

**NORTHFIELD COMMUNITY VISIT
FINAL REPORT**

**Vermont Council on Rural Development
January 2002**

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Northfield Community Visit Introduction

Democracy is always a work in progress. Lincoln called it an experiment, one tested on the grand scale of the nation and in each local community decision arrived at through debate and common consideration. It's the test of our ability to act together for the general good and toward our best common vision of the future.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development Community Visit Team came to Northfield late in 2001 and early 2002 with the goal of providing a structured format for local visioning, mutual consideration of issues and goals, the prioritization of the challenges before the community, and the beginning of implementation plans toward the resolution of these challenges.

Visitors to Northfield were charged to listen to community members as they enumerated the issues and challenges before the community, but they also observed an enviable and impressive set of community strengths and assets.

Foremost of these advantages, by all accounts, is Northfield's strong-minded, committed citizenry. VCRD and the Visiting Team are grateful for the energy and dedication of participants at the focus forums on November 6th, the Community Meeting on December 3rd, and the Resource Day meeting for the new Task Forces on January 3rd. We appreciate the organizational help and advice of the ad hoc local steering committee and other supporters of the Community Visit process early on, and are particularly thankful for the leadership of the Community Visit Chairs, Steven Jeffrey and Angie Fernandez. Charlie Morse's energy, enthusiasm and hard work were also indispensable. We recognize the critically important leadership that the Business and Professional Association, and especially Rick Van Arnam, their chair, contributed early on and will continue to provide for the betterment of life in Northfield. Finally, we thank the Village Trustees and the Town Selectboard, and appreciate the advice and support that Brad Denny has provided throughout the Visit process.

The Community Visit had three major parts:

1. On the **Community Visit Day** on November 6th, Visiting Resource Team members heard testimony from Northfield residents in nine focus group areas that had earlier been identified by the local steering committee. Notes and issues raised in these sessions are detailed in Part V. Based on the testimony received, the Vermont Council on Rural Development identified an initial list of the Major Challenges before the community (Part II).

2. The second stage of the Community Visit occurred at the Northfield **Community Meeting** on December 3rd, when VCRD presented the Major Challenges list and facilitated the review and prioritization of these issues by over 70 town residents. The resulting list of **Prioritized Challenges** (in Part I) were the focus for the formation of Task Forces set to build plans to address them.

3. In the third phase of the Visit, the **Community Resource Day** on January 3, 2002, the Task Forces met with a second Visiting Team to build Action Steps and consider state, federal, non-profit, and private resources that may be available to support their work toward the progress of the Northfield community. The **Task Force Action Steps** they defined are listed in Part IV.

Resource Team Members (listed in Part VI) signed on with a commitment to serve in an on-going way as sounding boards and referral agents for the Northfield Task Forces. Many of these visitors can be partners in the work before the committees, others can be a great source of advice or connection to other resources; call on them for help. Members of the Northfield Resource Team listened closely to the issues brought forward by town residents and have made suggestions in support of Northfield's efforts in each challenge area. Their **Recommendations** (Part III) are not prescriptions; community members are in the best position to make decisions about their next steps and strategies. Recognizing existing local efforts and the leadership of the Task Forces, these recommendations are offered, rather, as suggestions for next steps, and as lists of potential resources as the Task Forces make their way forward.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development is dedicated to helping Vermont communities develop their capacity to create a prosperous and sustainable future through coordination, collaboration, and the effective use of public and private resources.

A beautiful natural and built environment, a central location, the presence of Norwich University, and the strong skills and knowledge of its residents favor the progress of Northfield as it works to respond to the challenges ahead. The paramount common recognition of members of the Visiting Team was the tremendous capacity that Northfield has for progress if residents work together toward their common goals. We hope that the Community Visit process has provided a useful structure for Northfield, and we are grateful to have been involved in the ongoing conversation essential to real democracy with the Northfield community.

I. Northfield – Priority Challenges

Identified by Northfield Community Meeting – December 3, 2001

- ❖ **Downtown Issue:** Northfield needs a Downtown Planning Committee to review issues, establish priorities, attract new businesses, develop strategic parking, and, especially, to pick the Downtown Plan off the shelf, review and revise it, and put it into action.

- ❖ **Police Department/Emergency Services Issue:** The Police Department needs additional staff and increased resources to provide more competitive salaries. Police and Ambulance services need a new municipal facility

- ❖ **Academic Excellence Issue:** Northfield should develop and enact an action plan to expand curricular opportunities, and improve academic atmosphere and performance in the school.

- ❖ **Town/Village Issue:** The Town and Village of Northfield should merge to simplify community and municipal communications, raise the image of Northfield, and promote a common identity among Northfield residents as members of a unified community.

- ❖ **Water/Wastewater Issue:** Northfield needs to follow through with its water system expansion and build systemic responses to wastewater needs in Town and Village, and especially to protect its well field.

II. Northfield- Major Challenges **Identified by Focus Groups – November 6, 2001**

- ❖ **Downtown Issue:** Northfield needs a Downtown Planning Committee to review issues, establish priorities, attract new businesses, develop strategic parking, and, especially, to pick the Downtown Plan off the shelf, review and revise it, and put it into action.
- ❖ **External Communications Issue:** Northfield needs to build better relationships with the regional media and a comprehensive marketing plan to project itself as a positive, progressive community.
- ❖ **Emergency Services Issue:** Police and Ambulance services need a new municipal facility.
- ❖ **Police Department Issue:** The Police Department needs additional staff and increased resources to provide more competitive salaries.
- ❖ **Community Center Issue:** Northfield needs a multigenerational center to provide a home for recreational activities and services designed to meet needs of all community residents.
- ❖ **Parent Involvement Issue:** Northfield should build a plan in increase parental involvement in the school.
- ❖ **Academic Excellence Issue:** Northfield should develop and enact an action plan to expand curricular opportunities, and improve academic atmosphere and performance in the school.
- ❖ **Natural Resources/Conservation Issue:** Northfield needs a Conservation/Recreation Commission to plan and lead efforts to catalogue, protect, tend and clean up the community's outdoor assets—from the Dog River to Paine Mountain.
- ❖ **Dog River Bike/Walking Trail Issue:** Northfield should dust off and improve the river-walk plan, develop funding, and build the path from Northfield Falls through the Village.
- ❖ **Cetrangolo Site Issue:** Northfield should develop a plan for the Cetrangolo site downtown—including its possible public purchase and development.
- ❖ **Recreation Issue:** Northfield needs to coordinate and communicate a community-wide schedule of recreational activities and opportunities.
- ❖ **Town/Village Issue:** The Town and Village of Northfield should merge to rationalize utilities and services, support community-wide planning, simplify community and municipal communications, raise the image of Northfield, and promote a common identity among Northfield residents as members of a unified community.
- ❖ **Internal Communications Issue:** Northfield needs to coordinate community communications and ensure information exchange between groups in the Village, Town and Norwich University.

- ❖ **Industrial Development Issue:** Northfield needs a local development committee to plan for industrial development that fits with the community's character and setting, supports its tax base, and provides employment to Northfield residents.
- ❖ **Sports Fields Issue:** Northfield needs to expand field space at school for playground and sports activities.
- ❖ **Housing Issue:** Northfield needs to develop and implement a plan for new low and moderately priced housing and elderly housing in the Village.
- ❖ **Water/Wastewater Issue:** Northfield needs to follow through with its water system expansion and build systemic responses to wastewater needs in Town and Village, including protection of the well field.

III. VCRD Resource Team Recommendations

In response to the Five Northfield Priority Challenges

Downtown Issue

- Northfield should organize a Downtown Council to market the downtown and to push state and regional organizations to produce results for the community.
- Many downtowns are using the national “Main Street Program” model for their organization. Getting organization in place is the key to getting anything done—the Task Force will need municipal support, potentially including financial support. Many organizations for downtown development organize as non-profits to simplify fundraising. Vergennes is one community that has much to show for its organization effort.
- Build on the terrific participation already developed by communicating in all forums, papers, meetings, chatting on the street.
- Do one project that everyone likes and wants to be part of—this builds community, proves you are for real, and gives you support for the next projects.
- Bellows Falls has also made significant progress; Robert McBride from that community would be a useful reference (463-3456).
- The group should contact Jane Lendway and Joss Besse at the Agency of Commerce (828-3042). They run the Downtown Program and could help with moving the community toward becoming a “Designated Downtown”. Grants for some downtown improvements may be available through their office.
- Both Barre and Montpelier have gone through the process to become Designated Downtowns. Their leaders could be contacted: Cynthia Tokos (223-4884) for Barre, and Mary Hooper (223-9604) for Montpelier.
- Downtown issues are a major focus throughout the planning community in Vermont right now. Act 200 Planning Grants may be a source of funding to review and revise the existing plan. If the plan can be implemented “off the shelf”, such a grant might be used to hire someone to implement.
- The Planning Commission could take an active role in this process; the Task Force needs to stay in close touch with them as they proceed.
- Build planning around existing businesses. What do they need to survive and thrive? What new businesses will complement their businesses? Identify the “new” businesses the community would like to have in town.
- The town may also want to consider hiring a Community Development Planner to assist in implementing a plan of action. Usually these positions can be funded (or substantially so) through various grant opportunities. Jane Kiser is the CD Director of the City of St. Albans (524-1503) and might be a very good resource person. She administers block grants for adjacent communities on a fee for service basis, which helps pay her salary.

- Sherry Paige, USDA Rural Development (828-6034), is available to support the downtown planning effort; she could facilitate sessions to review the Downtown Plan, revise it, and put it into action.
- The community should be working closely with the regional planning commission and any Downtown Plan should be submitted to them. Contact Susan Sinclair, Central Vermont Planning Commission (223-0389).
- The Planning Commission may also be aware of funds to support the development of strategic parking.
- As for attracting new business, the Department of Economic Development (828-3211) can play a role in support of the Northfield Downtown Committee as well as Richard Angney at Central VT Economic Development (223-4654).
- Marketing assistance could be provided by the regional marketing organization, the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce led by George Malek (229-5711).
- There should also be some discussion between Norwich University and Northfield concerning their new information assurance center.
- The existing Downtown plan needs to be taken up and re-examined and people need to get involved in implementation.
- Examine the possibility of obtaining VTrans Transportation Enhancement Funds for downtown enhancement (VTrans, 828-3522).
- Consider a plan to buy options on the Cetrangolo site.
- Residents lamented the lack of a movie theater. Residents could resolve to start a theater in the community. In Bellows Falls the Town Recreation Department saw this as an important recreational need and responded by setting up for movies. They rented movies at reduced rates and actually generate profits that sustain other recreational activities. Contact Richard Ewald (463-3456).
- The grey elementary school could become a Community Resource Center. Consider Paul Bruhn and Ann Montgomery at Preservation Trust of Vermont as ongoing resources, referral agents, and potential sources of funding assistance for remedial work on the structure. (658-6647)
 - Contact Paul Hanson (or Gus Seelig) (828-3250) at the Housing Conservation Board about the possibility of a matching grant to help purchase the building.
 - A Community Development Block Grant could help with the redevelopment of the structure. Call director Carl Bohlen at 828-5215.
 - Build relationships with key congressional staffers and seek federal support through their offices.
 - St. Albans recently purchased the Barlow School and redeveloped the property as a Community Center in much the way Northfield residents aim to do with the Grey School. Committee members might want to go to St. Albans to view this project and consider the steps that led to their success. Call Jane Kiser at 524-1503.

Police Department/Emergency Services

- Police Department and Emergency Services issues in Northfield seem to center on funding which must be primarily local—progress on this issue will require broad community and taxpayer support.

- Northfield needs to database the belief that salaries are too low to attract new officers and retain existing staff by:
 - Surveying towns of comparable size as to number of officers, salaries, and benefits.
 - Quantifying the recruiting history for the last couple of years by compiling a report with the number of advertisements run (including where and how), the number of responses, number of applicants, number of qualified applicants, number of offers made, number of acceptances and, if possible, reasons offers were rejected, ie. salary, benefits.
- Then, database the need for additional staffing by conducting a formal survey of local citizens and businesses as to satisfaction with existing police services, including response time, coverage, and visibility and including a query on what additional coverage or services are needed. This survey should include a question or two on the need for a new police/EMS facility.
- For professional resources contact the Vermont Sherrifs Association (c/o Sherrif R.J. Eldrick, Rutland County Sherrifs Department, P.O. Box 303, Rutland, 05702-0303), and the Vermont Police Chiefs Association (c/o Chief Anthony Bossi, Rutland City Police Department, 108 Wales Street, Rutland, VT 05701).
- The new facility may be part of a Downtown issue as well. It should be considered as part of any downtown planning strategy so that some costs of facility planning could be funded in a grant.
- As is true for many of the issues before Northfield, progress for the Police Department and Emergency Services would be simplified by Town/Village merger.
- From among the Community Development Program, the USDA Rural Development Facilities Program, the Municipal Bond Bank, and the Community Development Block Grant Program funding support can be gained to contribute part of the costs of building or of renovating an existing building to accommodate the needs of the police department and ambulance service. There are also Department of Justice COPS grants available for additional staffing and equipment. Contact Sherry Paige at USDA (828-6034).
- Preservation Trust of Vermont can help with accessibility issues in the renovation of an historic structure (Paul Bruhn, 658-6647).

Academic Excellence

- Northfield should use the authority of the Title 16 School Quality Standards as a positive way to focus the school and the Northfield community on specific points of progress designed to improve academic performance. Northfield should follow the standards, refer to them publicly as a guide, and work to leverage resources to address the needs documented in relation to standards.
- The community's aspirations for improved student performance should be the cornerstone of discussions of aligning budgetary resources. Northfield should establish methods of assuring that resource allocations aim at the central goal of improving school quality.

- Northfield should plan to use the numerous resources available for school improvement including those from the Department of Education, neighboring school districts, and institutions of higher learning, especially Norwich University. Can Norwich students and faculty expand curricular offerings or systemically enrich opportunities in Northfield schools?
- Athletics provide community events that benefit the whole community and celebrate the athleticism of Northfield youth. Events that test and celebrate the academic excellence of Northfield students should also be developed. Planning for such events should include youth, parents and school leaders.
- Northfield should systematically examine possible collaborations to provide distance learning opportunities as a cost-effective and practical way to expand curricular offerings. Bill Ramond (828-0064), the leader for education technology in the VT Department of Education, can provide critical assistance. Winton Goodrich at the VT School Boards Association (223-3580) can also help in this area.
- The USDA Rural Utility Service Distance Learning and Telecommunications Program can be utilized to expand technology to connect the schools to each other and to other schools to broaden their curriculum. Contact Sherry Paige (828-6034).
- Ultimately, academic atmosphere and performance follow from community priorities. Northfield needs to build a long-term strategy to encourage a deep discussion of the need for academic excellence, and to inspire comprehensive support for progress in the community.

Town/Village Issue

- Maybe Greg Brown at Housing and Community Affairs could be of some assistance.
- Contact Paul Cillo, chair of the Hardwick Planning board for his advice or to meet with the Northfield committee. Paul led the successful effort in Hardwick (472-6222).
- Build a charter for merger and, in advance of Town/Village votes, ask the Selectboard and Trustees to vote for a resolution to support the adoption of the merger charter, and ask them to vote unanimously for this resolution. Then send the charter with a cover letter demonstrating their support and including the specific benefits of merger to every Northfield voter and taxpayer in advance of public votes.
- Representatives of Town and Village could meet with members of a community that has successfully merged.
- The League of Cities and Towns could provide technical assistance.
- Part of the work that is required is communication. From the perspectives presented on the Community Visit Day it seems that both the Selectboard and the Village Trustees would, on the whole, support a merger. Plans should be developed to bring the larger community into a dialogue around the issue.
- The Task Force needs to do the fact finding—do the math—honestly list out the pros and cons.
- The Northfield News could play a major role in encouraging a deep debate in its pages and thereby educating the public to all sides of the issue.

- Community Forums would also be key points for dialogue. These could begin with presentation of key information on the tax structure, the repayment of existing Village and Town debt, and how that repayment will effect residents. Representatives from successfully merged towns like Richford, Stowe and Hardwick should be invited.
- Progress toward a merger will require the mobilization of broad community support. One of the main issues seemed to be the town's reticence over becoming responsible for village debt, in concern over the possibility of a default on the part of the village . With a little education this really should be a non-issue. It is very hard to think of a case of a VT municipality going down the tubes and defaulting on bonds.
- The Village and Town of Richford recently went through a successful merger (after a 1996 VCRD Community Visit). Gary Snider (Clerk), Jim Tomlinson (Selectman) and Albert Perry (community leader, 878-7618) would be good contacts to detail the process they went through.
- Cost savings are likely to be realized with a merger and overall efficiency of the governmental unit will be one of the most positive results.
- Community communications and continuity would be advanced and Northfield would strengthen its identity and reputation as a community which works together to make progress.
- The issues having to do with water/waste-water and emergency services would probably be easier to decide if there were not two boards.

Water/Wastewater Issue

- Curt Carter in the Department of Economic Development could provide some assistance when the projects reach a permitting phase (828-5233). He also has many contacts in Agency of Natural Resources that might be of some help.
- Funding could be available through the CDBG program or, depending upon the project, a VEPC tax increment financing district or reallocation approval.
- Water and Wastewater issues are likely to be some of the more challenging ones to achieve final results. From the outside, and based on what was observable on the Visit Day, Northfield appears to need to achieve better definition (clearly mapped) of the services areas and an updated allocation ordinance to deal with hook up policies (including required hook ups in the service area), fees, re-allocation of unused capacity, contribution of large users of B.O.D., etc.
- These decisions can be better made if there is a merger.
- The designation of the service area and clear standards for additional hook ups is going to be critical in getting Act 250 approval. Northfield should plan for this and address the issues of scattered growth BEFORE it get into the Act 250 process. If there is any possibility of a determination of scattered growth, the allocation ordinance (addressing the scattered growth issue) will be critical.
- The Towns of Milton and Stowe are two towns that have been caught in this issue. Ted Nelson, Milton Manager (893-6655) and Scott Dunn, Stowe Administrator (253-6135), would be good resources as to the pitfalls of the Act 250 process and how to address these issues proactively.

- Hook ups in an expanded service area (outside the current area) could be required to pay an additional hook up fee or an “impact fee” to help pay for initial costs of the infrastructure. New users in an expanded service area should help pay for the debt previously incurred by the original users.
- Protection of the water source should be a key concern of the entire Northfield community. A review of the local sewage ordinance should be undertaken and strict enforcement required. Providing sewer lines to those areas surrounding the water supply may or may not be the best solution. Extension of the lines could simply increase pressure for development. On site sewage disposal is not the only pollution danger to this water source. Intensive development will also create pollution in the form of runoff--ranging from road salt to lawn and garden chemicals and pesticides. Growth management in the identified source protection area should be part of the plan for protecting the supply. Protection may require land purchase to provide optimum control.
- Northfield might invite the Agency of Natural Resources, Northern Vermont RC&D (Beth Ann Finlay), Environmental Protection Agency, the Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration (828-2765) and Department of Health and hold a community forum on health and safety issues surrounding water and wastewater treatment and well field protection.

IV. Task Force Action Plans

Established on the January 3rd Resource Day

Downtown Task Force

Northfield needs a Downtown Planning Committee to review issues, establish priorities, attract new businesses, develop strategic parking, and, especially, to pick the Downtown Plan off the shelf, review and revise it, and put it into action.

Chairperson: Rick Van Arnam

Major issues

Economic Vitality:

- Need stronger Business
- Business Recruitment
- Something for kids
- College link w/downtown
- Need retail for vitality
- Hospitality facilities
- Vacant building and lots (i.e. Grey building, armory)

Physical Appearance:

- No center or focus
- Empty store fronts – bad impression
- Design plan for downtown (1998 plan)
- Waterfront potential

Promotion:

- Marketing what we have to offer within the community and outside the community

Action Steps

1. All committee members are to review the 1998 Downtown Plan before the next meeting.
 - Brad Denny/Rick Van Arnam will provide copies to the committee members and place a copy at the Municipal office and the Brown Library.
2. Committee will define the vision of downtown. Questions to consider:
 - Are all stakeholders represented on committee?
 - Richard Schneider, President of Norwich University, will investigate the use of an architect student to help committee with planning.
 - Richard Schneider will also have someone at NU do a scan to see what financial resources are available to communities.

3. Committee to gather all relevant information related to this issue.
4. Do downtown site visits, or have representatives come to Northfield, to help in defining our downtown vision. Also look at what it's like to do start or run a business in Northfield.
 - Create uniform questions to ask when visiting other towns and/or researching what's working not working in our own community. It was suggested that a resource be created so it's easy to start and/or run a business in Nfld.
 - Kerri Hoffman and Angie Roberts will draft questions
 - Pam Knight will get a list of all businesses in Nfld from NBPA
 - Brad Denny will work to get a list of businesses in Nfld from the municipal office.
 - Brad and Bruce Youngbluth will work together to inventory resources and impediments.
 - Take pictures of other communities
5. All members will bring a list of potential people to interview whom have considered doing business in NFLD but went elsewhere, had a business and left, or currently have a business.
6. Need to contact the Northfield Planning Committee (Steve Hatch) regarding their Master Plan and coordinate our activities with them.

Police Department/Emergency Services Task Force

The Police Department needs additional staff and increased resources to provide more competitive salaries. Police and Ambulance services need a new municipal facility.

Chairperson: Betty Podgwaite

Action Steps

1. Create and distribute an information pamphlet on emergency services in Northfield and describing volunteer opportunities.
2. Establish a Fund Raising Committee to identify what people can do to help; for example making phone calls, supporting fundraising activities and events, or helping with mailings.
3. Continue to meet as a "Building Committee" to focus on combining Ambulance and Police with the Fire Department—Invite Municipal Manager Charlie Morse to the next meeting.
4. Support EMS Bill in the Legislature.
5. Investigate whether a long-term lease may be available for building an addition on the Fire Department (on railroad-owned land).

6. Investigate the possibility of developing a First Response Course for high school students, grades 10, 11 and 12, to lead toward EMT certification. Investigate the possibility of locating such a course at Norwich University.

Resources

1. Maxine Grad – Champion for the EMS bill.
2. Alan Weiss – Building Committee.
3. Nicole Goldstein – grant writer.
4. USDA Rural Development, possible source of a facilities loan/grant (828-6032).
5. Community Development Block Grant Program for ADA accessibility (828-3211).

Academic Excellence Task Force

Northfield should develop and enact an action plan to expand curricular opportunities, and improve academic atmosphere and performance in the school.

Chair: Mary Ellen Simmons

Action Steps

1. Build community support for academic excellence through newspapers, website, newsletters, letters to the community, public forums, school board meetings, and the town report.
2. Maximize the structure of the learning system in the school through the use of outside consultants, enrichment periods, supporting the existing structure, first day of school activities, and CSO.
3. Review Curriculum: evaluate existing curriculum and align with Vermont Standards; identify Northfield student needs; develop a community service element in the curriculum; participate in monthly statewide curriculum coordination meetings.
4. Integrate Technology: Assess and ensure basic infrastructure; improve professional development; employ local cable access and Norwich resources; set up a mentoring program for teachers; assess staff skills; tap into state-wide resources—Vita learn and VISMET; and include the technology resources of the district.

Town/Village Task Force

The Town and Village of Northfield should merge to simplify community and municipal communications, raise the image of Northfield, and promote a common identity among Northfield residents as members of a unified community.

Chairpersons: Richmond Moot, Alan Weiss, Steven Jeffrey (Executive Committee)
[The Task Force sees itself as an investigative committee which will institute a full Merger Committee, if evidence warrants after investigation, and Village and Town Boards endorse the effort.]

Action Steps

1. Committee members will receive and review the merger proposal from the last Northfield attempt at merging town and village, a copy of the Richford merger plan and report to the Legislature, and results of the last merger initiative.
2. A questionnaire will be distributed with the Town Report and a series of small focus groups will be developed to articulate the reasons for the defeat of the 1999 merger proposal.
3. The committee will build a plan and timeline for future efforts towards merger within the next 30 days; depending on the evidence reviewed.
4. The Task Force would then seek official sanction from the Town Board of Selectmen and the Village Trustees to establish a Town/Village Merger Committee with additional members and adequate resources to build a merger proposal.

Resources

1. Documents: Merger Proposal, October 28, 1998, April 12, 1999, and other pertinent documents.
2. Contact other communities which have gone through this process: Hardwick, Stowe, Richford.
3. Vermont League of Cities and Towns.
4. Mel Adams.
5. Volunteers and focus group participants.

Water/Wastewater Task Force

Northfield needs to follow through with its water system expansion and build systemic responses to wastewater needs in Town and Village, and especially to protect its well field.

Chair: Kathy Lott

Action Steps

1. Investigate the feasibility of extending the sewer project to include well field protection and Northfield Falls (including analysis of the number of users [and potential users] and financial impacts).
2. Investigate funding possibilities with the Agency of Natural Resources and USDA Rural Development.
3. Work with the Planning Commission to identify higher density areas in Municipal Plan

Resources

1. Agency of Natural Resources.
2. USDA Rural Development

V. Notes and Major Issues

Points of Testimony from the Community Visit Day, November 6th, 2001

Resource Team A –Industrial Development Issue, Natural Resources & Recreation Issue, and Downtown Development Issue

Paul Costello – Executive Director, VT Council on Rural Development (Team Facilitator)

Chris D’Elia, Commissioner, VT Department of Economic Development

Richard Angney, Executive Director, Central VT Economic Development Corp (CVEDC)

Wayne Fawbush, Executive Director, VT Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF)

George Malek, Executive Director, Central VT Chamber of Commerce (CVCC)

Sherry Paige, Community & Business Outreach Specialist, USDA Rural Development (Scribe)

I. Industrial Development Issue Focus Group

Brad Denny

Angie Fernandez

John Donahue

Rick Van Arnam

Melanie Menagh

Dexter Landers

Dick Moot

Russ Todd

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- There is a strong Wood Products Industry.
- Access to transportation (rail, freight, interstate) is very good.
- Northfield residents have a very strong work ethic.
- There is space available that can be made useful.
- There is a strong hand labor sector in Northfield.
- Both Nantana and Bean Industrial Park are not fully developed. There is space available for new businesses or expansions.
- TDS (telecommunications) is committed to rural areas and to Northfield so Northfield residents have access to high-speed Internet connection.
- The textile industry is thriving due to high tech inventory management systems.
- Northfield makes a good impression on first time visitors.
- Northfield has natural beauty, homes and rental space and is the home to Norwich University.
- Northfield is identified as a university town.
- Electric infrastructure was totally replaced recently.
- There are 290 businesses (some world class) in Northfield.
- There are opportunities for small entrepreneurs to grow in Northfield.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- Some residents might not want to industrialize Northfield; there is no consensus.
- Some fear that bringing in more industry could make Northfield into another Williston.
- There were retail stores around the common that are now empty or are offices.
- Many residents outside of the Village of Northfield do not want industry.
- Some residents believe that Northfield is a bedroom community.
- Development should be in Bean Industrial Park, not in downtown area zoned for commercial/mixed use.
- People would welcome high tech businesses rather than granite plants.
- Products are manufactured/produced in Northfield, but sold outside of Northfield.
- TDS is an industry that sells telecommunications in region, not just in Northfield.
- The Norwich University faculty that used to live in Northfield, now lives outside.
- No immediate housing is available; no new housing is being built; the market is tight.
- Spouses' jobs/employment are not available in Northfield.
- There is a perception that the Northfield School System is not very good.
- Electricity rates are 2 stage rates, one for winter and one for summer.
- Act 250 regulations act as impediments.
- Water and sewer rates are high.
- There is infrastructure for businesses in Northfield, but it is expensive.
- There is no current or local effort (except for CVEDC) to bring industry into Northfield.
- There is no local committee to draw and support industry.
- Northfield may need to import labor if new industry comes in.
- Real estate tax rates are high.
- Residents need to go out of Northfield for just about everything.
- There is no movie theater anymore.
- There is no real sit-down family-style middle class restaurant anymore.
- The Municipal Manager is supposed to be coordinating the local effort to bring new businesses into Northfield, but has too many other things to do.
- Northfield is not considered a progressive community by many; this is a marketing challenge.
- In the 1960's during the Vietnam War, Northfield was looked down upon by the media due to the presence of a military college (Norwich University) in town.
- Certain television stations refuse to show Norwich University sports and events.
- Northfield needs to market itself.
- Some people want to expose what is going on in the Selectboard.
- Some of the wood products producers have been getting solicitations from North Dakota to relocate.
- There are few resources for advertising for this small community.
- The school system is not large or wealthy. There are few Advanced Placement courses and the size limits the curriculum.
- Some feel the need to change internal perception of Northfield with a public relations effort for residents and businesses.

- Northfield has no plan for what development is wanted here.
- The community should develop the industries that are in Northfield rather than seek to bring in new ones.
- CVEDC and the State of Vermont are not being pushed to work on economic development in Northfield.
- In the future the feds are going to be spending money in energy and defense, not on rural economic development.
- Internal communications are weak.
- There is no newspaper, phone system, or television station that reaches everyone.
- Internal communications exist only through the tax bills.
- Northfield Town should merge with the Village.
- If you live in the village, you can be on the board in town. However, if you live in the town, you cannot be on the Village board.

Key Challenges Summary

1. There is no single, locally active group to lead planning for industrial development that fits into Northfield and working to draw in new businesses and manufacturers and support existing industry.
2. Northfield needs to market itself based on its assets and attractiveness.
3. Town/Village divisions are a distraction to the town's internal communications and external reputation/image.

II. Natural Resources & Recreation Issue Focus Group

*Mack Golterman
Meg Donahue Davis
Nelson Hoffman
Frank Pecora
Carol Jean Sutor
Gail Lawson*

*Craig Sullivan
Kelly Young
Conrad Motyka
Don Wallace
Becky Merrilees
Ann Walton*

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- There are hiking trails, beaver ponds, and wildlife on Paine Mountain.
- The ridgeline trail runs from Darling Road to the Northfield Line on the Berlin side of Paine Mountain. This is developed and cleared by the Berlin Conservation Commission.
- The Berlin Pond Area on the east side of the ride is conserved from possible development.
- The Northfield Youth Group has interest in a master recreation plan.

- Norwich University engineering students designed a bike path from Northfield Falls to Memorial Park Recreation Pool that connects both recreation fields—the plan is on a shelf.
- The snowmobile club has many members who do trail work for permission to use trails.
- These recreation trails can be used year round for walking, bird-watching, hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing.
- Northfield has ball fields, a golf course, tennis courts, and a soccer field.
- Northfield has a newly formed Jazz band, an Arts Activities group, a community chorus. In addition, youth and adults perform Broadway plays on the common.
- There are unique natural resources in Northfield.
- Norwich University is generous in support of ‘community activities.’
- There are monthly meetings held between the Municipal Manager and Norwich University staff.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- Out of state landowners will not give right of way access to parts of the ridgeline trails.
- The trails must be protected.
- There must be an opportunity to form a Conservation Commission.
- Northfield needs to develop the political will to have a recreation plan and to build support to provide resources.
- The Bike Path plan designed by Norwich University Engineering students needs VTRANS & environmental review and approval.
- Funds are needed to conduct an inventory of resources for planning purposes.
- There is no arts studio.
- There is no place for theater rehearsals.
- There are no indoor activities for the arts.
- The residents of Northfield need to identify the organizations and partners who are interested in building recreation.
- Land is being posted so people can’t get into the backcountry; you can’t walk between houses anymore and some access roads are posted.
- Unused roads are allowed to grow up rather than made into trails.
- Posted land limits access for those who want to walk in the hills.
- Because of posted land and guardrails, there is limited access to the Dog River.
- Northfield needs to clean up the shoreline, the brush and junk, behind the Senior Center and behind the market to make trails.
- There is a possibility of developing a park on the waterside site of the Cetrangolo lot.
- Is the town willing to put aside resources/funds into a Conservation Plan and Commission?
- How much does the town really want to protect? Back roads, 1 – 2 acre plots, changing landscape, look & access. Will the town put funds into this?
- There is no recreation field at the high school. There is no place for a physical education field.

- There is nothing within a quarter mile from high school for the schools to use as a physical education field.
- There is a combination soccer field and baseball field in Northfield.
- The high school is using the church parking lot for student parking. If there is an event in the gym & in the auditorium, there is no parking available.
- Northfield has no bowling alley.
- If Northfield had a community recreation center, they could schedule play and court time, use it as a meeting place, a youth center, and a center for the arts. There are location and funding sustainability challenges.
- Northfield does not have night volleyball, aerobics, or other nighttime activities.
- There is no trailhead parking in Northfield.
- Outsiders do use the hiking trails.
- There is no developed market for trail use by Norwich University, or local schools.
- There are no dining and lodging facilities for nighttime visitors on “big” event weekends.
- The establishment of a Conservation/Recreation Commission could serve as a clearinghouse for requests for information regarding physical activities, art events, and protection of natural resources.
- People do not respect personal property (use roadside as dump site for tires, junk, etc.).
- There is tension between large property landowners and users of recreation and resources.
- Northfield needs to maintain rural roads.
- There has been an increase in the town grand list of 1% per year and there has been an increase in the inflation rate of 3% per year; the select Board gets grief when tax bills come out.
- Teen ‘group sports’ seem to be supported more by the community than ‘individual’ sport activities.
- Town funds cannot support an increase in budget. There is a need to search for outside grant funding or volunteer activity.
- Dogwood Glen Apartments has debris that is difficult to deal with because of access. The Dam area has the same problem. Town cannot put equipment into the Dog River, the debris needs to be brought to the road for removal.
- Political relationships need to be addressed between the town and schools (elementary, middle, high school and Norwich University).
- There needs to be a separate Natural Resource Plan and a Recreation Plan.
- There needs to be some internal communication to connect landowners along the trails.
- There are many litterbugs using the trails. People are not respecting the landowners.
- Establish a friends group to monitor (police) the trails.
- The Garvey Hill School property is damaged on a regular basis by high school and college students. In fact, grade school kids set fire to school recently.
- There is friction between Cadets at Norwich University using the streets for running and then Norwich posting their land against hunting by residents.
- Even though there are monthly meetings held between the Municipal Manager and Norwich University staff, communication between Northfield residents and Norwich needs to be strengthened.

Key Challenges Summary

1. Northfield has a wealth of outdoor assets that are not catalogued, protected, tended, or, in some cases, cleaned up.
2. Northfield needs a Conservation/Recreation Commission to plan in the public interest for trails, river access, the preservation of natural resources, to enhance the town, and to serve as a communications clearinghouse for outdoor and indoor recreational activities.
3. Northfield has a great variety of indoor recreational activities already in place but no one center for information or activity.
4. A community center could bring indoor recreational activities under one roof and provide opportunities in theatre and the arts.

III. Downtown Development Issue Focus Group

*Art Hambleton
Libby Hambleton
Richmond Moot
Jane Bryant
Rick Van Arnam
John Donahue, Jr.
Kerri Hoffman*

*Frank Plumley
Brad Denny
Jill Donahue
Susan Podowski
Scott Neal
Angie Fernandez
Richard Suitor*

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- You can park in one spot and pay all your bills in 5 minutes. Free Parking.
- There is a complement of businesses to provide necessities, services and goods.
- Northfield has an improved Common. The downtown is central, clean and appealing.
- The design of the Village and the way downtown works are key Northfield strengths.
- People know you on a first name basis.
- There is potential space in the “Depot” where the Merchants Bank branch is located.
- There is easy access without the problems of big trucks like Route 4.
- There is high-speed Internet access for small businesses.
- The few retail outlets are very good and strong.
- The fire department is in a well-lighted location near the downtown common.
- There is a place behind the fire department and common that is used for big activities (circus, town fairs)
- There is a variety of stores in Northfield.
- There is space open for development at Cetrangolo’s that will be crucial to the future of downtown.
- The Dog River runs through downtown (and has ducks in it).

- The long-serving Northfield Business and Professional Association has goals, organizes group Christmas activities, and holds a banquet in the spring honoring a local merchant.
- Most of the upper floors around the downtown are occupied as apartments or office space.
- More people are telecommuting, so having the cable Company in town is a great asset for small businesses that need high-speed Internet access.
- The Municipal Manager has applied for a planning grant from CVRPC.
- The Municipal Manager has applied for “Downtown Designation.”
- Road services are very good.
- Seniors can walk to shop in downtown.
- There is a new Chief of Police. There is an officer walking downtown now that was never there before.
- The ‘live’ camera downtown has reduced problems.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- The relationship between Norwich University and the downtown is tenuous. Although there are 1200 students on the Norwich campus, the students make very little impact on downtown businesses, even the pizza place. The students do not come downtown; they go out of town.
- Norwich University owns a lot of property but is tax-exempt.
- Downtown needs to attract Norwich faculty, visitors and students; students do not tend to walk downtown.
- Northfield needs facilities to keep visitors lodging here. If you build up the traffic, then more business will come downtown.
- Norwich University does some business with Northfield, but they could do more.
- Northfield does not have much lodging to offer visitors.
- There are only 4 weekends each year when there is a high visitor rate.
- Lodging owners do not like to have students as lodgers.
- Northfield is lacking small business services (printer/copier access--Kinkos, mail delivery services--UPS/Mailboxes Etc.).
- There is no bookstore in Northfield.
- Northfield is perceived as a “bedroom community” by some residents. Pizza Hut won’t come here – that is good; Kinkos won’t come here – that is bad. It is a numbers game.
- There are more than 1,000 jobs in Northfield; it is not just a “bedroom community.”
- There is no Downtown Plan.
- Actually, Northfield spent \$30,000 developing a Downtown Plan. The Municipal Manager at that time had a conflict with the Selectboard and left. The Downtown Plan hasn’t been reviewed or implemented since.
- There is no UPS or FedEx stop here unless they are called.
- Norwich University operates its own printing facility.
- Strategic parking is an issue – you cannot park to pick up a pizza or prescriptions at the pharmacy.
- There is no control over the parking time (no limits).

- There is the possibility of paving the back parking lot behind TDS for excess parking of downtown employees.
- Sidewalks need repair.
- The budget is tight for enhancements or maintenance (for example, the wall along the common is getting bad.)
- There is the feeling of “Why should people who don’t go downtown pay for sidewalks?”
- The Selectboard doesn’t see putting electrical lines under the sidewalks in their budget.
- There is the perception that Norwich University is not really a part of Northfield.
- People leave Northfield to shop. It doesn’t have what people want at the lower big place prices. Convenience store prices are higher.
- There is competition outside of Northfield (i.e. The Berlin Mall, Ames Plaza).
- Residents travel to shopping centers because they can’t get items in town that are needed on a regular basis.
- The economics of using a mail order catalog or night shopping over the Internet takes business away from Northfield.
- There are currently 2 empty storefronts on the common.
- The Village might consider putting a Plaza at Cetrangolo’s site.
- The market is tight for single-family home purchases and rentals for families.
- The Downtown Plan needs funding to put it into effect.
- With the events at the Norwich University, the Armory, and the Quilt Festival, Northfield needs lodging for more than just Norwich’s 4 big weekends.
- Northfield should look for a hotel to keep people in Northfield when they visit.
- The tax base is high compared to census. Services are good, however the rates are high.
- There is no ‘joint Town & Village’ planning commission to capture ideas for planning, but there is a Central Vermont regional planning commission for the region.
- There needs to be an official committee to improve the internal communications with business owners and the planning commission.
- The movie theater in town burned down and was not replaced. Consider using Cetrangolo’s site for a standard size restaurant and movie theater.
- There is a need for more senior housing in the downtown area.
- There is a problem with the youth at the walking bridge harassing little children and older senior citizens.
- There is a question as to what is going to be done with the Armory Building, as it will be 2 to 5 years before it will be available to municipal or local organizations.
- Northfield faces a transition as to how to develop the downtown area. How Cetrangolo’s site is developed can change activities in downtown. There is a need to have creative open discussions on developing the plan for the Cetrangolo site.
- There are enough parking spaces in downtown, just not enough convenient spaces. Employees may park in front or non-customers remain in choice spots.
- No one really wants to create parking behind the common stores.
- There is a suggestion to pay police to patrol parking if the town institutes a 2-hour parking; but it costs too much to do that.
- Develop a walking path to encourage people to walk the river walk.
- A coordinated plan is needed for pedestrian traffic flow.
- Publicize town plan revision process, as we need people/residents to participate.

- How can we create a forum for safe talking and discussion?

Key Challenges Summary

1. Northfield lacks a Downtown Planning Committee to review issues, establish priorities, and attract new businesses.
2. The existing Downtown Plan is sitting on a shelf: it could be dusted off, reviewed, and, depending on its current relevance, followed or adjusted toward real results for downtown.
3. There is no town development plan for the Cetrangolo site—including its possible public purchase.
4. There is no active Downtown Plan to incorporate long-term goals of bringing a restaurant and hotel to Northfield, strategically expand parking, and build better relations with Norwich to gain more downtown/university partnerships.
5. There is an historic opportunity for the renovation and redevelopment of the old gray school.

Resource Team B – Utilities Issue, Community Communication (Internal and External) Issues and Emergency Services/Municipal Facilities Issue

Jolinda LaClair – State Director, USDA Rural Development (Team Facilitator)

Anita Bird – General Manager, Times Argus

James Walton – Commissioner, VT Dept. of Public Safety

Duncan Hastings – Town Administrator, Town of Georgia

Susan Sinclair – Executive Director, Central Vermont Regional Development Council

Col. Ed O'Neill, VT National Guard

Carolyn Lawrence, Special Projects Coordinator, USDA Rural Development (Scribe)

I. Utilities Issue Focus Group

John Marcotte

Clovis DeLary

Tom McCarney

Lynn Sanders

Steven Jeffrey

Dan Dilena

Don Wallace

Melanie Menagh

Charlie Morse

Richard Suitor

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- The taste of the water is exceptional with very little chlorine—it's of high quality compared to "city water" elsewhere.
- Water comes from well fields, nor reservoirs so it never sees the light of day till it comes out of the tap.
- Both Village and Town boards have similar concerns regarding the water.
- Only cast iron is used on the systems, which means they are in fairly good condition.

- Thirty acres around the well field has been purchased for its protection.
- There is a sewer plant in town.
- The sewer plant needs to be upgraded but the town has received a \$6,000,000 grant.
- The sewer plant has capacity for more hook ups.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- The area around the well field is controlled by the town but owned and operated by the village. It is becoming a high-density area, with septic systems from 136 properties located above the well field; there is a danger of future contamination.
- Not everyone is on the public water or sewer system.
- Participants are not sure of exactly who is and who isn't on the system—there's a need for an inventory of users.
- The sewer plant was built in 1966 and needs to be upgraded.
- There are some in the Village, even on Main Street, who rely on cesspools rather than the sewer system.
- The community is working to extend water and sewer lines to South Northfield on Rt. 12, to Northfield Falls, and to extend sewer lines to the mobile home park on Rt. 12A.
- The sewer system is funded by user fees, but issues of protecting the water source make the sewer issue of concern to the full Northfield community.
- Town residents pay sewer, water, and electric fees but do not have voting rights in Village; Town/Village boundaries do not always mark the end of respective service areas.
- Hook ups must be economically feasible for new users.
- Many areas are not now served by public utilities.
- How do the town and village work together to solve these issues? How do you divide costs and share financing between town and village?
- In order to entice future economic development, you need to have dependable affordable services, and infrastructure.
- How big does Northfield really want to grow? What does that mean for needs in the long run?
- The plant itself has capacity for additional hook-ups.
- There are approximately 1,000 water users/900 sewer users.
- Goals cited include protection of the wellhead, and extending lines to 2 major areas.
- The water system is about 100 years old and needs an increase in pipe size.
- Businesses (restaurant) cannot expand because of limited sewage treatment capacity.
- The utilities' systems do not follow map-lines between Town and Village.

Key Challenges Summary

1. Major projects to protect the wellhead and to extend lines need broad support, and support beyond the Village.
2. Town/Village divisions are a distraction and make common action to plan and resource community-wide interests more complicated.
3. Northfield lacks concerted and consensus housing and industrial development plans today.

II. Communication Issue (Internal and External) Focus Group

*James Wilson
Jody Wheeler
Rick Van Arnam
Brad Denny
Jacquelyn Comi
Pam Knight*

*John Donahue Jr.
Scott Brooks
Alan Weiss
Kathleen Lott
Jane Bryant*

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- There are invaluable, informal gathering and information exchange locations in Northfield.
- Many people that belong to one organization also belong to another—cross memberships help in information exchange.
- Northfield has its own newspaper, Northfield News, telephone company, and cable company (there's cable in village, not in town).
- The governmental structure in Northfield is very open and flexible.
- Northfield holds an annual Labor Day Parade that is attended by people from across the state.
- Northfield also hosts the annual quilt festival.
- Northfield is going to have a new high tech armory.
- Northfield has its own web page—which needs updating.
- Both the World and the Times Argus cover some activities in Northfield.
- A school newsletter is produced.
- A community calendar is being designed.
- Town meetings are televised.
- The Northfield Post Office is a good gathering place for the exchange of information.
- Northfield has a strong Business and Professional Association made up of almost 50 business-people from the 290 businesses in town.
- Many employees of Northfield businesses live in the community.
- Trans Video allows for high-speed internet access.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- Many would like to see the Northfield Newsletter come back.
- There is no one type of communication that reaches everyone in Northfield—many groups only communicate internally.
- There needs to be coordination between the different vehicles of communication.
- Many would like to see the Norwich Guidon (newspaper) made available to Northfield residents.
- Many do not feel they are connected to Norwich or to what happens there and are not aware of what Norwich and the students contribute to Northfield.

- Because of the segmentation of Northfield into Town/Village and smaller centers of Northfield Falls and Rt. 12 South, many feel that communications are insular; they don't feel they are one community.
- People have not received enough information from the National Guard about the new armory that is coming to town; they don't know what it will mean for the future.
- Many people would like to see a community calendar, published on all communication mediums.
- An increase in the sense of the community as a whole through communications could encourage residents to invest in the community and support local businesses.
- One current perception is that Northfield is not a center for commerce—there is no money to be made in Northfield, therefore there is no money invested for advertising and showcasing Northfield.
- A PR campaign could help.
- The outside perception of Northfield is not the reality.
- Northfield residents don't believe they get accurate or fair coverage from the Times Argus and other media – coverage has been mostly negative, although relations with the Times Argus are improving.
- A paid employee could provide communications through the community by monitoring a Web page, bulletin board, and building systemic connections to Norwich.

Key Challenges Summary

1. Communications gaps and insularity fragment some community efforts, undermine identification with Northfield as a whole, and lead to uncoordinated activities.
2. There is no plan or organized effort today to communicate more effectively with the regional media in order to broadcast a positive image of Northfield.
3. Northfield residents need to be apprised in more detail about the new armory and how it will affect the town.
4. Northfield/Norwich relations could be improved with better and more systematic communications.

III. Emergency Services/Municipal Facilities Issue Focus Group

*Betty Podgwaite
Ellen Powell
Jeffrey Shaw
Bill Lyon
Michael Abraham*

*Mark Podgwaite
Katherine Lyford
Alan Weiss
Dave Jennings
Jim Boraw*

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Northfield has 24-hour police coverage with five full time police officers.

- The police department equipment is in good condition.
- The fire department is well organized, has a good station, and adequate space.
- There is public water and sewer available.
- The municipal building is a good facility.
- The Norwich University students that perform EMS duty are very valuable.
- There is good ambulance equipment with 15 volunteers.
- There is a good senior center available.
- There is a Serve Program that provides services to low income and seniors.
- Norwich has a Reparative Board to give offenders an alternative to jail.
- There are Success-By-Six and Head Start programs.
- Norwich security, the police department, sheriff's department and state police are not territorial; they work well together.
- The fire department provides good service because most volunteers work and live locally.
- There is an excellent relationship with Norwich University. They provide manpower for fires, search and rescues, EMS, ambulance and security needs.
- Norwich commits funds to the town for emergency services.
- The fire department is very prepared.
- Northfield has a fine town-owned library.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- There is a need for a public safety building (\$900,000 - \$1,000,000) to house the police department and the ambulance.
- It is difficult to attract volunteer members for the ambulance.
- The training time for ambulance workers is high—120 hours—and recertification is required every two years. This is paid for by the individual up front and then reimbursed.
- The staffing for the police department is less per capita than that of other towns, and wages are low.
- The Fire Chief is working too many hours.
- Police need a policy and procedures manual—The Chief has to put in too many hours on the beat to pull this together. He works up to 15-hour days.
- Taxes are high in Northfield, and bonding for P.D. Fire, and emergency services are low on the totem pole.
- Police/Fire/Emergency Services are separate but not equal municipal operations.
- At the present time, the fire department is staffed by volunteers who are paid by hours of service; there may come a time when full time fire fighters are needed to provide more service and better response time.
- The Senior Center faces budgeting challenges and needs more volunteers especially Meals on Wheels drivers.
- There is only one 4-wheel drive vehicle available in the police department.
- The police department is very short staffed.
- Funding mechanisms for the various emergency serves are not equal.
- Billing for services does not cover costs.
- Ambulance service has very low visibility because of the nature of the service.

- There are needless disconnects and complexities in budgeting between services, town and village boards, and municipal manager.
- A Town/Village merger could improve the coordination of services and rationalize the budget process.
- Affordable Housing, especially senior housing is also an issue.

Key Challenges Summary

1. The building and infrastructure for the Police Department and Ambulance needs upgrading.
2. The Police Department is understaffed, underpaid, and lacks sufficient vehicles.
3. Funding and organization are subject to disconnects and irrationality because of the division between Town and Village.

Resource Team C – Youth Activities & Community Center Issues, Affordable Housing, Student Housing and Zoning Issues, and Northfield Educational System Issue,

Hal Cohen – Executive Director, Central VT Community Action Council (Team Facilitator)

Andy Broderick – President, Housing Vermont

Jeff Francis – Executive Director, Vermont Superintendents Association

William Kurtz – Chief of Staff, Senator Jeffords Office

Ray Proulx – Consultant

Fred Schmidt – Director, UVM Center for Rural Studies

Candy Koenemann, Executive Assistant, Vermont Council on Rural Development (Scribe)

I. Youth Activities/Community Center Issues Focus Group

Jane Bryant

Rep. Maxine Grad

Carol Todd

Frank W. Plumley

Meg Donahue Davis

Dot Maver

Mary Diego

Rebecca Macijeski

Courtney Delaney

Robin Skiffington

Sunsetta Avery

Ravyn Ashford

Leslie Striebe

Edward Tracy

Melanie Menagh

Alan Weiss

James Lott

Annie Gould

Cole Ryan

Dyanne Demas

Molly Slater

Terrie Ashford

Kelly Young

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- The community has many individuals with passion and willingness to work for youth.
- Numerous safe, drug-free, and diverse activities are available for those with sports, arts, and other interests.
- Youth serve in leadership roles on boards and committees throughout the community.
- Various activities include all age groups, which allows for cross generation participation.
- Community members are supportive of youth and are generous with donations and volunteering their time.
- The school administration provides support to the Northfield youth.
- There is a strong music program in the community (lessons, dance, chorus, plays, school programs and jazz program).
- The library has just hired a Youth Librarian.
- Norwich contributes hugely to community youth through the mentoring program (studying and community activities) and the use of some University facilities and fields (hockey rink, soccer fields, rifle range, baseball fields, swimming pool for Wavemakers Swim Team, use of library, and site for graduation). Some areas are off-limits due to security and liability issues.
- The Norwich food service donates food to the youth center on a regular basis, feeding as many of 25 students per night and providing lunches for the summer program.
- Norwich provides employment opportunities.
- Norwich has a community service representative to work with the community.
- There is a partnership with Woodbury College that helps with youth mediation.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- There are so many groups and so many different activities that coordination is needed to avoid the scheduling conflicts that are currently happening. Better communication between groups should be developed.
- There is a youth center, but space is limited and inadequate for the demands.
- Youth Center participation starts at the 6th grade level; the space should be expanded to include programs for younger age children. This would help to continue the benefits and reinforce the rules learned in the summer programs.
- A Community Center to serve all age groups is needed. The old Armory is seen as a good potential site.
- While there are over 65 activity programs in Northfield, there are still a great number whose needs are not being met.
- People who are currently not participating should be surveyed to identify their interests so that activities can be directed to their unmet needs.
- The empty Cetrangolo site is potential space for a movie theatre, “malt shop”, and other desirable social activities.
- Drinking is a huge problem for both youth and adults. The perception is you are an adult when you can “hold your liquor”. There is a need to educate all age groups that alcohol is not necessary to celebrate or have a good time. Other alternatives are needed.
- Cross-generation community celebrations should be planned (at recent soccer championships-adults “partied” together and the students held their own parties with

alcohol involved.) Non-alcohol gatherings such as post-theatrical cast parties have been successful in the past.

- Alcohol, drugs, pregnancy and suicide are major issues.
- Multi-generation interaction, skill-teaching and relationship building are desired. Suggestions were to expand annual SHINE Span Night to occur more than once a year and include Game/Pot Luck night for all ages (checkers, chess, bridge and other card games), Christmas party potluck, summer multi-generation field games (i.e., three legged race with youngster and senior citizen) and other bonding activities.
- Dances at both middle and high school are well attended but there are only a few dances per year.
- Norwich provides a positive influence through mentoring, but some Northfield youth manage to attend off-campus college parties and access alcohol.
- Violence and fighting are not specifically a problem, but there is some fighting at the “gate” by elementary students.
- Use of bad language is a problem starting at the elementary school level.
- Youth smoking (cigarettes and marijuana) at the “ walking bridge” is a problem. Eight and nine year olds are encouraged to smoke, and in some cases intimidation is used to get the youth to try smoking.
- Fundraising and volunteer staffs help somewhat, but more money is needed to address the needs of current and future programs and provide a larger facility. Two grants (New Directions and Drug Free Communities) have been beneficial.
- The partial-year PTA after-school program has an 80% participation rate, but year-round, age-appropriate programs are needed.
- Transportation is a major issue, particularly for outlying areas (Roxbury, Northfield Falls). The summer programs are especially impacted.
- For some students, the scheduled school bus runs (which transports over 50% of students) are the only means of travel, so they cannot participate in programs that fall outside school time frames. Summer and mud season (6-8 weeks) are the most difficult times.
- Walking is dangerous along Route 12 since there are limited sidewalks.
- More parent involvement would benefit both family relationships and programs.

Key Challenges Summary

1. There are many who would like to see a multi-generational Community Center.
2. Transportation to activities is challenging for youth outside the Village.
3. There is not enough communication and coordination of activities between groups.
4. Alcohol and drugs are critical issues; current programs don’t always reach those most at risk.

II. Affordable/Student Housing/Zoning Issues Focus Group

Joseph O’Brien
Martha Mathis
Angie Fernandez

Rose Audet
Sheila Ruel
Paula Sambel

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- Communication with Norwich is good concerning student housing issues; Norwich is responsive.
- Some rental property is affordable.
- Average housing quality is okay, with some at each extreme.
- There is a good facility for seniors, but there is a long waiting list.
- There are three nursing homes, again with waiting list.
- Zoning seems to be flexible and good.
- Dogwood Glen and the trailer parks provide housing for low-income residents.
- Norwich and Village residents have formed a sub-committee that is dealing with conflicts created by student residents.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- There is a need for new moderate cost housing; there is little new construction.
- More housing that is designed for the elderly is needed to accommodate those whose homes are now too big and who lack alternatives.
- There is a large quantity of vacant space where housing could be developed.
- Some feel rentals are scarce and costs are too high. Scarcity drives up prices.
- Students who use off-campus housing take up just enough of the apartments to create shortages.
- Student apartments seem to “clump” on several of the streets, which creates issues. (Norwich has helped by instituting noise ordinances and implementing high fines for violations.)
- Taxes are high in both the town and village, but most Vermont communities complain about the tax rates.
- The education system needs to be more competitive in order to attract new families to the area.
- Many of the Village apartments are owned by out-of-state landlords.
- Delany House (an assisted living facility) is not being fully utilized; there are always openings and there is a need to communicate what they can provide.
- Northfield Falls has a sewage problem, and a number of residents have their own septic system; these people might not want to access the municipal system.
- Conflict between village and town residents places the sewer project in a position where the State will fine the town if the village residents don’t approve the vote for the mandatory sewer system upgrades.
- Industrial and commercial development is limited by the lack of housing, but more tax base would probably encourage new housing.

- New housing is much desired but participants fear that the current division of town and village and fragmented management services will continue to be an obstacle.
- There is no housing plan in place; there needs to be a vision. The 5 year plan is too ambiguous.
- Merger of the Town and Village is the way to move forward. The Village manages utilities and the Town manages fire, police and roads. The process is complex and burdensome; it breaks down efficiency without any real gain.
- The focus has been on current factors and not on a long-term vision for Northfield.

Key Challenges Summary

1. The Town/Village organizational landscape interferes with a common vision of Northfield; until the issue is resolved, both industrial and housing development are impeded.
2. The 5-year plan for housing is out of date and does not project specific goals and actions.
3. Communications on available assisted living services for seniors are weak and uncoordinated.
4. Northfield needs new moderate and low-cost housing and additional senior housing.

III. Northfield Educational System Issue Focus Group

*Charlie Morse
Dave Potter
Peter Evans
Kelly Young
Rose Beatty
Ann Walton
Mary Denny*

*Courtney Delany
Rebecca Macijeski
Richard Higgins
Jerry Asselin
Donald Boardman
Austin Commons*

Points of Testimony

Community Strengths

- The school facility is great shape having been remodeled just 7 years ago.
- All 3 schools and the district office are located on one campus.
- The community and schools work well together; Norwich is supportive too.
- Northfield kids get into competitive colleges; this reflects good teachers and preparedness.
- The school staff shows good work ethic and dedication.
- The school district is forthcoming with information.
- The school staff is open to change and improvements; the status quo is not acceptable as a goal.
- The K-12 system can look at whole education picture; it's preferable to a union district.
- There is excellent communication regarding bonds and the need for expenditure.
- There is a push to get students involved in the decision-making process.

- The New Directions Grant shows collaborative work between school and community members.
- There has been a successful partnership with Woodbury College.
- The Norwich University Mentoring Program is doing well and growing.
- One school system serves both Town and Village; there are no divisive issues.
- Norwich provides for a number of full scholarships for Northfield students.

Challenges in this Issue Area

- Schools suffer from inadequate funding—there is not enough business tax base. Northfield is a receiving town for Act 60 money.
- Enrollment is declining; the projection for next 10 years is for a further decline in numbers. There are currently about 1000 students, pre-schools through 12th grade.
- The census is not going down, but the population is getting older.
- More space is needed for athletic fields and playgrounds.
- Residential areas surround schools and prohibit the expansion of grounds.
- Parking is a problem.
- Having one campus produces traffic issues.
- 6th Graders have no playground at all.
- The community perception is that sports get more attention than academics.
- Non-community perceptions are that Northfield has awful schools that only produce “jocks”.
- Students feel that all the energy goes to sports and have a misguided impression that learning is only secondary.
- Northfield is one of 39 schools receiving State technical assistance because of low academic performance.
- Basic Reading, Math and English skills need to be emphasized more.
- Little attention is given to “gifted” students; athletes and “bad” kids get attention.
- Gifted students want meaningful assignments, not just busy work.
- The school should address the needs of all students in its diverse student body, but limited resources inhibit efforts.
- Foreign language options are very limited; only Spanish is offered.
- Reading instruction needs to be given in higher grades than the elementary level; reading skills are lacking in upper grades.
- English grammar and sentence structure needs to be taught more comprehensively.
- Parental involvement seems to drop off around the 4th and 5th grade level. There is a high turnout for sporting events but low attendance at open houses.
- Some athletes are also academic achievers but low achievers are motivated to do any activity and seem to lack parental involvement.
- There has been more stability in the school administration and community budget support in the last five years.
- Because it is served by a private telephone service and not Bell Atlantic, Northfield is left out of the distance-learning satellite program.
- The curriculum needs to include integrated math that uses real life problems, starting as early as first grade.

- Off site “work-based learning” opportunities need to be clearer in performance expectations and designed to give more realistic work experience.

Key Challenges Summary

1. There are deficits in terms of academic atmosphere, curricular opportunities, and performance.
2. There is a lack of field space for playground and sports.
3. There is not enough sustained parental involvement and leadership toward academic, rather than athletic, excellence, especially for the higher grades and high school.

VI. Resource Team Members

1. Community Visit Day Focus Group Team

**This team met with community members in nine focus sessions on
November 6, 2001**

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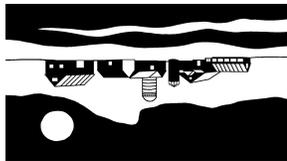
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