experts to research and understand strategies that are most effective. Learn what has worked in other communities and ways that towns can try out and experiment with traffic safety models.

- Inventory the problem areas in town. Survey residents and map with support from the Regional Planning Commission, particular areas that are dangerous and could use support to address safety and/or speed challenges.
- Depending on findings, develop a plan to address intersection visibility challenges, road crossings, enforcement, and speed.

Developing Trails and Paths:

- Look at a map of Westford and map out where trails and paths are today.
- Survey where trails/paths/access are wanted.
- Learn about how other towns have integrated and approached private landowners and develop a plan to work with landowners in town to improve trail access and connections.
- Improve and share the current map of existing trails. Improve education around use and safety on the trails.
- Through the mapping process, develop a plan for what it would take to connect trails and where new trails should be built. Identify funding and call on local volunteers and community groups to implement the plan.

Other Potential Action:

- Create a recreational bike path
- Build a bike park
- Improve road signage – make it fun!
- Reconsider speed limits in town
- Consider a constable for speed enforcement

Resources

- The Vermont Youth Conservation Coalition (VYCC) could be a trail building/maintenance partner. Contact Executive Director Breck Knauft at 598-6386 or breck.knauft@vycc.org.
- The Westford Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, Recreation Commission, and Roads Committee will be key partners in this work.
- Other local organizations and groups could be volunteers and partners including the 4-H Club, Girl/Boy Scouts, the School, and others
- America Walks has a small grant program for this type of work
- The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission will be a key resource and partner around speed studies, sign inventories, mapping, road corridor and scoping studies, bike lanes, and more. Contact Regina Mahoney at rmahoney@ccrpcvt.org or 846-4490 x28.
- Local Motion is an organization with expertise in traffic safety and improving walkability and bike-ability in towns. Allegra Williams is the contact at 861-2700 or allegra@localmotion.org.
- The Department of Forest, Parks, and Recreation has Recreation and Trails grants. Contact Jessica Savage at jessica.savage@vermont.gov or 249-1230.
- The Vermont Community Foundation could be a potential funding partner through their Spark Connecting Communities grant program.
<https://www.vermontcf.org/nonprofitsgrants/availablegrants/sparkconnectingcommunity.aspx>
- Fellowship of the Wheel may be interested in collaborating on mountain bike trails.
- The VT Agency of Transportation has a Bike/Ped program with grants to support this work. Contact Jon Kaplan and jon.kaplan@vermont.gov.

✓ Priority: Boost Local Business and Economic Development and Improve Broadband and Cell Connectivity

Chairperson: **Mark Drapa**

Facilitator: **Paul Costello**, *Executive Director*, VCRD

Resource Team Members: **Curt Carter**, *Senior Vice President*, Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation
Jacob Hemmerick, *Planning and Policy Manager*, VT Department of Housing and Community Development
Rebecca Schrader, *Community Programs Specialist*, USDA Rural Development

Action Steps:

For Broadband and Cell Connectivity:

1. Starting Action Steps include evaluating the history of the attempt to locate a high strength broadband signal on the ridge and the potential interest in providers of renewing that effort.
2. And assessing the current map of broadband and cell coverage to identify clear needs and move on to next steps.

For Boosting Local Business and Economic Development:

1. Build a local business directory online and on paper.
2. Update the town website small business site.
3. Act in an ongoing way as a business liaison group to help answer questions, attract and land businesses and help them be successful in Westford.
4. Work to attract and grow businesses and grow the grand list by marketing Westford to appropriate businesses.
5. Evaluate ways to make the regulatory framework for business development more friendly, especially for priority sites.
6. Define the appropriate kinds of businesses that Westford would want to attract or grow.
7. Evaluate town data on business applications—which went forward, and which did not—to consider ways to encourage successful location of businesses in town.
8. Audit/assess viable business properties—buildings or sites for potential development in Westford.
9. Consider the potential to develop spaces in the community for businesses that grow out of homes.
10. Consider the development of local tax stabilization or other incentives for targeted businesses on targeted sites.

Resources

- The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission can help with mapping and may be able to lend facilitative or grant writing assistance. Contact Regina Mahoney at rmahoney@ccrpcvt.org or 846-4490 x28.
- The Secretary of State's office has records of all Westford business registrations.
- The Committee could connect to other towns who have done some of this work to learn best practices: Jericho might be one to start with.
- Local businesses are the starting point. They could be invited to participate in the committee, register in the local directory, and lend advice on ways to support and attract economic activity.
- The Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation is the Regional Development Corporation for the county and could provide advice and support. Contact Curt Carter at curt@vermont.org.
- Look at past Westford visioning materials and recent surveys for pertinent information.

- The Agency of Commerce and Community Development could potentially help with a Municipal Planning Grant. The ACCD Village Centers Program, led by Richard Amore, could lend facilitation and support and has a funding directory. Contact at richard.amore@vermont.gov or 828-5229.
- The Westford Planning Commission and Planning Coordinator will be partners.
- USDA Rural Development and the Northern Borders Regional Commission could be grant sources if larger projects are developed over time.
- The Vermont Community Foundation could provide smaller grants to move key parts of the initiative forward. Contact Emilye Pelow Corbett at 388-3355 x230 or epelowcorbett@vermontcf.org.
- The Department of Public Service has a 'Broadband Ombudsman' staff person who helps communities frame and advance broadband efforts, and also has some grant funds for local broadband project implementation.



✓ Advance the Arts, Community Events, and Communications

Chairperson: **Julia Andrews, Eric Ford, and Tara Pereira**

Facilitator: **Rebecca Ellis**, *State Director*, Office of Congressman Peter Welch

Resource Team Members: **Michele Bailey**, *Program Director*, Vermont Arts Council

A task force could come together in support of existing community and arts events and to expand offerings to include concerts, recreational events, arts shows, comedy events, volunteer days, events for local teens, recreational events, and more. The group could collaborate with other community groups and organizations to support events and could create a template and improve local guidelines and ordinances to make it simple and accessible to pull off great events that bring people together. Additionally, the task force could work to promote and share events as well as recognize local crafters, artists, musicians, and others. At the same time, the group could be working to better communicate with each other and to stay more deeply connected to what is going on in town by developing a platform for community communications. The platform could include a website, a community calendar, and a newsletter or bulletin.

The Issue Today

Existing Communications/Events/Arts

- Town Newsletter
- Front Porch Forum
- Library Newsletter
- Town Website
- School events/calendar
- Monthly open mic coffee house
- Concerts on the common
- Concerts at the White Church
- Town Clerk's calendar
- Town email list

Task Force Goals

- Integrate community events and info in one place Coordinate people and groups
- Create opportunities for crafters and artists
- Develop audiences for artists and spaces
- Catalogue artists and spaces in Westford

Two Phases

- Internal – develop structure and a system
- External – marketing outside of Westford

Priority Action Steps:

1. Create a Fun Committee
 - a. Identify diverse stakeholders to be involved
 - b. Include people with communication skill sets
 - c. Include the school/youth
2. Create a website (separate from the Town)
 - a. Include a calendar of events separate from the Town website to share events and act more in a "tourism council" capacity
 - b. Identify a person to build the website and calendar
 - c. Write a policy for submitting events on the website
 - d. Use social media to share events and information
 - e. Develop a list/catalog of contacts for the website
3. Explore using the White Church for more events

- a. Events could include art exhibits, pop up events, and more
 - b. Help the Church as it develops its plan for the future
4. Identify funding sources and apply for grants
- a. Explore the idea of crowd-source funding
 - b. Vermont Arts Council
- c. Coordinate grant writing efforts
5. Use existing communication channels
- a. Front Porch Forum
 - b. Town Cryer Signs
 - c. School and Town Newsletters

Other Potential Action:

- Hold regular meetings of town groups to connect
- Use the commons as a “campus”
- Ask town to create a part-time paid person who can build website, market events, support public relations
- Ask for a line item in the town budget for PR
- Weekly email to solicit events
- Encourage more Wi-Fi in commons area

Resources

- The Vermont Arts Council could offer technical assistance and has grants available. To learn more contact Michele Bailey at m Bailey@vermontartscouncil.org or 828-3294
- Vermont Community Foundation may have grants to support events or programs that connect community. See their Spark Connecting Community grants here <https://www.vermontcf.org/NonprofitsGrants/AvailableGrants/SparkConnectingCommunity.aspx>
- There are great models out there for community calendars and website. Some examples include:
 - Island Pond <https://visitislandpond.com/events-and-festivals/>
 - Craftsbury <https://www.townofcraftsbury.com/craftsbury-ss-calendar>
 - Vernon <https://vernonvermont.org/> (see their e-newsletter in particular)
- Art Place America “Artist Leads” will match town investment
- In Our Backyard – crowd source funding
- AARP – Do It Yourself Kit for pop up events and spaces <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2016/pop-up-demonstration-tool-kit.html> (Also contact Kelly Stoddard Poor at kstoddardpoor@aarp.org or 951-1313)
- Town Budget

IV. Westford's Future Town Forum Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held with over 120 Westford residents and the VCRD Visiting Team on September 19th 2019

Village Revitalization and Economic Development

Visiting Team: Ben Doyle, Erica Campbell, Jacob Hemmerick (scribe), Jenna Koloski (facilitator), Regina Mahoney

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Our library.
- The Town Forest we recently purchased. There could be some economic growth once we do a forest management plan.
- We have a New England quaint common.
- Browns River going through the Village. It is scenic, but could be more scenic and could develop around it.
- Our schools.
- Covered Bridge
- Proximity to other big towns.
- Hiking Trails. Preserved lands here and across the road with three-season trails.
- People passing through can't avoid the common. It invites people to stop along the way.
- All roads lead to the common. It is a unified central place.
- The aesthetics of the common – the White Church is beautiful and structurally sound.
- The Ice rink in the winter and the common has open green space for gathering.
- The rural character that the town offers is an asset. Development is okay, but let's be reasonable. People are drawn to that rural character.
- Many historic buildings.
- The Common is a place where you have to slow down – maybe stop, and get a coffee.
- Red Brick Meeting House is very good for gatherings in the winter.
- There is a surprising amount of opportunity in the village. Lots and spaces that haven't been used by buildings.
- One thing that jumps out having grown up here is that there are a number of small home businesses and a great diversity of them. Architects, lawyers, winery, brewery, contractors. Both a lot and a diversity of them.
- Roads have been well-maintained recently and the quality has improved.
- I'd be surprised if there isn't an amazing skill and talent base that isn't widely known to the community. Human capacity.
- How the school is so accessible. Students are able to bike here. If there were more walkways, it would be safer.
- The green is very special because it is not being developed. There is a bandstand and ice rink. It's good that we haven't compressed a lot of things in there. It is a flexible and open to meet the needs of all.
- Gazebo on the common. Concerts out there are fun.
- We have a volunteer fire department. Very active and does a wonderful job. SAVED MY HOUSE!
- Post office is near the common.
- Everything is close together, so people can get there easier.
- Agriculture. We are down to one dairy farm. It is not as vibrant as it once was but there are some small farms and a lot of people raising animals.

What are the Challenges?

- Taxes are too high.
- I talk to developers who don't want to develop here because we don't have 3-phase, natural gas, water, or sewer. It is expensive to develop.
- Infrastructure challenges.
- I don't think many people have high speed internet. Few of us are on the cable line.
- A barrier to getting all the infrastructure are geographic constraints. Gas line goes through the town, but no one is being served by it. Near Westford/Milton border, buried. Don't think anyone is being serviced by it.
- We don't even have electricity everywhere in town.
- Big gaps in cell phone coverage. Some might like it, but some might not.
- Very hilly, if you're biking it's hard to do it uphill.
- 128 is very loud. Engine breaks, motorcycles that peel out of our corner. Being on the main road is a perk and a drawback.
- Speeding on the dirt roads. Constant Front Porch Forum discussion about it.
- Old Stage is very bad in the winter. Many cars bottom out.
- The hill when I'm coming down Old Stage Rd., visibility issues and stop signs. Cars going too fast and it makes me nervous.
- Sidewalks would be nice, so we're now always having to go around tight corners with cars going fast or speeding.
- We only have one labeled crosswalk. There are other places that we will eventually need one.
- Dirt roads are a wonderful places to walk, but many of us are isolated from them by high-speed roads. It's close, but the busy roads create a barrier.
- We're split by geography. We have our Rt. 15 community that's separated.

- No place to stop and buy the coffee yet.
- Lack of affordable housing. Very hard to find housing for families to move in. Families want to move here, but the prices are too expensive.
- Lack of a market. We used to have a market. If you ran out of bread or need to fill up gas for your mower, you can run down there. It's also an environmental thing to have to drive out of town and waste money.
- We have a store coming. Same spot? On the common? Not sure when.
- Our permit is in labor and industry. Submitted August 3, but have not responded yet. Waiting for permit. Said I was going to start without it. I said call me if you have a problem. No call yet.
- Our fairly recent town survey, indicated that people want to see economic development in the town center. Depends on what it is.
- We are very sparse town as far as density. There are a few neighborhoods that are densely populated. 25% of our town's population on three private roads. Might be at a turning point that have to depend on 3rd parties to ambulance or emergency vehicle access.
- Hospitals or emergency rooms are limited around here.
- Other healthcare providers? Essex rescue. Georgia or Fairfax is closest.
- Diversity is a challenge. People who see the appeal of Westford but can't afford it.
- We're losing a lot of long-term residents because taxes are so high and they can't stay.
- In regard to cell phone service, you can't get service in the Town Office, unless you're standing by the window.
- As rural as we are, people don't always respect the wildlife we do have. Continued feeding of birds and that brings the bears in. Not always good neighbors.
- In winter lots of cars block the road, and sometimes the school bus goes off the roads. They sometimes get really icy and there should be a way to fix that.
- School bus routes. Some are over an hour in some cases.
- No school bus service for middle school ... or high school Because of school choice. We now have bussing for both.
- No businesses on the common that draw people to Westford or places where businesses can share a space.
- I know there is one veterinarian in town and her practice is full. Community might benefit from a veterinarian.
- We always have to split resources. Not enough kids to make a full time. Buildings that need fixed up but not the budget to do everything.
- School teams are very small. Boys soccer team only has thirteen people on a good day. Not that much interest. School too small?
- School is not growing, very static. After-school program is non-existent, but now there is the Y.
- Communication is a challenge. Trying to get the word out to all the people. Not just those on FPF or who stop by the library. Ongoing challenge to have a source where everyone can get information on what is happening in town.
- I would like to see more public lands for people to recreation. Have to drive to Charlotte to go hiking.
- No real air-conditioning in the school.
- School population. VT had more kids in school pre-civil war than we do now. Areas of the state that see increasing, but mostly declination. People aren't staying here. Not unique to just Vermont but throughout New England.
- Millennials don't have anything to keep them.
- Built our house in 2013 and taxes have skyrocketed. We love this town, but as people have said, people aren't moving out. We need businesses to offset the taxes for all of us. Impacts to town and school.
- Librarian talked how the library is public restroom, which is shared with the town hall, and the leechfield is under the parking lot. We have a chicken and egg with the wastewater service to support businesses.
- Planning Commission has tried to make the zoning more predictable and clearer, but state processes have not necessarily become easier. Three applications have an easy time getting through the town, but it's taken longer than it should on the state side.
- Lacrosse fields, had to go down to the common because the fields are soaked. Better drainage or lawncare.
- 68% of the tax dollar goes to the school.

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- What can we do to address some of the challenges you've mentioned?
- You know how we have space out in the mountains, let's make trails out there.
- More focus on the arts. Town chorus. I'd love to sing. Artist group. No arts group in town. Attempt to start one, but nothing got off the ground. Needs some leadership to make it town.
- Assets of cottage industries and home businesses. Would be nice to have a link on the town website of all these businesses.
- Communication. If we had one community calendar we could access and see what's going on, that would be so helpful. Also an opportunity to link up to the businesses.
- Really come up with some focused strategies to attract business, and get more commerce and balance the tax rate. Is there an economic development committee? No.
- When I moved here 8 years ago from Richmond. They had on the green pizza, music, and beers. We think that would wonderful to have in Westford, and have a place for our young people to work besides out of town options. Places where teenagers can find job in the summer.
- Like to tag on to economic development. To those of you who are afraid, I want people who will contribute to the property taxes. On my road, there are tenfold the number of houses on the road impacting public services. We need businesses that add to the tax base, so we can afford to stay here.
- I live next to Adams Turkey Farm, I could ask if you want to put a link to his website.

- While we think about economic development, we have to take into consideration where these businesses are going to be. We love the rural aspect of town. Economic development should consider where these businesses can be. General store, gas station, and coffee shop would benefit the green. Thoughtful zoning.
- Just merged our schools. We're losing our people. We're talking about increased demand on our services. What if we merged our Town with Essex to create more efficiencies? I question if businesses can be viable on the green. There should be a study to say what it would take to support a business before changing businesses. An economic study and strategic plan would be a good first step.
- We need to highlight our positives and be our own best advocates. How many people are driving around looking for a covered bridge, or hike, or picnic on a sandy river? There all there, but people don't know about it. We need better signage. Do the Westford loop. We need some businesses to capture revenue from that traffic.
- In terms of attracting businesses. How many people know that the Town Center has an Act 250 exemption? How many people know that they would be available for a 50% tax credit? How many people know that development is exempt from the land gains tax? Assets. Walmart isn't going to develop in Westford.
- Public spaces. Parks and campgrounds would draw more people in to go to concerns and Lake Champlain.
- What is an appropriate business for revitalizing the core? The White Church is an asset when it's used and a liability when it's empty. How can we get four professionals to fill the upstairs? United Church of Westford doesn't pay taxes, how could that transition to a property that does pay taxes. Church is now vacant all but four hours a week.
- What if we were to use the White Church as concerts for pay? That could draw people from other towns. Acoustics of that facility is an incredible asset.
- I love bicycling or walking on 128 or Osgood Hill. Both are dangerous, even with the bike shoulder on 128. Maybe there are ways to connect right of ways and offer our lands? Stowe does an amazing job with its bike paths. People love to bicycle and Westford is gorgeous.
- Biking and recreation, besides the arts, recreation is what will do it. The broomball tourney was one of Kevin's businesses first. Develop your recreational facilities first and the businesses will come. If you are familiar with E. Burke, they've brought in substantial income. It's an excellent example of what recreation can do for a community. If you want visitors to come here, recreation is a way to do it. People come to Vermont for recreation, not gas stations.
- A better website for our Town that is less business and more tourist-oriented.
- If we could make all these things happen, we could put it on some sort of interactive kiosk on some public buildings.
- I know some other counties have development corporations. I think Chittenden has one, but I don't know if they represent Westford in that group. Would be good if they represented Westford.
- Equestrian revenue is an opportunity as farms close down. Huge industry in terms of money.
- Affordable housing, and I'm not talking about 10 story high rise. Housing people can afford can bring more kids to the school.
- My mom has a letter from his first term on the Selectboard. Took 15 years to get a meeting with DHCD for a variety of reasons. Town recently did its first feasibility study, which located suitable soils on the Jackson Farm – which is quite far from the center. Although the disposal field isn't expensive the pipes are. Between 2005 and 2014 the Planning Commission and Selectboard pursued municipal planning grants to locate something closer, with no luck: high water tables, no soils. The Town has since purchased the Jackson Farm and the easement allows the field closest to the common to be used for a leech field. Now we're looking at how to break out the costs in a way that would be fair and encourage businesses.
- We can't have economic development without wastewater capacity. It also would allow affordable housing. Wastewater is a big part of it.
- Everyone comes out of the hills that isn't in the town center, and don't want to pay for it – but they want the economic development and businesses. We have to pony up with we want development in the town center. We need community support.
- Are there other parts of Westford to support development? The only other location is Plains Rd. which allows more development than other areas.
- Towns with similar joint interest to coordinate. EC Fiber is an example of Towns that came together after realizing that they'll never be served by Comcast. How often do we talk to Jericho and Underhill to solve these problems for all of us?
- I'd like to see all-inclusive recreation, including mechanical recreational uses.
- A good advertising spot is where Old Stage meets up with Cold Hollow. Lots of signs at that spots. Welcome to Westford.
- The State is starting to pass laws about composting. We're all going to have to be composting. Businesses are going to have to find places for compost materials. Other communities are getting anaerobic digesters to produce renewable natural gas. Vermont gas is helping to put the pipeline in for some of these. We have land mass and connectivity that could feed a compost facility in Westford. Trucks with food waste driving through Westford to get to Coventry.
- Wondering about the wastewater issue. Composting toilets. Wondering why they're not done more. Has anyone ever talked about this as a solution to support some of the changes we want to see?
- What are the types of things that can happen without wastewater? Burke is an example. Bike tours is one of those things, captive market for something like a store. Clives toilets are challenge because you still need to treat the gray water, but they can be a really good tool to get an extra table in a store.
- I used to have a Clives toilet. What are the state regs? They've adapted to allow more Clives, but it's still case-by-case and environmental engineers have different ideas as to what would be needed. Deep into the world of Clives.

- To add onto more hiking trails. There are some abandoned quarries in Westford where there could be trails. They're not all on public land. Would be great if people could open them up.
- Most of the people that go to Westford, they either work or do something in the Burlington area. The pull of Burlington is strong, and people have challenges getting from point A to point B in Westford. At all the intersections with dirt roads, like Rollin Irish and ?, it's not always safe there. That feeling of unsafe translates into I'm not going to Westford for business. Make the intersections safer by paving them.
- I would like to see a co-housing community that is affordable and senior friendly, near the school, so there are volunteer opportunities that are accessible to transportation. As people age and don't want to maintain homes, this would offer a place to move that they could afford. But it would also be great to have young families so it could be intergenerational.
- Would be nice to attract an Inn or a B&B in town when you have out of town family.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- If you've seen one rural town, you've seen one rural town. Each town is unique. I encourage you folks to have a conversation about what economic development really looks like in this community. You need to have an economic development group that's thinking about that and looking at that. When you're thinking about economic development, you're also thinking about infrastructure. The best thing you can do is supporting the businesses you already have, and grow that sector. Leverage the things that you love about this town.
- Great ideas. Lots of work with Melissa about the Town Forest in Milton. All kinds of transportation resources to bring to bear. RPC has been and will continue to be a key partner.
- Great youth voices. Burlington people want to get out. Draw them out here. Look forward to seeing where you focus your energy.

Gathering Spaces, Communication, and Events

Visiting Team: Michele Bailey, Paul Costello (facilitator), Noah Gilbert-Fuller (scribe), John Killacky, Jenna Lapachinski, Misty Sinsigalli

What are the Assets in this Area?

- Front Porch Forum is a useful tool. 90% of the community is on Front Porch Forum
- The Library, White church on the common, School gym, public property around school including soccer fields
- Trails are underused, undeveloped land – big opportunity. Bike paths to connect towns, communities
- Red Brick Meeting House
- Fourth of July on the Green
- Common is a priceless place – hosts many events (ice skating, Christmas tree lighting)
- Duck Race during Fourth of July
- Town-wide football game
- Coffee house at red brick
- Music series at white church in winter - "eclectic". There's a lot of music that happens in Westford. Monthly concerts, going for 10 yrs
- Town Forest – used and appreciated
- Turkey Trot hosts for Westford community support group incl. food shelf, etc.
- Food shelf once a month
- School programs for grades connect children to community efforts
- Westford Robotics team is doing community development projects
- The schools – public and private – provide meeting spaces and event hosting
- Monthly town newsletter, town website, people communicate
- "Not a lot to do for older kids" but plenty for younger
- Dirt roads considered cause of the lack of traffic and use for recreation
- Wildlife, trees, nature important to people
- Town meetings valuable, but phased out due to
- Proximity to the rest of Chittenden county, like an oasis in it
- The ethos of people in Westford, active, outdoorsy
- Could have a co-working office space for folks who need it at town hall, library
- "Best kept secret of Chittenden County"
- Get the kids to help design a new playground space
- River is an underused and underdeveloped asset, no trails, but can be used
- Develop a doctor's office in case of emergency
- Town employees work really hard
- The wooden middle finger

What are the Challenges?

- Disjointed feeling from people who leave for school, even out to Essex, and a lot of folks don't see each other face to face, to get more event attendance
- Town is big enough where groups form that can be separated, bubbles within the community
- Due to a lot of outward movement for work?
- Reach out to neighboring communities to get folks to come to Westford more, consider Westford
- Could totally pull in folks for events, but hard to know about even if you live across town
- Hard to get weight behind movements (money mostly, communication included)
- Need new faces to get involved, because it's usually the same faces. Not enough people.
- Connectivity is a huge problem. Remote WiFi, Cellular. Even spaces with WiFi aren't great.
- Difficult with infrastructure to get connected
- A late twenties or teenager would have difficulty fitting in, finding a place to be, things to do
- The bubbles do great things but they don't connect to work together. Need better connections with the different groups
- Need a better playground for the common so the kids can enjoy events too
- No real public spaces. When stopping by, not much to do, not everything is open all the time
- Connect younger folks with older folks, create opportunities for interactions to bridge generations
- Roads can be a real challenge, especially for people's cars
- Accessibility, now and in the future
- Getting loaded with things to do when you volunteer, may be overwhelming especially if you work full time
- Public recreation areas can cause conflicts with private property
- Town employees work short hours, can be hard to communicate, and costs to improve would be hard

Opportunities: What Should Be Done?

- Pull in folks from outside the community – surrounding towns, activity groups
- Trails connect places in the town, separate foot traffic and car traffic
- Socialization of people, using events to bring people together. "If you build it, they come – we just don't build it"
- Awful lot of land that can be improved to bring folks in for recreation, while also improving folk's lives in the community
- It's a commuter town. Make the common a place for folks to stop along the way and stay.
- Keep the public/community facilities open longer. Can better serve community and also public
- Town-level social media accts. Outside Front-porch forum, to pull folks outside of town and at the fringes – a moderated, town-wide Facebook or twitter
- Community Calendar, google calendar communication and outreach, postings
- "Volunteer day" for groups to meet, trade ideas
- Resource list for folks who are new to town, need-to-know – make it easy to find, reduce the challenge of finding the things you need/want, online list to contact. Good, trackable researchable resource collection. Don't pick one place to put everything
- Make a place to bring new groups in and keep them happy, focusing on people over 11 and before 30
- Comedy festival, diversify acts and provide amenities during those big events
- Teens in Westford will go to Essex often because they have friends there. Bring them all here too with events
- White church as a retreat and arts space. Varied arts space
- Diversify events space, improve amenities and establish a community (CBD festival, Westford got talent, food events) Could occur with collaboration between the different meeting space groups (esp. around the commons, could link the groups)
- A funded position to collaborate and develop these ideas consistently. Could be along the budget line of library, etc. Establish a committee for planning events
- Real physical board to post things where people gather
- Community event planning checklist, ordinance, instruction list so people can start events easier. don't need to recreate the wheel every time – set up list of folks who know how to get things set up
- Establishing a town vision to put forward and follow. Toward good health – mental, physical, social health
- Need something to clearly identify the town so people get what community they're in as they go through
- Neighborhoods working toward one nucleus. Representatives from different neighborhoods who do their events, and can plan with the greater community. Like how this event was spread about.
- High school groups come here to perform, play their games, run their races and know it as a place to go
- UVM outing rep. can't have access to resources in the community, hard to find outdoor equipment to use for recreation (could be a business, place to rent) need an outdoor resource for maps, things to do and stuff to get before you go.
- If you don't have kids, it can really be hard to meet people, and the zoning really puts people apart physically. Hard to get to know your neighbor, hard to develop. Need to be able to condense a little, for the areas you want to have it.
- Really push to get the common really established, and tackle the underlying issues like develop and the sewage treatment things that need solving. Can't move forward with the plans when you're limited by that challenge.
- Help train and educate folks who are coming in so they can develop skills to care for their land and live out here. There are really knowledgeable people in town who can serve

- newcomers in the community and get folks to know each other and work together through sharing skills
- Campground using the great outdoor spaces, use the green for a camping event

- Put a A-frame on Route 15, where people go by and will see
- Use the river for recreation (boating), add to what is there.

Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Has done retreats in the past, and sees this community as ahead of the game when they talk about it. Likes to see how people are sharing their events together, and sees it as helping build off of each other. Building an audience.
- Impressed by the number, diversity of activities, impressed by the variety of voices in the room. Coordination, and building on a common theme. Working with the collaborative energy and vision. Are there business opportunities around the things that are happening here? Seems to be with what people were suggesting.
- So many wonderful things. Collaboration is very important to share the work. The three meeting houses give great opportunities to get partners and get things done. Providing volunteer opportunities, designing them to pick up different people's lifestyles. Great path.
- The process takes different shapes in different places. But the challenges present different opportunities. The work to overcome issues alone brings people together, and the result draws in a lot of people even from outside of the town in other places. It's not rocket science. The act of bringing these things together forms a sense of cohesion, and makes the place really attractive not only for people who are here but people who are to come. The assets here are incredible. There are places yet to be used. When you look at communities, you assess whether they're going up, plateauing, or going down. You have to see the issues and the potential. You can build a list of things to move forward and accomplish more than you would if you left it to chance. All about putting yourself on the line.

Additional Action Ideas

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

- Community materials sharing space – tools, kayaks, canoes, large event furniture, how to books, camping equipment, bikes, etc.
- Park and ride/carpool network
- Network of producers/service providers – connect, trouble shoot open houses
- Ice Rink - please keep that only fun winter activities spot in Westford. Drainage can be fixed or perhaps provide a new location/set up. There is a new development off plains rd with 12 new houses.
- My concern is roads. Cambridge Rd was in extremely poor condition last spring. What will be done to support increasing usage of Cambridge Rd?
- Increased affordable housing to bring young people into Westford
- Make the process easier or allow more development of reasonably priced family neighborhoods. Westford needs to offer more than just "a rural Character". It's not sustainable for our taxes, school or families.
- Leave as is, the quality of life goes down for some as the taxes to support the ideas go up.
- I believe it's important to understand the traffic flow through our town. We currently have a high traffic problem on Woods Hollow Road. Woods Hollow Road has become a bypass to Rt 128. Apparently, there is significant interest in promoting business development in the town center; its success will likely depend on 128 traffic flow through the town center. I would like to suggest that the town arrange for a traffic count near Cobbs Corner (the intersection of Rt 128 and Woods Hollow Road) during the hours of 6:30AM-8AM and again 3:30PM-6:30PM weekdays.
- The Town Center is Perfect as is, no changes needed or desired.
- I hope that the health, safety, and sanity of all the residents who live in the village are being remembered as part of this discussion to reroute traffic to 128. Many of our homes in the village are built very close to 128 due to how historic they are and there are already issues with noise invasion in our homes at current traffic levels. Every day, I hear brakes screeching around the sharp turn at the Common and every day and night there are air brakes being deployed. Speeding and rapid acceleration are constant issues in this stretch, to the point my toddler is afraid of the loud noises both in our yard, and in our home. We have had to call police multiple times this year for noise and speed complaints on 128. In addition, our family has had health negatively impacted do to noise stress living on 128, and we have to close our windows on nice days due to exhaust fumes coming into our house during busy traffic times. Anyone who has attended a concert in the common or at RBMH knows the truth of the noise in the Common, often to the point of not being able to carry on a conversation outdoor. Please know that noise and speeding is every day and every night for the village residents living along 128, and that is at current traffic levels. Please consider us too when we talk about changing traffic patterns that will worsen current problems.
- We moved to Westford to get away from the hectic South Burlington suburbs. Stop the sprawl and the traffic and noise that come with it. If I wanted that I would have stayed in South Burlington. Keep Westford rural.

- In the past, Church was the gathering place where different generations and neighborhood communities would interact every week. Because the church is no longer the center of town life, there is no weekly gathering to pull everyone together. We are missing this communal time for young kids to interact with elder community members, for the 20 something to ask the 40 something to borrow their rototiller, or for a single Mom to find a teenage babysitter in town. We have 2 empty churches that we are trying to fill with entertainment, arts, and shared work spaces. And while I am all for filling these spaces with these things, I do not think that would achieve a goal of bringing our community closer across ages and neighborhoods. Some opportunities to cultivate intergenerational interactions, might include a weekly/

monthly gathering/brunch/dinner? With speakers, games, or activities? Sing along? I no longer attend church but I very much miss the experience of singing with a group of people. Beatles sing along night?? In addition, partnering older groups with younger groups to mentor and work together on town projects, buildings, trails. Trail grooming volunteer Dale Rodgers/others could work with the girls scout troop, or Boy Scout troop (Essex based troop but with a Westford Dad leader), to train them in how to care for the trails. The red brick and or white church could partner with the 4H group to work on historical preservation, repairs, maintenance, booking/ advertising. The commons committee could work with the library story time kids or a middle school class to plant/care for flower plots/planters. We must be purposeful in bringing people of all ages together!



Members of the community and the Visiting Team gathered for a potluck dinner on Community Visit Day.

V. Westford's Future Participants

Ira Allen	Bree Drapa	Martha Heath	Erin Medick	Dale Rodgers
Mel Allen	Mark Drapa	Michael Hechmer	Art Menut	Peggy Rodgers
John Andersen	Max Drapa	Patricia Hechmer	Ava Menut	Francois Ross
Lynn Andersen	Ada Dunkley	Brooke Henry	Beth Menut	Vicky Ross
Julia Andrews	Isabel Dunkley	Amber Holler	Erin Menut	Andre Roy
Heather Armata	Tom Dunkley	Finn Holler	Maria Moore	Becky Roy
Rebecca Baczewski	William Dunkley	Braeden Hughes	Tri Nguyen	Susan Schmidt
Dave Baczewsko	Mason Eakman	Janet Jaffe	Maura O'Brien	Amanda Spector
Robert Bancroft	Elsa Fennelly	Ethan Jeans	Jane O'Neil	Jenn Stockwell
Greg Barrows	Joe Forbes	Peter Jenkins	Tom Orfeo	Kevin Stockwell
Greg Bemis	Karen Forbes	Louise Jensen	Leafye Pante	Mary Stockwell
Martha Bennett	Eric Ford	Seth Jensen	Marcus Pante	Daniel Strobridge
Doris Bittruf	Sheila Franz	Kaija Johnson	Bob Parker	Kam Symula
Suzanne Blanchard	Andy Fulton	Lori Johnson	Rachael Parker	Dan Treadway
Koi Boynton	Gordon Gebauer	Francis Kazak	Beth Peloquin	Dan Tuure
Lynn Bursell	Ray Geddeus	Kristen Keating	Mark Peloquin	Mary Tuure
Izzy Cady	Janet Golden	George Lamphere	Tara Pereira	Kirsten Tyler
Jake Cady	Kari Greenbaum	Beth Lane	Sarah Pinto	Kelly White
Jennifer Caldwell-	Kim Guidry	Thomas Lane	Robert Pittala	Rob White
Jeans	Pat Haller	Andrea Letourney	Devin Porter	Ryder White
Bill Cleary	Callie Hamdy	Anne Maloney	Kathleen Porter	Shelly White
Cindy Cross	Marge Hamrell	Melissa Manka	Jess Pouliot	Carol Winfield
Rebecca DaVanon	Marjorie Hamrell	Beth Manut	Finnian Reilly	Bernhard Wunder
John Doane	Deb Harris	Marge McIntosh	John Reilly	Olga
Wendy Doane	Isiah Harris	Chuck Medick	Marijke Reilly	
John Doty	Debra Hazel	Elliot Medick	Mary Reilly	



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