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# VERNON VILLAGE CENTER MASTER PLAN

FINAL REPORT - JANUARY 2019

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# Acknowledgements

This master plan is a result of a collaboration of the following groups:

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# Table of Contents

Part I: Establishing the Foundation.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	4
CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND.....	5
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY.....	12
Part II: What Will Shape the Future.....	17
KEY CHALLENGES.....	17
KEY OPPORTUNITIES.....	19
Part III: A Vision Explored.....	20
CORE PLANNING AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES.....	20
EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES.....	23
A WORKING VISION.....	26
Part IV: A Framework for the Future.....	28
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	28
TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORT.....	32

## Appendices

- APPENDIX A** VERNON - INITIAL MARKET RESEARCH
- APPENDIX B** MARKET RESEARCH FINDINGS
- APPENDIX C** FISCAL IMPACTS - VERNON VILLAGE CENTER MASTER PLAN
- APPENDIX D** DEVELOPER RFP OUTLINE
- APPENDIX E** STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEW SUMMARY
- APPENDIX F** COMMUNITY VISION EVENT PRESENTATION
- APPENDIX G** COMMUNITY VISION EVENT BOARDS AND COMMENTS
- APPENDIX H** VERNON COMMUNITY VISION SURVEY RESULTS
- APPENDIX I** CONCEPT PLAN PRESENTATION



# Part I: Establishing the Foundation

## Introduction

The Town of Vernon has faced many changes in the past few years. As a smaller, rural community located at the southeastern corner of Vermont, Vernon experiences the issues and challenges that many rural communities have: an aging population, the evolving agricultural sector, and a lack of affordable housing. It also has the added challenge of the closure of the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant, which from 1968 to 2014, when it ceased operations was the largest single employer in town, employing 78 residents). Since 2014, the town has focused primarily on managing its fiscal situation but has kept moving forward with planning for its future.

These challenges are profound, but despite them, the Vernon community has focused on planning for renewal and resiliency. As expressed in the recently adopted Town Plan and as evidenced by the formation of the Friends of Vernon Center, the community is seeking to position itself for changes while remaining mindful of the fiscal realities that the town faces.

As a part of its long-range planning, the Town of Vernon sought and ultimately was awarded a Municipal Planning Grant to help fund the development of this plan.

The work for this project was undertaken with four primary goals in mind:

- Create a welcoming public process to broaden the input on how the Village Center might evolve
- Understand the demographic, land use, economic and fiscal realities of the town
- Explore a range of options for a vision of a future Village Center that incorporates both public input and these fiscal/economic realities
- Identify potential initiatives that can advance the vision and support future decision-making and act as guidance to long-range investments

The study began in earnest in July 2018 and the final plan was presented in January 2019. This report summarizes the efforts completed in the development of this plan.



# Context and Background

Vernon's Village Center occupies about 55 acres of land within the center of town. These acres are a mix of primary residential uses (single-family, detached), civic uses (town offices, elementary school) and agricultural uses.

The Vernon Village Center Master Plan is the outgrowth of community conversations and initiatives. In 2016, during a Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD)-led community visit, Vernon residents expressed strong interest in the development of a village center. Although the town had never had a traditional village center, residents saw a center as key to enhancing the social and economic life of the town. In 2017, a non-profit, Friends of Vernon Center, was formed to pursue a village center. The Friends partnered with the town to receive an official Vermont Village Center designation in 2017 for the area between and surrounding the Town Office Building and the Elementary School. The Town and Friends partnered again in 2018 to receive a Vermont Municipal Planning Grant. That grant, along with funds from the Town and Friends of Vernon Center, funded the development of this Master Plan.

## PAST PLANNING EFFORTS

To help inform the development of a conceptual master plan for Vernon Village Center, this project reviewed several important foundational documents.

These inputs are summarized below.

### 2018 Town Plan

The most recently adopted Town Plan for Vernon reflects upon many of the challenges the community faces. It directly addresses the need for resilience in light of the Vermont Yankee closure and includes a chapter devoted solely to how the Town should position itself. Many of the goals and objectives within this chapter stress the desire of the Town to gain access to and leverage the assets of the former power plant to enliven local economic activity. While the plant and its assets are not within the designated village center boundary, the capacity of the property to support new businesses and/or provide access to established water and sewer systems could support future development within the Village Center.

The Town Plan also makes it clear that the future intention for the Village Center (and lands beyond) are for a more diverse mix of uses: residential, commercial and institutional. Such uses would need to be balanced with the continued desire to be an agricultural community. Another hallmark of the Town Plan is a diverse array of complementary uses.

### 2016 Community Visit

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) facilitated a Community Visit process in Vernon in 2016. As part of this effort, VCRD brought together an assortment of professionals (planners, designers, engineers) and the broader public. Through a community visit and surveying work, the effort resulted in an Action Plan document that articulated basic components of a vision, presented a series



of “priorities” for the town, and explored specific initiatives to advance the vision. While this effort addressed many town-wide issues (access to broadband, enhancing the local economy, developing community solar, etc.), it did provide specific guidance towards “enhancing” the Village Center:

- Create a welcoming arrival to the Village Center through signage and exploration and communication of the town’s identity.
- Explore and take full advantage of the Governor Hunt House – make it a hub of activity in the Village Center and promoting its historic significance.
- Improve the connectivity within the Village Center, including access for recreation
- Enhance the social and gathering spaces within the Village Center by promoting events, leveraging community assets, and adding a design focus to create a more identifiable space.
- Encourage local task force members to visit other communities who have gone through similar transitions and learn from those experiences.

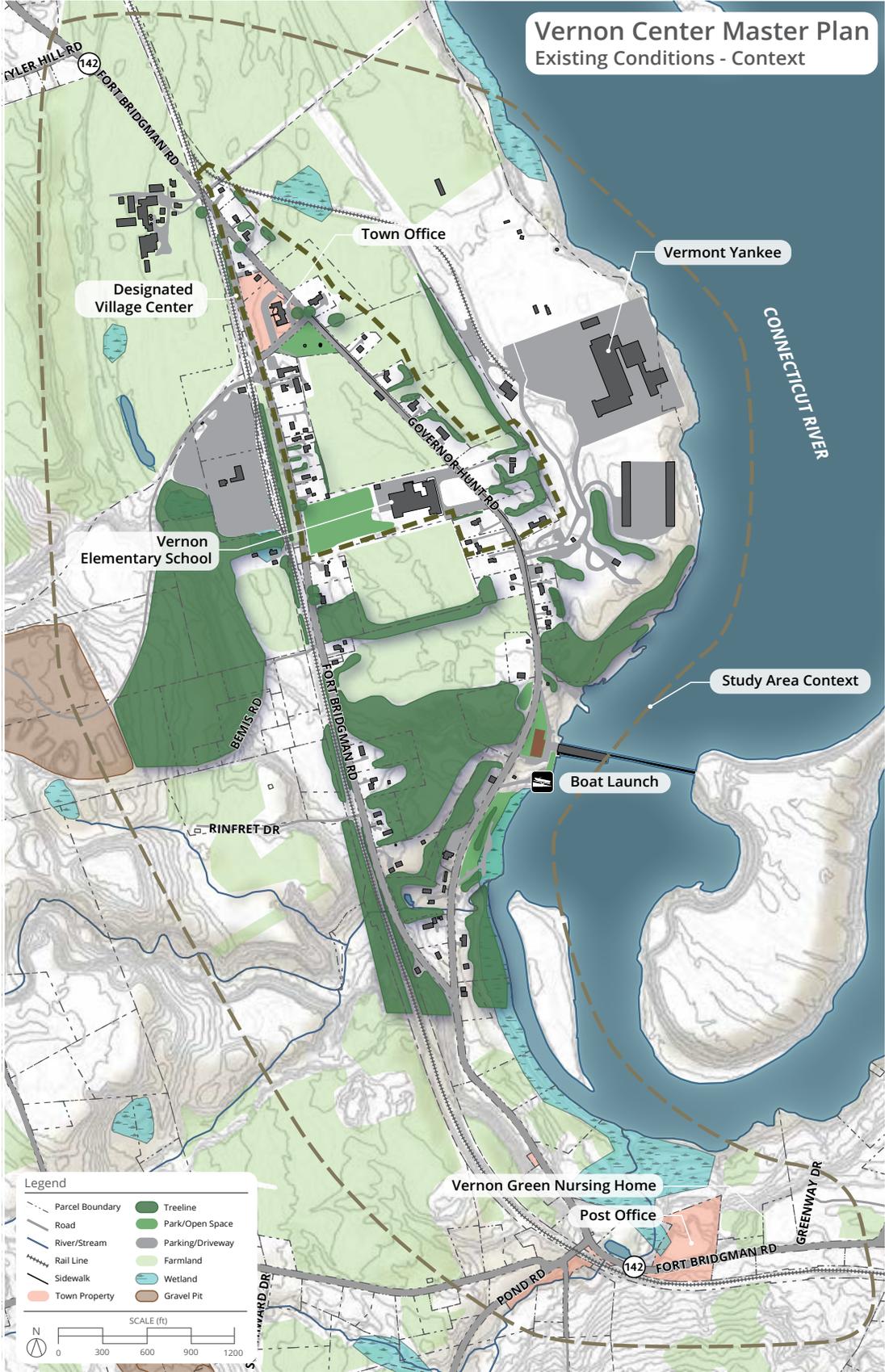
Much of this vision and the resulting initiatives are relevant to this planning process as well.



# EXISTING CONDITIONS - VILLAGE CENTER



**EXISTING CONDITIONS - CONTEXT**



## BASELINE MARKET AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS: TAKEWAYS AND POTENTIAL USES

As a part of this process, the consultant team mined available local and regional economic and market data to better understand the underlying realities shaping the future potential for the Village Center (see Appendix A & B). This effort started with a general assessment of Vernon’s economic base, including the level of economic activity. Key takeaways from this work include:

- Vernon is a small town and is not projected to grow (in terms of population) in the near future – the population is 2,187 persons and is projected to remain at that level for the next five years.
- Like most northeastern markets, the major demographic dynamic at work in Vernon is the aging of the baby boomers into upper age brackets and retirement.
- Vernon’s housing stock grew by 15+ percent between 2000 and 2018; however, minimal increase has occurred since 2010.
- Overall, the number of households moving out of Windham County exceeds the number of households moving in.
- Interest in residential properties has increased in Vernon; residential sales activity in 2017 was at 125% of the 2012 levels.
- There are approximately 60 active businesses in the town employing 450 workers; these enterprises are spread out throughout the town. Most of these businesses are small and many are home occupations.
- Brattleboro (14%), Vernon (11%) and Guilford (10%) are the highest proportion of persons who work in Vernon. (Statistics based on the 2015 ‘On the Map’ data - U.S. Census Bureau).
- Among employed Vernon residents, Brattleboro is the most significant work destination with 44% of all Vernon working residents working in Brattleboro. Only 8% of Vernon’s employed residents work in Vernon.
- Retail activity in Vernon is minimal; while per capita gross retail sales statewide are \$9,618, the figure in Vernon is only \$497. Three primary factors combine to reduce Vernon’s viability as a retail community: 1) adjacent Brattleboro is a regional center with a broad range of retail activity - the competition from this community overwhelms Vernon; 2) The regional/local highway system does not result in significant traffic volumes in Vernon; and 3) Retail is in decline nationwide due to the growing presence of internet sales.
- Vernon’s potential market reach extends within approximately a 16-minute drive time from the village center; this area has a population of approximately 12,400 persons.

After establishing this foundation and, based on input from the public process, the economic analysis next considered both existing and a range of potential uses for the village center, with a focus on residential uses, public uses, commercial and service uses, and recreation.

		2000	2010	2017
<b>Vernon</b>	Labor Force	1,187	1,304	1,215
	Employment	1,152	1,233	1,178
	Unemploy. Rate	2.9%	5.4%	3.0%
<b>Windham Cty,</b>	Labor Force	24,074	25,435	22,954
	Employment	23,394	23,873	22,247
	Unemploy. Rate	2.8%	6.1%	3.1%



## Residential

Any successful village incorporates residential components. In addition to supplying homes for community residents, residential use creates 'people activity' and supplies a built-in market for village commercial or service enterprises. Key observations regarding the residential market include:

- Household age by income level is the best indicator of housing demand - these combined factors relate to explain household decision making and residential preferences.
- The total number of households in the market area isn't likely to change in the next few years; however, a substantial number of households will move into 65+ years bracket and will be seeking a change in housing, typically to smaller units.
- Creation of new housing options for Vernon's seniors would allow them to remain in the community and provide an essential residential component of the village center.
- New residential uses should address the market – a focus on smaller cottage homes, senior apartments and/or moderately-scaled residential properties are best aligned with the existing and likely residential market in Vernon.

## Public Uses

Supporting public gathering is a vital function of a village center, both providing a gathering point for civic activities and generating 'people activity.' Key takeaways include:

- Improve walking within the Village Center – linking important civic spaces
- Create a visible venue for activities and meetings that is flexible for varying uses and seasons
- Promote the adaptive reuse of the Governor Hunt House and/or Grange building – for uses that promote community activities such as meetings, workspaces, public gatherings, and more.
- Assess the viability of holding a farmers'/craft market; perhaps as a more locals-oriented adjunct to Brattleboro's farmers' markets.
- Establish a shared working space – a place where community members may seek flexible office space to offer a workspace and opportunity to meet with other local business owners. This might include a space for craftspeople.

## Commercial Services

Because there are heavy constraints on retail potential in Vernon, commercial activities should be limited in scope and focused on local needs. Recognizing this, key takeaways include:

- Local Café – A stand-alone local for-profit café is probably not sustainable at present. However, a small café could serve as an adjunct to a community store or other service enterprise.
- Post Office – A post office typically functions as an important hub in many smaller communities. If the Post Office could be relocated to within the Village Center or better connected to it (via walking paths, etc.) it might act as more of a hub. An existing long-term lease within the current space likely makes achieving relocation a challenge, but improving its connection to the Village Center is an opportunity.
- Community Store – Vernon does not have sufficient market power to support a second community store, but enhancing the connection between the Village Center and the existing Cold Brook Store or working over time to relocate the store to a more central location might be beneficial.



- Events – Vernon can take advantage of renewed sense of gathering in the Village Center to introduce commercial activities (food trucks, farmers’ markets, craft fairs) and dovetail with local and/or regional tourism opportunities.

## Recreation

Vernon’s recreational assets are spread throughout the town and have varying degrees of visibility/accessibility to visitors and residents. Given this, key takeaways include:

- Existing recreation assets serve the community – the existing recreation center, trail and town forest resources are excellent and should continue to provide the bulk of the community’s recreation needs and continue to invest in these facilities.
- Village Center recreation hub – Work to expand the connection of the Village Center to existing recreational assets: on-road biking, trails, and portages.
- Tap into regional recreation - take advantage of the existing biking and water activity on the periphery of the Village Center by adding a kiosk or another information source showing hiking trails, river access points, natural areas, etc. This facility could also offer a stopping point for bikers with water and bike repair tools.
- Pay close attention to planning for the Vermont Yankee property, this site could present future recreational opportunities.

These topic areas are covered in more detail in Appendices A and B.



# Public Engagement Summary

This planning process sought specific input from key stakeholders and the public at large through direct outreach efforts.

## STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

At the start of the project (July 2018), the consultant team helped facilitate a series of stakeholder interviews. Through the efforts of the Planning Commission and the Friends of Vernon Center, a list of key stakeholders (long-time residents, business owners, town officials, etc.) was developed and each sat down for a 20-40 minute interview. Ultimately, 26 individuals were interviewed.

The set of questions each stakeholder was asked reflected several important topics related to community identity, current needs and hopes, the relationship between the Village Center and the town and the right features in a Vernon Village Center. Each topic area is briefly summarized below. For a summary of all question responses, see Appendix E.

### Topic One: Community Identity

Through a series of questions related to the community's identity and attitude, several important thematic elements emerged. Vernon has an abundance of small-town pride, in part earned through the hard work and effort of its residents, but also because it has demonstrated a willingness to take a different path. Many in the community, particularly those with longer tenures, noted that the approval of the VT Yankee Plant in Vernon in 1968 was markedly different than the reaction of the neighboring towns and reflective of a more conservative streak that persists. While political and social attributes have and continue to fuel some rigorous community debate over policies and priorities, many of the stakeholders highlighted that the Town's history (railroad to hydropower) and civic assets (school, recreation center) provide a key point of unity. The independent spirit of the community, its fiscal prudence, and commitment to each other were also key components of its identity.

### Topic Two: Community Needs and Hopes

Not surprisingly, many of the stakeholders felt a renewed and more vibrant village center would be an important improvement to help create a "heart" for the Town. Promoting a more diverse economy by leveraging community assets (history, access to river, former Vermont Yankee lands, proximity to bike routes) can provide a basis for the future.

### Topic Three: The Village Center and the Town

The relationship between the Town and the Village Center was asked in a few questions. At present, most of the stakeholders felt that the village does not act as a gathering place, although the elementary school shines as a positive example of community space. Many recognized that the facilities of the community are spread out – the post office is not in the village center and the recreation center and town forest are some distance apart, etc. Many also expressed hope that a village center might attract visitors, but that should not be the sole focus; it should be a place for those who live in Vernon first and foremost. Using the village center to "show off" important aspects of Vernon (its history, agricultural heritage and community creativity) was an idea expressed by many participants.

### Topic Four: Vernon Village Center Imagined

Questions related to what a future village center in Vernon might look like or include solicited a variety of responses. No clear perspective on whether housing should be a priority was heard,



although some felt more diverse housing options, and/or a mix of residential and non-residential uses would be beneficial. Concerns about “low-income” housing were common in the discussions. Many participants felt that a focus on gathering space is important. Some cited the classic “general store” that acts as a community hub and how Vernon has lacked that.

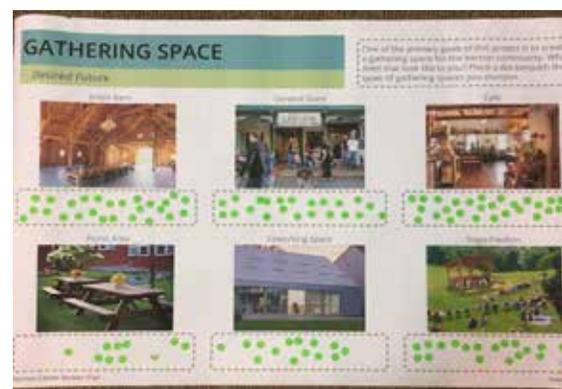
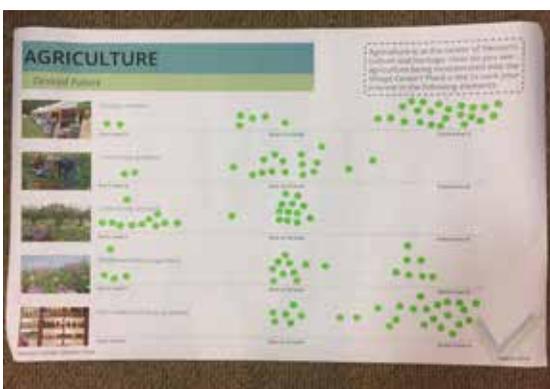
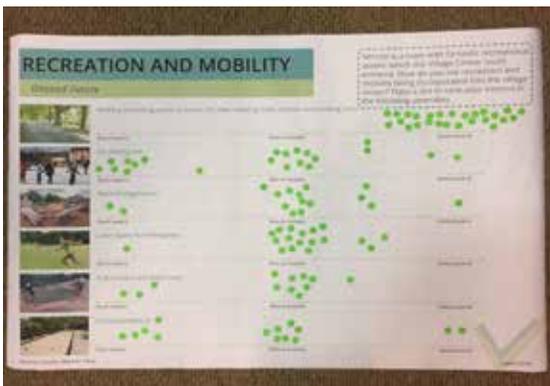
## COMMUNITY VISION EVENT

On August 20th, approximately 64 residents attended an open house style event held to gain input from the public on a range of issues that would inform the village planning process. A preliminary presentation by the consultant team gave an overview of the following:

- Project Background and Existing Conditions
- Project Goals
- Community and Market Profile
- Opportunities and Challenges



The presentation is available as Appendix F. Group discussion followed the presentation and then participants were asked to note their preferences for a range of options organized under four broad themes: Recreation, Agriculture, Neighborhood, and Gathering Spaces. Participants placed sticker dots on the boards to share their preferences, and they had the option of recording written comments on a board or in a comments box. Comments and feedback recorded at the Community Vision Event are presented as Appendix G. Photos of the boards are included here:



## COMMUNITY SURVEY

Following the Community Vision event, a web survey was launched to solicit additional input from members of the public who were not able to attend the Community Vision event. Ultimately the survey received 77 total responses (52 complete and 25 partial). Questions in the survey touched on the same themes presented at the Community Vision event:

### Recreation

*How recreation should be incorporated into the Village Center.*

A variety of potential recreational improvements (walking paths, skating rink, playgrounds, etc.) were presented for input on whether they were desired within the Village Center. Overwhelmingly, respondents felt new walking and biking paths to connect to the river and surrounding areas were important. Adding more basic accommodations for biking (bike racks, signage) was noted. Generally, the more active recreation options were less desired.

Comments from respondents reflected concerns over costs, particularly considering the fiscal challenges of the community and the need to assure that new facilities are well maintained. Open-ended responses included finding a more flexible “indoor” space that serves a variety of needs. Many felt that the recreation center on Pond Road is the best venue for a rethinking of recreational uses. Better access to the river, by addressing the challenges of ownership of the shoreline and difficult terrain, was mentioned as a possibility given the proximity of the Village Center to the water and the potential for attracting some visitors.

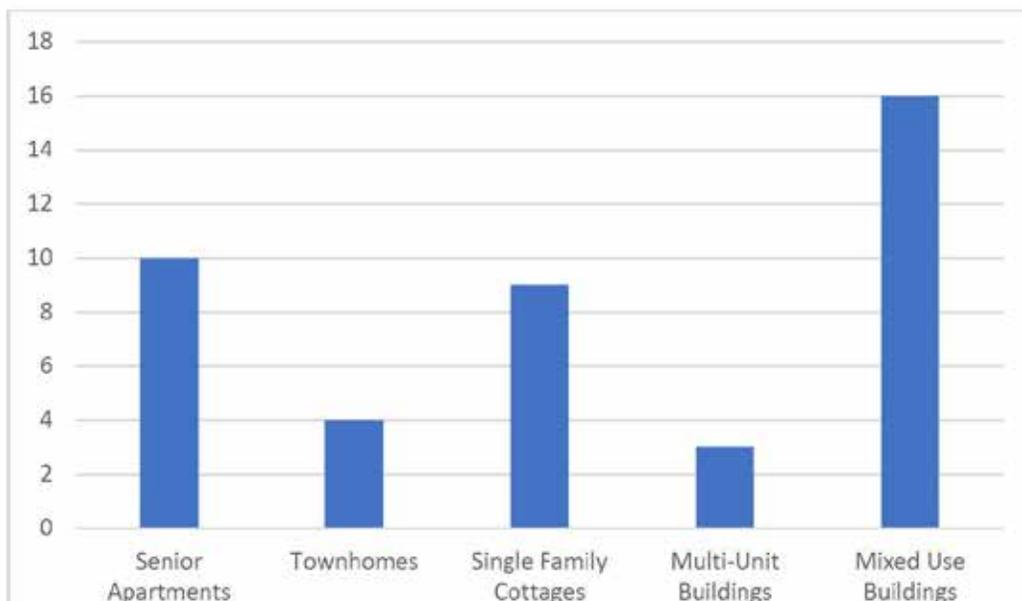
### Neighborhood

*What the composition of the “neighborhood” should look like in the Village Center.*

Input on the “types” of neighborhood uses (single family, multi-unit, etc.) varied with most respondents seeing mixed-use forms, senior apartments and single family cottages as most desirable.

Comments from respondents raised concern over the need for more residential “concentrations” and the impact of lower-income housing.

14) Please select all neighborhood types you'd like to see in the Village Center.



## Agriculture

*How Vernon's agricultural economy should be incorporated into the Village Center.*

Many respondents thought developing or supporting a farmers' market in the Village Center would be "nice to include" with slightly less support to gardens in general. A local store that offered farm products from the area was mentioned as a possibility.

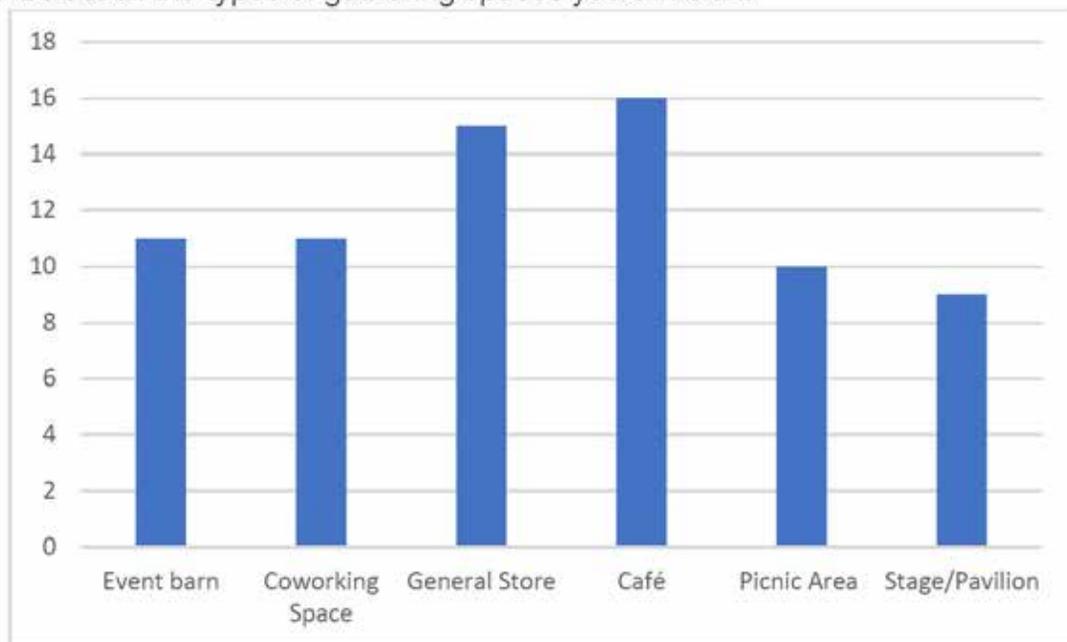
Many comments expressed concern over having "another" store – issues around not enough local business and the potential negative impact on existing businesses.

## Gathering Spaces

*What features/attributes would enhance the Village Center as a gathering place.*

Many respondents seemed to like the idea of improving the Village Center's role as a gathering place. Event barns, stores, or cafés were most commonly preferred. Comments supporting more community events were noted.

16) Select all the types of gathering spaces you envision.



Overall, some respondents had concerns about the "cost" of making improvements (new housing, cafes, etc.) within the Village Center. Their presumption was that these costs would somehow be borne solely on the taxpayers and, given the fiscal position of the town, could not be justified. What was not implicitly clear was how much the community might be willing to invest in support of improvements such as walkways, paths and gathering spaces, recognizing that elements like housing, café or other development would most likely not be undertaken by the town itself, but rather private landowners.

Community survey results are found in Appendix H.



## CONCEPT PRESENTATION

On October 10th, the consultant team presented the preliminary Village Center concepts to the Planning Commission, with approximately 5-10 members of the public present. To set the stage for the concepts, an overview of the following was provided:

- Community Input Summary
- Market Assessment – Challenges and Opportunities
- Guiding Principles of the Plans

The first plan presented by the consultant team, “Land Use and Connectivity,” showed the broader context of the village plan on a very diagrammatic level. Following that, two Concept Alternatives were presented to show different potential configurations of residential uses, commercial uses, public open spaces, and vehicular and pedestrian circulation within the Village Center.

See PART III: A VISION EXPLORED for an overview of the Guiding Principles and the Conceptual Alternatives.

The Concept Presentation slides are found in Appendix I.

The following questions and comments were offered by members of the public and the Planning Commission (as recorded in the official meeting minutes):

- Commercial space should be included.
- More density rather than less.
- Concerns about the viability of a store/café.
- Possibility of moving the post office.
- Focus on attracting the right businesses rather than homes.
- A larger commercial base would help to cover the school taxes. (Could Doug Kennedy look at that vs. residential?)
- What does it mean to be a 21st Century village?
- Will there be demand for this kind of housing?
- What is the demand for commercial space such as small business space?
- Should Gov. Hunt House be incubator/co-working space, or community center?
- Can the town define a direction that aims to incubate, grow, and host 21st Century businesses?
- Farmers’ market could be challenged by neighboring markets, and lack of small produce farms.
- More trail linkages to VY site, and Ct. River.



# Part II: What Will Shape the Future

## Key Challenges

Based on the foundation exploration described in Part I, the key challenges for evolving the Vernon Village Center include:

### LIMITED LAND AVAILABILITY

Much of the Village Center is developed, and most vacant/available land is under private ownership. Approximately 22.6 acres within the current Village Center is under-developed. In some respects, the size of the designated village center is too small.

### LIMITED VEHICULAR CONNECTIVITY

As noted above, few roadways connect the Village Center to other communities and popular thoroughfares. As VT 142 approaches the Village Center from the south, Governor Hunt Road intersects at an odd angle, making it a less obvious a route to travel. Similarly, approaching the Village Center from the north, both the road geometry and presence of an active rail line bisecting VT 142 de-emphasize Governor Hunt Road. Beyond these entry points, only Burrows Road at the northern edge of the Village Center provides east-west connectivity between Governor Hunt Road and VT 142. This lack of connector roads makes it hard to entice VT 142 road users to “come into” the Village Center and encourages a more linear development pattern along VT 142 and Governor Hunt Road.

### THE COMMERCIAL/RETAIL CHALLENGE

As identified in the analysis of economic data and through the observation of many residents; retail and commercial uses in Vernon are challenging due to the community's small size, the presence of regional commercial/service center in the adjacent community, and a rapidly changing retail landscape. Any commercial enterprise must be closely attuned to the needs of the local population.

### LACK OF PEDESTRIAN ACCOMMODATION

The Village Center does not have sidewalks along all existing streets and has few visible bike racks. There are few connections to existing recreational features such as the forest land adjacent to the village and the river. Nighttime lighting is sparse.

### PROXIMITY TO VERMONT YANKEE

The former VT Yankee plant is adjacent to the Village Center. At present, there is not clarity on what the community might gain from the facility in terms of land, water, sewer, and office/industrial space. This makes it exceedingly difficult to plan for, but regardless of the outcome for VT Yankee and its lands, Vernon should respond. The VT Yankee plant might play a vital role in future opportunities for both commercial and civic uses.



### LACK OF REGULATORY TOOLS

The Town of Vernon does not have zoning which limits the ability of the community to shape future land use changes. The lack of zoning, while expressly desired by the community, takes away many of the tools often used to inform and guide development and puts a much greater emphasis on a collaborative dialogue between land owners and potential development interests.

### EVOLVING COMMUNITY IDENTITY

It was clear from the public engagement and discussion of the project that Vernon is re-examining its community identity. The community's history and agricultural legacy are important, but many expressed desires to be a 21st century village. The lack of clarity on "What Does Vernon Want to Be" limits the ability of the community to make decisions regarding its future.

### THE LONG TIMELINE FOR CHANGE

The current fiscal challenges in Vernon, the limited near-term opportunity for retail and commercial uses, the reliance on private-sector involvement and the unknowns regarding what's next for the VT Yankee property, all suggest a long timeline for changing the Village Center. Long-range planning is not easy for many and can undermine activism at the grassroots level and provide an excuse for some to give up. Communicating how smaller, incremental changes contribute to the broader vision is often very difficult.



# Key Opportunities

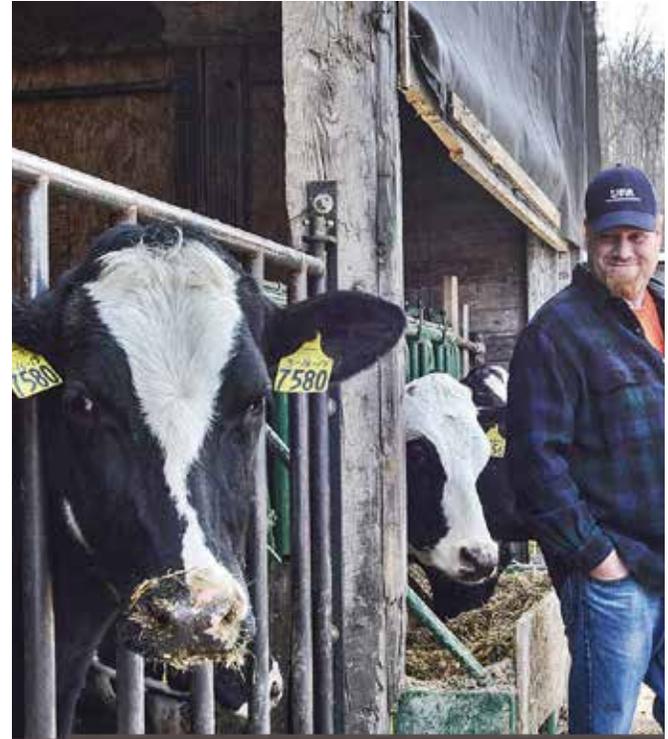
While challenges exist, opportunities do as well.

## SMALL SCALE/BIG IMPACT

Because the Village Center is so small, even a modest change can have an outsized impact. Encouraging new growth to be compact and scaled to the Village Center and immediate vicinity helps communicate the “small-town” feel that many in Vernon cherish.

## TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CIVIC ASSETS

The presence of the town offices, library, elementary school, Governor Hunt House, and memorial/gazebo all within (or very near) the Village Center gives the center a civic core on which to build. Expanding the visibility and connectivity of these assets can elevate their importance and expands options for community gathering.



## AGRICULTURE AS FOCUS

The Village Center has immediate adjacency to working farms and could leverage this relationship by giving the farming activities of the town a showcase venue. Whether realized as a farmers’ market, community garden or event space, or through the adaptation of the Grange as a community store/café; blurring the lines between village and farm could be a unique and interesting choice.

## VERNON AS A VISIONARY

Vernon is no stranger to adapting to (or inducing) change. Its history of evolution from agriculture, to tourist stop on the railroad, to provider of power, speaks of a community that is open to making a turn when and where needed. Harnessing this community spirit and attitude can help the community stay grounded and help it overcome the inevitable challenges it faces.



# Part III: A Vision Explored

From the engagement and outreach and the challenges and opportunities, a vision for the Village Center emerged. This effort established core design/planning principles to influence the outcome in the long-term. From this, two alternatives were explored which culminated in a working Conceptual Vision for how the Village Center might evolve.

## Core Planning and Design Principles

### IMPROVE/LEVERAGE CIVIC SPACES

Reimagine existing civic spaces including the town offices, library, and green as more accessible, functional, and with an upgraded and visually interesting design. Recognize that this northern end of the Village Center can act as an entry point for visitors and as the gathering space many residents would like to see. Adapt the Grange and Governor Hunt House to provide some community benefit, in balance with private sector interests.

### PROMOTE A MIX OF USES

Encourage new infill development to have a more diverse mix and support the adaptation of residential uses into home office and small service businesses as market and investment conditions allow. Recognize the long timeline and support a more adaptive approach towards uses.

### MAINTAIN A MODERATE DENSITY

While supporting a mix of uses, don't seek to urbanize the Village Center. Strive to keep the density moderate with a stronger emphasis on clustering of uses and establishing good open spaces that connect.

### STRESS ARCHITECTURAL COMPATIBILITY

Encourage the development of building forms that maintain the scale and character of Vernon with an emphasis on more traditional design, while recognizing that modern adaptations will introduce new materials.

### EXPAND CONNECTIVITY AND MOBILITY

Encourage east-west connectors into the heart of the Village Center to frame development and encourage access. Expand sidewalks within and outside of the Village Center to unify the Governor Hunt Road corridor, access to the river, Post Office/Mill, and Cold Brook Store. Keep the design simple, avoid excessive infrastructure, but strive for convenience.

### DEFINE GATEWAYS

Establish kiosks and welcome signage at the critical entry points of the Village Center; focusing on capturing roadside vehicular and bicycle visitors and establishing visual arrival points for visitors. Gateway enhancements should be scaled as the village evolves – starting simple and expanding as the Village Center grows. Key gateway points are the northern and southern intersections between Governor Hunt Road and VT 142.



## LAND USE AND CONNECTIVITY DIAGRAM





# Exploring Alternatives

The two preliminary alternatives explored ways to create a lively Village Center through clustering a mix of uses that would attract people and build upon the existing resources. Both plans included enhancements to the civic space with a reconfigured village green. This involved reconfiguring parking and vehicular access around the Town Offices/Library to create a continuous pedestrian environment. Both plans suggested converting the existing Grange building back into a store – possibly with a café – to provide a much-needed gathering space in the heart of the village. The Governor Hunt House was also envisioned as a community gathering and event space, serving as another node of activity.

Creating a walkable neighborhood of moderate density was a crucial component of both alternatives. Having residents of a variety of ages in the Village Center would add energy and help support commercial enterprises. Various housing types such as townhouses, single-family, and senior apartments are included to serve a wide market and create diversity of scale architecturally. A new east-west road between the new neighborhood core and the existing elementary school improves vehicular access in both plans. Improved connections to surrounding open space areas like the river, forests, and farms are also suggested.

## KEY ELEMENTS OF CONCEPT A

- No direct vehicular connection between the Town Offices/Library and the new neighborhood core
- More preservation of open space in the new neighborhood core than in Concept B, possibly with an agrarian character,
- Less commercial space than in Concept B
- Approximately 75 residential units

## KEY ELEMENTS OF CONCEPT B

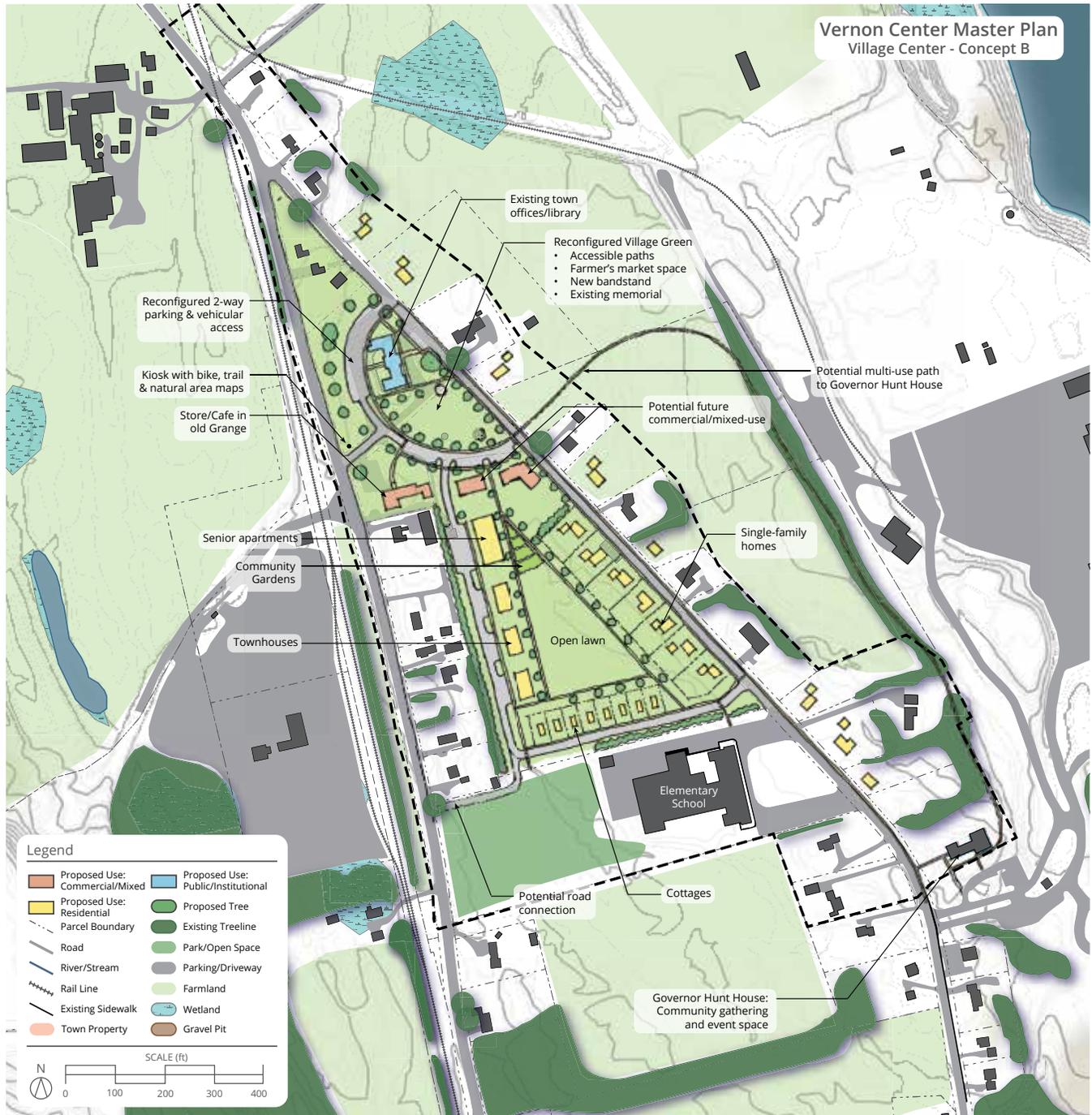
- Reconfigured vehicular circulation and parking creates a commercial frontage along the village green
- Open space in the new neighborhood core is more internal than in Concept A, and it is envisioned as flexible lawn space
- Approximately 80 residential units

The conceptual alternatives explored are not meant to suggest that the Town of Vernon should actively engage in development or the expansion of infrastructure, but are views of how the Village Center might evolve. As the recommendations in Part IV suggest, initiatives exist that can help support this evolution. It is possible that the community decides to invest in certain improvements or takes a greater role in supporting development. Regardless, the purpose of a vision is to inform the community when faced with decisions about if/how to nurture the evolution of the Village Center.





# VILLAGE CENTER CONCEPT B



# A Working Vision

Based on feedback from the Planning Commission and the public, a refined Concept Plan was prepared that included elements from both preliminary concepts. Although the overarching principles that guided the preliminary plans remained largely the same, the final plan reflected the following refinements:

- Additional commercial space. Home businesses are promoted along Governor Hunt Road to supplement the commercial frontage proposed along the village green.
- Increased residential density. Additional townhouses increase the total unit count (90 total), adding more energy and vitality to the neighborhood core.
- Plan for future commercial use on the Vermont Yankee site. With a new crop of workers entering and exiting the site daily, there could be opportunities to promote more commercial activity near the site entrance. The Governor Hunt House, possibly supporting an incubator or coworking space, would become a more central hub of activity under this scenario.

See Appendix C for an analysis of the financial impacts of this plan.



## Key

- ① Village gateway sign
- ② Existing Town Office/Library
- ③ Kiosk with bike, trail & natural area maps
- ④ Reconfigured Village Green
  - Accessible sidewalks
  - Event space
  - New pavilion/bandstand
  - Existing memorial
- ⑤ Store/Cafe in old Grange
- ⑥ Shared parking for Village Green and commercial frontage
- ⑦ Senior apartments
- ⑧ Townhouses
- ⑨ Cottages
- ⑩ Community garden
- ⑪ Open lawn with sidewalks
- ⑫ Pedestrian connection to Elementary School
- ⑬ Potential multi-use path to Governor Hunt House
- ⑭ Governor Hunt House - community gathering and event space or coworking space

## Legend

 Parcel Boundary	 Existing Building
 Road	 Proposed use: Public/Institutional
 River/Stream	 Proposed use: Commercial/Mixed-use
 Rail Line	 Proposed use: Home Business/Residential
 Sidewalk	 Proposed use: Residential
 Treeline	
 Park/Open Space	
 Parking/Driveway	
 Farmland	
 Wetland	



# VILLAGE CENTER CONCEPT PLAN



# Part IV: A Framework for the Future

## Key Recommendations

### 1) DEFINE YOUR IDENTITY/EXPLORE YOUR BRAND

Engage the community to discuss and debate what the identity of Vernon should be. A facilitated process can help coalesce current perspectives and identify the elements that are most important. Use this work to inform how you communicate Vernon through the media and express your community's "brand" through logos, signage, etc.

#### Key Initiatives:

- Conduct a Community Identity Workshop – Host an event to seek community input on what uniquely communicates Vernon. What makes Vernon special or different?
- Identity Survey – Conduct a web-based survey of residents to test attitudes about the identity.
- Explore Visual Motifs – Explore visual expressions of the identity. Engage the local arts community and/or students to document buildings, ridgelines, vistas that speak to the unique qualities of Vernon. Create collages of images that reflect or represent the brand.
- Explore Graphics and Logos – Engage a graphic artist to consolidate ideas into visual elements that might serve as a community logo or representative image for Vernon.
- Consistent Graphics - Develop a consistent graphical interface for any marketing outreach, including social media, press releases, etc. A consistent graphical interface allows potential visitors and others to instantly identify Vernon and its offerings.
- Testimonials - Include testimonials in marketing efforts with quotes from real visitors that attest to Vernon's offerings and virtues.

**Relative Costs:** Low. Generally, these sorts of initiatives can be done with a healthy dose of local volunteers or with some limited financial support for graphics. Costs would likely be in the \$3,000-\$5,000 range.

**Priority:** Near-Term. Continuing to engage the community and exploring its identity is an easy step that can expand upon this and earlier efforts. It creates discussion and a visible outcome for the community engagement work.

### 2) CREATE ENERGY THROUGH EVENTS

Make the Village Center the go-to community gathering space by promoting and encouraging events within it. Seek permission of existing land owners to use undeveloped property on a temporary basis for a community arts fair, community supper, etc. Keep the focus on quality verses quantity – try to have events that have a strong local flavor but are unique and might encourage some visitation. Recognize that bringing people together in the Village Center can help them appreciate what it offers today and help them consider changes to make it even better in the future.

#### Key Initiatives:

- Align Events and Teams – Bring together local groups, clubs, businesses and other interests



who have or would like to sponsor events and discuss what, where, when and why. Seek to find related or complementary events and bring them together to increase critical mass – think Food + Art or Farm + History.

- Make a Calendar – Compile the events into a community calendar and communicate it widely - Keep people informed! Use social media tools to distribute and update. Find a “champion” to perform this community communication function given the lack of a town-sponsored website.
- Monitor Progress – Track how events are received (ask via polls and/or survey) and monitor the results.

**Relative Costs:** Low to Moderate. Events will undoubtedly take the support of local volunteers and some limited financial support to get them off the ground. Support (in-kind or financial) from local businesses can help defer costs and broaden the lines of communication. Costs might be in the \$6,000-\$8,000 range to support several events. Eventually, events can be larger in scope if/when the market demands and if the offsetting economic benefit dictates.

**Priority:** Near to Mid-Term. Use the opportunity to bring the community together as a way of both celebrating Vernon but also to gauge what future improvements might be best aligned with community needs. Events can also help “test” the capacity of the community to communicate itself beyond its borders. Emphasize better, rather than more events.

### 3) ALIGN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC INTERESTS IN THE VILLAGE CENTER

Take a proactive role with private property owners to see how they can help advance the basic ideas of the vision. Don’t worry if their ideas are different, but rather focus on the core principles. Keep an open dialogue with them as things evolve.

#### Key Initiatives:

- Host a joint Planning Commission/Selectboard Meeting – bring together private land owners in the Village Center and surrounding lands to discuss this conceptual plan, how the core planning and design principles might work and what the concerns/issues might be.
- Explore the development of agreements with private properties to establish options for right-of-way for new streets if/when needed. Work with private property owners to determine where potential future road connections might make the most sense.
- Study the potential to have the right of first refusal on key properties within the Village Center to protect the Town’s ability to direct the outcome of future development.
- Share the Village Center Master Plan with Windham and Windsor Housing Trust to gauge their interest in developing affordable senior housing in the Village Center. [www.w-wht.org](http://www.w-wht.org)
- Study community use of the Grange building including an assessment of the structure’s physical condition and issues related to public accessibility, etc. Complete an assessment report on the potential reuse of the structure to cover a range of options: business incubator space, community café, etc. Get cost estimates on both potential acquisition of the space as well as costs to improve it to allow for public access and use.
- Study expanded community use of the Governor Hunt House building including an assessment of the structure’s physical condition and issues related to expanded public accessibility, outdoor use, etc. Evaluate the ability to relocate the Vernon Historic Society to Governor Hunt House and install front sidewalk connection. Complete an assessment report



on the potential reuse of the structure to cover a range of options: business incubator space, community café, etc. Get cost estimates on both potential acquisition of the space as well as costs to improve it to allow for public access and use.

- Evaluate the potential of a community-supported café that offers a limited range of products (Coffee/Beverages, Baked Goods, etc.). These enterprises typically operate with limited hours, using volunteer labor, and can be supported through purchases, local subscription, or other means. Coordinate and engage existing businesses (such as Cold Brook Store) into this conversation. See background data regarding community supported enterprises at: [http://www.ptvermont.org/community\\_supported\\_enterprises/communitysupported.php](http://www.ptvermont.org/community_supported_enterprises/communitysupported.php).
- Find qualified developers to partner with the town in developing the Village Center. An outline of a developer RFP is included as Appendix D.

**Relative Costs:** Low to High. Outreach efforts do not require a large expenditure of financial resources. If the town wishes to enter into any agreements, costs might be in the \$3,000-\$5,000 range for legal services. Studies to fully evaluate the ability to adapt structures such as the Grange or Governor Hunt House would vary in scope and cost but could be \$20,000 to \$30,000. Following these studies, development of capital campaigns, securing of grants and other fundraising efforts would be needed to acquire access and/or make improvements. Many of the grant programs outlined at the end of this section are potentially useful for such efforts.

**Priority:** Near to Mid-Term. While it is more likely that development within the Village Center would happen slowly and over a longer timeline, many of the initiatives above would be foundational to the town for deciding how to participate in the future outcome. Starting the conversation with the private-sector landowners in the short-term is important to allow future action. Seeking partnerships with regional agencies and organizations to help guide future improvements is also important to initiate in the near-term. Over the next 3-5 years, such efforts could yield valuable insight into what steps the town should take.

#### 4) SEEK GRANTS FOR CONNECTIVITY IMPROVEMENTS

Seek money through state and federal programs to study in more detail connectivity projects within Vernon's Village Center. Explore a variety of sources and forms of connectivity: trails, sidewalks, paths. Kiosks to make passing recreational users aware of the Village Center are also important.

##### **Key Initiatives:**

- Expand Sidewalks – The vision for Vernon Village Center identifies about 1,700 feet of new sidewalk to fill in gaps in the existing network. Constructing these segments can provide an immediate benefit in connectivity and also signal that the Village Center is progressing. The primary focus on sidewalks should consider the potential future development.
- Connect to Trails –The desire to connect the Village Center to the river and surrounding recreational assets is an important sentiment repeatedly heard during this process. To support this, a more detailed analysis of appropriate routes, site and engineering issues, and land ownership is needed. As a core initiative, Vernon should seek grant assistance (TAP, FHWA, USDA, and state sources) to position specific segments of trail for implementation. Commensurate development of a wayfinding and signage plan would benefit the new system.
- Create a Gateway - Establish informational kiosk locations at the northern and southern ends



of Governor Hunt Road to establish an arrival point into the Village Center, welcome travelers to Vernon Village Center, and announce events and activities. Incorporate local art, connect with any community branding efforts, and enhance the area with appropriate landscaping.

**Relative Costs:** Moderate to High. Costs associated with supporting these efforts will vary widely depending on the actual segments and other factors. In more general terms, the costs for any expansion of sidewalks or the development of trails is high; frequently driven by the need to secure rights-of-way (for implementation and/or construction) or to address site complexities such as drainages, steep embankments, etc. The efforts for sidewalk development typically first go through a scoping study which would cost around \$30,000 (of which a required town match would be about \$5,000). Vtrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Grants are a common source for funding these initiatives. Following the Scoping Study, a survey of the right-of-way and design would be needed. Costs for sidewalk can vary but are generally around \$200 per foot without curbing. Costs for trails can be less, depending on type and setting. Development of a kiosk and gateway might involve site planning and engineering, some land acquisition, and fabrication. Costs could be between \$20,000 and \$40,000 depending on the size and type of kiosk.

**Priority:** Mid to Long-Term. While improving connections within the Village Center is important, it is also important to scale those efforts with the capacity of the town. Scoping of sidewalk and trail projects are appropriate to start sooner, as they can take some time and have moderate costs. Implementation of specific sidewalk or trail connections would likely be done over a longer period of time. Planning for and the development of gateway treatments might be a good mid-term objective, particularly as a way of leveraging any community branding and identity work.



# Tools and Strategies for Support

Moving the objectives and initiatives of this plan forward will require resources. Fortunately, the town does not have to go at it alone. Grants from the federal and state government and national and state organizations are available to fund most, if not all, of the concepts in this Master Plan. Relevant grants are listed below with information about eligibility, match requirements, types of projects funded, and links for more information. Vernon may want to pursue smaller grants for easy to accomplish projects that will demonstrate the potential of the project to the community and future grantors.

Beyond grants, Vernon should also look to leverage its local resources and seek out private investment.

## FEDERAL AND STATE GRANTS AND PROGRAMS

### Land and Water Conservation Fund State and Local Assistance Program

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) state assistance program provides matching grants to help local communities enhance the outdoor recreation resources on public land. LWCF funding has benefited nearly every county in America, supporting over 40,000 projects. The grants create parks and open spaces, protect wilderness and forests, and provide outdoor recreation opportunities. Eligible projects are acquisition of land for parks and public outdoor recreation or development and/or renovation of existing facilities for outdoor recreation. This 50:50 matching program is the primary federal investment tool to ensure that families have easy access to public, open spaces. In Vermont, LWCF is administered by Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation.

<http://fpr.vermont.gov/recreation/grants/lwcf>

### Surface Transportation Block Grant Program

The State Surface Transportation Program is the main program of Federal Transportation Funds, managed by VTrans, for transportation improvements on state highways. Possible projects include recreational trails, pedestrian and biking enhancements, sidewalks, and signed routes.

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/specialfunding/stp/>

### USDA Rural Development Loan and Grant Assistance

USDA Rural Development forges partnerships with rural communities (defined as towns and villages with less than 20,000 inhabitants), funding projects that bring housing, community facilities (including trails and active transportation facilities), business guarantees, utilities and other services to rural America. This program provides funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. An essential community facility is defined as a facility that provides an essential service to the local community for the orderly development of the community.

<http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/community-facilities-direct-loan-grant-program>

### National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

The National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTC) program supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the nation. Their national network of conservation and recreation planning professionals can partner with community groups, nonprofits, tribes, and state and local governments to design trails and parks, conserve and improve access to rivers, protect special places, and create recreation opportunities.



Current projects include trail rehabilitation, interpretive trails, connector trails, trail master plans, trails collaboratives, and rail trail connectors. No monetary grants are made.

<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/index.htm>

### FHWA Recreational Trails Program

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) provides funds to communities for development and maintaining recreational trail projects. Grants are awarded to well-planned projects that help to develop, protect, and maintain trails and trail systems that improve connections in the community, livability, user-ability, and are maintained for public recreational use. Funds can be used for the following types of projects: construction of new trails or trail connections; construction of new trailhead areas/parking facilities; construction of trailside facilities; maintenance, renovation, or restoration of trails; improvements to signage or trail structures along the trail; and trail-related educational projects (i.e., information about trail safety, appropriate trail use, environmental protection, etc.). The program is administered by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation in the Agency of Natural Resources, in cooperation with VTrans.

<http://fpr.vermont.gov/recreation/grants/rtp>

### Highway Safety Grants

Highway Safety Grants (HSG) are managed by VTrans as part of the Governor's Highway Safety Program. They are available to support projects to create safer roads for all users. Improvements must be part of the Highway Safety Plan and could include roadway or intersection projects.

<https://ghsp.vermont.gov/grants>

### Transportation Alternatives Program

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a grant program administered by VTrans that provides funding for programs and projects defined as transportation alternatives, including on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle facilities, sidewalks, and bicycle infrastructure. These funds will cover a maximum of 80% of the project with the remaining portions most likely coming from the project-sponsoring organization or town. The FY 2019 funds are reserved for environmental mitigation projects.

<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/local-projects/transport-alt>

### VTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Program

The Vermont Bicycle and Pedestrian Program (BPP) provides funds managed by VTrans for scoping, design, and construction of bike and pedestrian facilities, sidewalks, shared-use paths, and bike lanes. A local match is required but varies based on the type of project.

<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/highway/local-projects/bike-ped>

## STATE GRANTS AND PROGRAMS

### Vermont Community Development Program

The Vermont Community Development Program provides Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to all Vermont towns and cities, aside from Burlington. The grant provides financial and technical assistance to identify address local needs in housing, economic development, public facilities, public services, and handicapped accessibility modifications. The four types of grants are Accessibility Modification Grants (AM), Implementation Grants (IG), Planning Grants (PG), Scattered Site Grants (SS). These grants must primarily benefit persons of low and moderate incomes.



[http://accd.vermont.gov/strong\\_communities/opportunities/funding/vcdp](http://accd.vermont.gov/strong_communities/opportunities/funding/vcdp)

## Vermont Community and Urban Forestry Council Grants (Caring for Canopies Grants)

These Caring for Canopies Grants (CCG) are awarded to municipalities to aid in taking the necessary actions to developing and sustaining a community-wide tree program, including tree plantings, inventories, maintenance, and planning. There are two grant categories, Caring for the Canopy and Canopy Mini. Caring for Canopy is for projects that help move a community's tree management program towards a sustained level while Canopy Mini is for smaller projects to help move a tree management program forward. The grants range in size from \$500 to \$5,000 and require a 50% match.

<https://vtcommunityforestry.org/programs-0/financial-assistance/caring-canopy-grants>

## Municipal Planning Grant Program

The Municipal Planning Grants (MPG) are Vermont State grants for a wide range of municipal planning projects including land use plans, zoning and subdivision bylaws, trail networks and walking and biking improvements, resiliency planning, economic plans, and village and neighborhood planning. The range of the grants is from \$2,500 to \$20,000 with a required 10% match.

<http://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant>

## Regional Economic Development Grant Program

The Vermont Regional Development Program provides matching state grants to stimulate the creation and development or retention of economic development of individual or regional Vermont communities. The grants range from \$1,000 to \$25,000 and are available for Vermont municipalities and non-profit organizations.

<https://bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants>

## Recreational Facilities Grant Program

The Recreational Facilities Grants (RFG) program provides matching state grants for capital costs associated with the development and creation of community recreational opportunities. This program provides last gap funding for shovel ready projects and does not support any ongoing fundraising initiatives. The program requires a 100% match and awards are capped at \$25,000.

<https://bgs.vermont.gov/commissioner/building-communities-grants>

## Transportation Planning Initiative

VTrans administers the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI), which distributes funding to regional planning commissions to undertake transportation planning work in their regions. Vernon can ask for transportation planning assistance from the Windham Regional Planning Commission but cannot apply for a grant.

<https://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/policy-planning/regional>

## Cultural Facilities Grant Program

The Cultural Facilities Grants help Vermont non-profit organizations and municipalities enhance, create, or expand the capacity of an existing building to provide cultural activities to the public. Eligible projects include improvements to the structure (wiring, heating, lighting, and plumbing),



accessibility features, stage improvements, permanent display panels or exhibits, equipment, and wireless. Awards range from \$1,000 to \$30,000 and must be matched on a 1:1 basis with at least 50% of that match in cash and the other 50% can be well-documented in-kind materials and/or labor.

<https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/grants-and-services/organizations/cultural-facilities>

## Vermont Arts Council Animating Infrastructure Grant

Animating Infrastructure Grants support community projects that integrate art with infrastructure improvements. The program strives to demonstrate the positive impact of art in helping communities meet goals of livability, walkability, safety, economic vitality, and community vibrancy. Anything that serves a functional purpose in the built or natural environment qualifies. Proposed projects would not be limited to, but could include improvements to: buildings, rec paths, parks, bridges, and small-scale renewable energy projects. Municipalities, non profit arts and non-arts organizations, schools, libraries, downtown associations, historical societies, and regional planning commissions can apply. Organizations in rural communities and/or communities with little or no prior experience in public art are encouraged to apply. Grants range from \$1,000 to \$15,000 and may only be used to pay artist fees and for installation of artwork. No match is required but costs may fall on the organization or municipality.

<https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/grants-and-services/organizations/animating-infrastructure>

## ACCD State Historic Preservation Grants

The state-funded Historic Preservation Grant Program helps municipalities and non-profit organizations rehabilitate the historic buildings that are a vital part of Vermont's downtowns, villages, and rural communities. Grants have been used to revitalize buildings such as town halls, museums, theaters, libraries, recreation centers, and other municipal buildings. If the municipality owns a historic property, you may be eligible for a grant to assist with the cost of repairs, maintenance, and accessibility improvements. The grants require a 1:1 match and are up to \$20,000. The building must be at least 50 years old and listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

<https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/funding/historic-preservation-grants>

## ACCD Downtown and Village Center Tax Credits

Federal and state rehabilitation tax credits help to stimulate private investment, create jobs, restore historic buildings, and jump start the revitalization seen in Vermont's Designated Downtowns and Village Centers. The tax credits essentially redirect income taxes owed to help pay the construction bills. Credits are available from both the federal government and the state of Vermont. Federal credits are available for eligible historic commercial buildings while state credits are available for commercial buildings and non-profit owned buildings constructed before 1983 located with a designated downtown or village center.

<https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation/funding/tax-credits>

## Better Connections Program

The Better Connections Program seeks to align state and local investments to increase transportation options, build resilience, and strengthen economic vitality in Vermont's community centers, through an annual grant program administered by Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD). Municipalities annually compete for approximately \$200,000 in projects funds. A 10%



local cash match is required. The program supports implementation-focused, municipal planning initiatives that: provide safe, multi-modal and resilient transportation systems that supports the Vermont economy; support downtown and village economic development and revitalization efforts; and lead directly to project implementation. The program has been used for trails and active transportation master plans, village connection planning and other multi-modal planning efforts.

<http://vtrans.vermont.gov/planning/projects-programs/better-connections>

## VOREC Community Grant Program

The Vermont Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (VOREC) is launching a community grant program for outdoor recreation in Vermont municipalities. The grant is designed to help communities leverage their local outdoor recreation assets and applying communities must have completed some prior planning or mapping of outdoor recreation assets, have identified outdoor recreation as a component of their local economy through previous plans, and have a dedicated staff and/or volunteers to ensure long-term success of the project. The funds can be used for consultants, small scale outdoor recreation infrastructure improvements, materials or equipment to support outdoor recreation programs, marketing relating expenses, community based outdoor recreation planning, and securing public access through acquisition of land, easements, or rights-of-way. Communities are also responsible for making products and deliverables that could be adapted and reproduced by other communities in the state. The program is administered by FPR in partnership with ACCD and VOREC and offers grants between \$10,000 and \$100,000.

[https://fpr.vermont.gov/VOREC\\_Community\\_Grant](https://fpr.vermont.gov/VOREC_Community_Grant)

## STATE ORGANIZATIONS GRANTS

### Vermont Community Foundation – General Grants

A variety of grants are available to support projects to improve environmental sustainability, cultural heritage, social justice, historic preservation, and vitality of Vermont communities. The different types of grants offered include: Place-Based Grants, Arts Endowment Fund, Special and Urgent Needs, and Nonprofit Capacity Building (see below). Each place-based grant is only available to a specific region of the state. For information about which grants are available for your community, please see the website below.

<http://www.vermontcf.org/Nonprofits/AvailableGrants.aspx>

### Vermont Community Foundation – Nonprofit Capacity Building

The Nonprofit Capacity Building program is small grants to support the cost of consultants to facilitate discussions related to strategic planning, financial sustainability funding, or facilitating a merger. These grants are meant to supplement other funding. This grant is available to both nonprofits and municipalities.

<https://www.vermontcf.org/NonprofitsGrants/AvailableGrants/NonprofitCapacityBuilding.aspx>

### VHCB Local Conservation Projects (VHCB)

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board provides funding to conserve natural areas, recreation lands, and historic properties. VHCB provides loans to enable the project to leverage other funds or grants in cases where local efforts to obtain sources of funding have been exhausted. The available funds vary based on whether the parcel has statewide significance. For conserving locally-significant land, other sources must provide 1/3 of the project funding. VHCB



also provides funding for feasibility analysis, project-specific capacity (i.e, engineering work, historic preservation analysis, and hazardous materials analysis).

<https://vhcb.org/our-programs/conservation/apply-for-funding>

## Lintilhac Foundation

The foundation's central purpose is to support organizations that are making sustainable, positive change for Vermont's environment and its people. Grants are available in three core giving areas, water quality, energy, and conservation. The conservation giving is primarily to backcountry recreational access to lands and integrative land use planning.

<http://www.lintilhacfoundation.org/application-guidelines/>

## Ben & Jerry's Foundation (BJF)

The Ben & Jerry's Foundation funds multiple grants programs to help communities in Vermont. The Vermont Economic Justice Program gives grants to non-profits working to address the economic, social, and environmental impacts of poverty. The Vermont Community Action Team (CAT) Grant is a small grant awarded to non-profits, schools, and municipalities. The Community Action Teams provide general or project support. The CATs fund the following types of community programs: social services organizations, cultural, recreational, arts programs, and community celebrations.

<https://benandjerrysfoundation.org/vermont-grant-programs.html>

## Green Mountain Coffee Roasters

Green Mountain Coffee Roasters provides local community sponsorships and product donations. The company strives to make a difference on important social and environmental challenges that communities within their North American operations.

<https://www.keuriggreenmountain.com/en/Sustainability/PeopleAndCommunities/Overview.aspx>

## NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS GRANTS

### PeopleforBikes Community Fund

The PeopleforBikes Community Grant Program (PBCG) provides funding for important and influential projects that build momentum for bicycling in communities across the U.S. These projects include bike paths and rail trails, as well as mountain bike trails, bike parks, and large-scale bicycle advocacy initiatives. PeopleforBikes will fund engineering and design work, construction costs, and reasonable volunteer support costs. The maximum grant award is \$10,000 and the grant cannot make up more than 50% of the total project budget.

<http://www.peopleforbikes.org/pages/community-grants>

### Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grants (RWJF)

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provides grant funds to improve the health and health care of all Americans. RWJF awards grants for projects creating healthier communities. This funding has gone towards walking and bicycling facilities and upgrading underutilized green space.

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/how-we-work/grants-and-grant-programs.html>

## Trails Connecting People with Nature: A program of the Sierra Club's Nearby



## Nature Initiative (TCPN)

Trails Connecting People with Nature is a Sierra Club initiative that works to ensure that access to the outdoors is increasingly equitable and available to all communities. The Sierra Club Foundation awards one year trail grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$20,000 towards trail creation or maintenance projects that engage new leaders and provide opportunities for communities to connect with nature.

<https://content.sierraclub.org/ourwildamerica/nearby-nature>

## NON-GRANT FUNDING SOURCES

### Development Impact Fees

Development Impact Fees are a charge placed on new developments to help pay for new or expanded public facilities. They are a way of assessing developers for the public infrastructure costs incurred by new development, so the costs are not borne by residents. Some communities assess developers a standard dollar figure, others require the construction of a park, pedestrian improvements, a trails and open space development impact fee, while others allow for the dedication of parkland, or fee-in-lieu, in place of the impact fee.

### Bond Issues

A bond issue is voted on by members of the community to fund a project through taxes for a specific time period. The bond acts as a loan, where the municipality would eventually have to repay the amount. Bonds can help leverage funds for required matches for federal or state grants.

### Local Funds

Local funds are sources of funding that are provided by the local government from the budget or funds other than bonds. Capital Improvement Plans (CIP) can be leveraged to help advance specific initiatives or projects.

### Private Donors and Fundraising

Funds can be provided by private donors or through special fundraising efforts, which can supplement or substitute for local funds. In many communities, the design of specific improvements is often crafted to encourage private donations: donor benches, bricks, trees. The use of private funding is often less constrained and restricted and opens up new or expansive opportunities for creativity in design outcome. Fundraising efforts can be very time consuming and require reaching out broadly to the community, business interests, and others.

The use of crowd-sourcing sites such as Kickstarter can make the process of seeking input or funding easier in many ways. The web-based platforms allow communities to broadcast ideas widely, often attracting the interests of people who may have never visited Vernon. Keys to this process include making a compelling case about the reasons for the project, offering up some definitive value to the donor (i.e., a memorial brick, commemorative map, etc.) and communicating how the project supports the broader vision for the area. This last point is important as it is often appropriate to take big ideas and break them down in crowdfunding—smaller projects can be done more quickly and link together to provide bigger outcomes.

