

## Report to the Northfield Select Board and Town Manager

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November 12, 2020

The first two months of my tenure as Northfield's Economic Development Director have been incredibly busy, yet extremely fulfilling. I have been extensively networking with residents, businesses, and organizations to build a coalition committed to realizing the plans and goals crafted over the past decade. It's been inspiring to work with impassioned local citizens who want to see the best for Northfield, and I'm confident that with the support I have been receiving thus far, very little stands in the way of Northfield reaching its fullest potential. In addition to my routine responsibilities that are detailed in the Town Plan and my job description, I have been pursuing other projects to further the mission of Northfield's development, as elucidated in the following report.

### Recent Activities

- 1. Developed a funding database:** During my first few weeks as the Economic Development Director, I comprehensively researched funding opportunities (grants and financing) and developed a database that categorized each funding opportunity by sector (housing, ag, municipal, etc.)
- 2. Built a business database:** In my first three weeks I researched federal, state and local sources to find every active, registered business in Northfield. A database of ~200 business has been created and is updated frequently. It is my goal to call every business to glean a deeper understanding of their work and their needs.
- 3. Initiated an overhaul of the municipal website:** Updating the Town of Northfield municipal site was identified as a priority task. A web developer has been retained and a website hosting service has been purchased. A site template was recently selected, and the developer is currently building the site architecture. The new website will likely be launched in early December.
- 4. Building a promotional website:** Northfield needs to be marketed, as addressed in the V-DAT. Given the current reliance on online media, a website would be an effective strategy to market Northfield as a great place to visit, live and start a business. This website will promote existing businesses, attractions, the community and its quality of life. The quality of this website would match if not exceed promotional websites like [experiencemiddlebury.com](http://experiencemiddlebury.com), [gostowe.com](http://gostowe.com), or [discoverwaterbury.com](http://discoverwaterbury.com). The purpose of this website is not to portray Northfield as something that it isn't, but rather, showcase what Northfield is and disseminate this brand across the region. I recently sent out a survey on Front Porch Forum, and 45 respondents provided detailed suggestions about how they want Northfield to be branded, what qualities should be showcased, and what features the website should include (high quality photography, a community calendar, a business directory, "business of the month" profiles, etc.). Proposals for the construction of this website are currently being received, with a likely design-build cost of roughly \$10,000. A formal presentation will be made to the Select Board soon.

- 5. Providing support to citizen groups interested in building a dog park and a community garden:**  
Two individuals have separately approached me about building a dog park and a community garden, and I have been providing research assistance to these endeavors in addition to being a liaison to the municipal government.
- 6. Attended two farmers markets:** I attended the last two farmers markets of the season to directly meet with producers and citizens of Northfield.
- 7. Developing a plan for a Northfield Revolving Loan Fund:** Per the Town Plan, I have been tasked with the responsibility of developing a plan for the use of Northfield's economic development funds. A revolving loan fund would be a prudent use of this resource. A concept of a Town of Northfield revolving loan fund is being developed by Economic Development Director Jon Ignatowski, Town Manager Jeff Schulz, and CVEDC Executive Director Jamie Stewart. The revolving loan fund would use a portion of Northfield's economic development funds to provide small loans to local businesses for projects (such as façade improvements) that commercial loans are not typically available for. Northfield would be responsible for vetting loan applicants, while the CVEDC has offered to manage the loans and provide loan analysis training to the Economic Development Director. A Northfield revolving loan fund would not involve state oversight, and would provide an excellent opportunity to leverage current assets to obtain more funds from state and federal sources while also fostering the growth of local businesses. A formal presentation will be made to the Select Board soon.
- 8. Scheduled a virtual Designated Village Center benefits workshop:** A virtual workshop discussing the benefits of designated village center tax credits to landowners and businesses has been scheduled for January 13<sup>th</sup>. The workshop will be led by Caitlin Corkins of the ACCD.
- 9. Developed a business survey:** I developed a series of questions that I will ask business owners when I reach out to them to confirm their contact and business information. The questions have been vetted by seven different business owners, and include the following:
  - How many employees do you have?
  - Do you find it difficult to find and retain qualified workers?
  - Are you hoping to expand your businesses soon?
  - What are the biggest barriers with managing your business (financing, regulations, space, etc.)?
  - How would you describe the trajectory of your business pre-covid? How would you describe it post covid?
  - What resources would help you with the management or growth of your business?
  - What opportunities do you see in Northfield?
- 10. Developing a comprehensive list of properties available for development:** As detailed in the Town Plan, the Economic Development Director is responsible for building and maintaining a comprehensive list of properties available for development. This has involved a careful read of the Area-Wide Plan and of the current brownfield regulations. In addition to property available for development, I have also been creating a list of commercial properties available for sale or rent.
- 11. Networking:** I have been meeting with businesses, organizations, and citizens about community and economic development in Northfield. A list is provided below:

### Individuals I have met with

Bonnie Waninger of the CVRPC  
Jamie Stewart of the CVEDC  
Richard Amore of the ACCD  
Trish Coppolino of the DEC  
David Maxwell, Chair of Northfield's Select Board  
Lydia Petty  
Debbie Zuaro  
Collin O'Neil of Norwich's Shaw Center  
Phil Susmann (twice)  
Scott Kerner of Carrier and Good Measure  
Brent Blevins, COO of Darn Tough  
Matt Jacobs, Sustainability Coordinator at Darn Tough  
Fieldstone Farm  
Andrea Melville  
Kevin Eschelbach, President of Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce

### Organizations I have met with

The NCDN (3 meetings)  
CERV (1 meeting)  
Northfield Mutual Aid Task Force (1 Meeting)

### Workshops and Professional Training

CVRPC Roundtable  
AARP Placemaking Workshop

## Action Plan for Winter of 2020 / 2021

- 1. Facilitate East Street Placemaking:** As identified by the Area Wide Plan and V-DAT, the East Street business corridor is ripe for placemaking, and efforts targeting this area will likely see a significant return on investment. The recent ad-hoc “parklet” (the tent and jersey barriers) served as an excellent pilot project, providing an opportunity to understand the benefits and challenges that exist with a more permanent parklet. East Street businesses are being consulted, and Richard Amore will be assisting with design. A placemaking grant of up to \$15,000 without a match will be available in late December.
- 2. Host a Northfield Economic Symposium:** Several business owners, in addition to Norwich, have expressed interest in a symposium that coalesces business owners, Norwich leadership / faculty, elected officials, and community leaders. The symposium will be focused on understanding the common goals and visions for Northfield, in addition to exploring synergistic efforts. It is apparent that Northfield is home to many people with great ideas – however, an event is needed to break down silos and institutional barriers that currently inhibit co-creativity. A symposium would be the first step to unlocking the potential benefits from strategic alliances.
- 3. Launch a Northfield Promotional Website**
- 4. Establish a Revolving Loan Fund**