

St. Johnsbury

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM FINAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN



JANUARY, 2007

Vermont Council on Rural Development

St. Johnsbury Creative Communities Program

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Introduction

The Creative Communities Program at the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) began work with St. Johnsbury in fall, 2006, in a partnership called the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative. This initiative supports community efforts to build on past creative economy work and set plans for the next round of local projects.

St. Johnsbury has a host of creative economy assets. It is a gateway to the Northeast Kingdom, a region recently chosen as a top destination by National Geographic. A new Welcome Center enhances this gateway position. The town itself has many destination attractions, for example a Connecticut River Byways Waypoint designation, nationally famous sites like the Dog Chapel, and high-quality recreation that earned a top rating for small town adventure by National Geographic Adventure magazine. The downtown features tremendous historic buildings with strong cultural components, such as the Fairbanks Museum and the Athenaeum. The presence of arts and culture in the downtown is expanding. One ambitious project is the Catamount Film & Arts Company's planned renovations for the historic Masonic Temple building, which will become the organization's permanent home. St. Johnsbury also consciously fosters entrepreneurial business activity with projects ranging from highspeed Internet access to low-interest loans for creative enterprises.

In addition to having many strong starting assets, St. Johnsbury has consciously nurtured *ongoing* creative economy development. The downtown program, called St. Johnsbury WORKS!, joined statewide creative economy work early in the concept's evolution and has continued to take a lead in local planning efforts. The 2006 Town Plan highlighted the creative economy in many areas of potential development. Furthermore, St. Johnsbury has shown strong community interest in actively shaping the town's future. Over 100 people attended an initial creative economy summit (one that predated the Creative Communities Program) in April, 2005. Attendance numbers were strong for the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative as well. More information about background work and how it integrated into the Creative Communities Program appears under *Creative Communities Process in St. Johnsbury*.

The confluence of creative elements in St. Johnsbury has helped situate this city as a regional leader in the creative economy. This reputation of regional leadership has appeared in previous studies, as well. For example, O'Neal branding work characterized St. Johnsbury as an authentic town in a beautiful setting, where the past comes to life, and where creative innovation is the key to the future. St. Johnsbury regularly hosts events that draw in regional crowds, such as First Night and Victorian Holidays. Regular cultural events presented by Catamount Arts draw an estimated 30,000 patrons each year. The town also provides fundamental regional services, such as medical treatment (including the Norris Cotton Cancer Center) and education through the St. Johnsbury Academy, which accepts students from around the state and around the world.

The projects chosen through the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative reflect investment in St. Johnsbury as a regional leader that plans for both immediate action and longer-term goals around the local creative economy.

Developing an Eastern Avenue Park demonstrates public interest in a vital downtown. The project goal described for Eastern Avenue includes both local agriculture and local arts, looking for linkages between these two different arenas than can benefit both. These types of projects

highlight the many facets of Vermont's cultural heritage. Eastern Avenue work strengthens downtown vitality by connecting the two main streets (Main and Railroad Street). Ultimately, a unified downtown can offer extensive shopping, entertainment, social, and cultural opportunities for both local residents and visitors.

Improving St. Johnsbury's Web Presence responds to a need recognized by many towns as the Internet becomes a primary source of information. Improving St. Johnsbury's web presence puts the town on the map for those living outside of the immediate area. Two target outside groups mentioned in initial conversations were tourists and business leaders. The web also allows St. Johnsbury to get information to its current residents, a tool that can be helpful to many community projects, including the ones identified through the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative.

As with the web presence, **Highlighting Local Cultural Organizations** benefits both residents and non-residents. By focusing on collaboration between cultural organizations, this project team sets a firm foundation for ongoing cultural activity in St. Johnsbury. Other communities have found that strong partnerships between cultural organizations make creative projects with other sectors, such as local businesses, more effective.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development has enjoyed working with everyone involved in St. Johnsbury's Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative. We would like to especially thank our local outreach group for their hard work putting together the community forums. Members of this initial group were:

Jerry Aldredge
Charlie Browne
Sally Cavanagh
Linda Fogg
Lorna Higgs
Alice Kitchel Stowe
Sue Langlois
Steve Patterson
Sharon Reihmer
Joel Schwartz
Jay Sprout
Nat Tripp
Mike Welch

Chairs for the process are Sally Cavanagh and Charlie Browne. Their leadership, and the leadership of the outreach group, follows from the original application put together by: the Northeast Kingdom Chamber of Commerce, Northern Community Investment Corporation, St. Johnsbury Works!, Catamount Film and Arts Co, Inc., Northeastern Vermont Development Association, and the Town of St. Johnsbury.

We also thank our forum hosts. The forums would not have been possible without the space provided by the Fairbanks Museum and St. Johnsbury School.

Background on the Creative Communities Program

The Creative Communities Program began in October, 2005. This program implements the 2004 recommendation of the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation that an organization help communities jumpstart their local creative economy. The Creative Communities Program accomplishes this goal through comprehensive public outreach, facilitated public forums, action plans developed around specific projects, and connections to a statewide network of resources. The section on the *Creative Communities Program Process in St. Johnsbury* describes how St. Johnsbury modified the original template for the program to match their particular needs as a community that had already engaged in serious consideration of their creative economy.

Organizations around the world, including several in New England, have studied and set their own definitions of the “creative economy.” Some definitions focus on the revenue generated by particular creative sectors that fit standard industrial codes, others focus on the individual qualities of creative workers, and still others attempt to pinpoint specific policies that spark creativity in *every* worker.

The Creative Communities Program considers all existing creative economy perspectives and uses a working definition with three key components that are common to most creative economy discussions:

•The Importance of Place:

Our discussion of “place” includes the natural, physical and community environments that form the foundation for creative economy work. Is this a place where people will *want* to work, live, and participate as active citizens? Is there a healthy mix of culture and commerce? Is there a strong community identity that distinguishes this place from any other?

•Creative Partnerships:

The 2004 *Advancing Vermont’s Creative Economy* report began to outline the breadth of businesses, individuals, and organizations that contribute to a strong economy. These contributors include groups that have not traditionally been thought of as business partners, such as arts, heritage, place-based, and other (usually) not-for-profit organizations. They are core partners in economic development discussions. Who needs to be at the table to help build a strong local economy?

•Individuals’ Creative Skills:

Businesses in every field generate a competitive advantage from new ideas and unique skills – how do we increase business’ ability to capitalize on creative contributions? What type of environment attracts and retains today’s top creative thinkers? What inspires creative thinking in *everyone* in a community?

More information on the creative economy term can be found in *Advancing Vermont’s Creative Economy*, available online at <http://www.vtrural.org>.

Creative Communities Process in St. Johnsbury

St. Johnsbury had completed several planning projects related to the creative economy before beginning participation in the Creative Communities Program. St. Johnsbury WORKS! commissioned a branding study with the O’Neal Strategy Group that sought to tell St. Johnsbury’s unique community story. Results from the study became available in early 2006. The 2006 St. Johnsbury Town Plan, an extensive document, cited the creative economy several times in its vision for the future. Furthermore, St. Johnsbury worked with the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation during its own creative economy study and brought VCRD in for a creative economy conversation in April, 2005, following publication of the *Advancing Vermont’s Creative Economy* report.

In recognition of past creative economy planning, the Creative Communities Program worked with local Chairs, Sally Cavanagh and Charlie Browne, to structure the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative to explicitly build from planning that had already happened and the actions that had come from those previous plans. This background information provided a foundation for outlining future actions.

The Creative Communities Program began the process of incorporating previous studies into new planning by reviewing the Town Plan and O’Neal Branding Study for creative economy references – either by name or by close association to creative economy activities. A summary of the O’Neal findings and quotes from the Town Plan appear at the end of this report. In the first public forum, these findings became grouped into 4 general categories: Recruit Creative Businesses and Retain Existing Ones, Increase Appeal of Downtown St. Johnsbury as a Center of Community Activity, Establish St. Johnsbury as a Leading Destination for Visitors to the Northeast Kingdom, Highlight St. Johnsbury’s Strong Cultural History. The specific project ideas belonging to each category appear in the following section.

The first public forum, held November 2nd, 2006, began with a panel of local residents speaking about past creative economy work, followed by facilitated discussions in break out groups formed around the 4 topic areas. These discussions reviewed past recommendations, asked for updates on activities in those areas, solicited new suggestions, and finally prioritized one project in each area for future action. The second public forum, held December 12th, 2006, brought a resource team of leaders from around the state together with local project teams to develop initial action plans for moving forward in each project area. This second forum also allowed time for the project teams to refine the concepts selected in the first forum.

The following sections present the results of the public engagement process that occurred through the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative.



First Public Forum **November 2nd, 2006**

On November 2nd, 2006, a diverse group of citizens gathered at the St. Johnsbury School to discuss possible projects to advance the local creative economy. This forum combined three goals: first, reviewing work that already existed on St. Johnsbury's creative economy, then brainstorming any additional projects, and finally prioritizing projects to become the focus of an action plan session in December. The evening began with a short panel presentation on St. Johnsbury's current creative economy work. The panel included: Barbara Morrow, Linda Fogg, Sally Cavanagh, Charlie Browne, and Gary Reis.

After an overview of past work, participants divided into groups based on 4 central themes identified in earlier creative economy planning: Recruit Creative Businesses and Retain Existing Ones, Increase Appeal of Downtown St. Johnsbury as a Center of Community Activity, Establish St. Johnsbury as a Leading Destination for Visitors to the Northeast Kingdom, Highlight St. Johnsbury's Strong Cultural History.

The project ideas in each of the 4 general categories appear below. The items in *italics* were pulled from previous studies. These projects simply report previous plans and do not remove projects already undertaken; the discussion groups identified any current projects related to the earlier recommendations and used that information to avoid selecting repeat projects. For a general overview of the creative economy foundation from which these teams worked, please refer to the *Introduction* section. The items not in italics are new additions, generated during conversations on Nov. 2nd. The priority projects each group selected appear at the end of this section. Please note that the Action Plans in the next section further define the projects.

Recruit Creative Businesses and Retain Existing Ones

- *Provide space – e.g. studios, classrooms, start up venues – for creative economy workers. The Pomerleau building offers one option.*
- *Conduct a feasibility study for building incubator space for downtown.*
- *Improve telecommunications, providing infrastructure that is necessary for many creative businesses and workers.*
- *Create an Economic Development Ombudsman to be a single point person for business development inquiries, coordinating all available resources.*
- Start a workforce development effort for IT and launch business plan competition from NVDA for new projects.
- Create a “Virtual Ombudsman” with a database of resources and space in St. Johnsbury. Create an online marketing plan for St. Johnsbury.
- Conduct a personal outreach effort to area small businesses and match them with downtown space.
- Promote a stronger “buy local” culture for St. Johnsbury.
- Establish a business improvement district.



Increase the Appeal of Downtown St. Johnsbury as a Center of Community Activity

- *Improve the downtown historic district.*
- *Improve Bay Street access and develop Bay Street into a retail-shopping draw.*
- *Place attractive signage in downtown – including advertising buildings where new businesses will be arriving.*
- *Create an incentive system for property owners to invest in aesthetic improvements.*
- *Promote a weekly evening when merchants stay open.*
- *Paint or refurbish the exterior of the Ralston building.*
- *Develop a riverside park with bandstand / amphitheater and space for a farmers' market*
- *Designate an Eastern Avenue Park and Greenbelt.*
- *Fill Main Street storefronts with viable, attractive businesses.*

Fill empty fronts with art.

- Shut Railroad Street for a weekly evening event with the Farmers' Market, open stores, food. Include performers / music / crafts. Explore extending the Farmers' Market season (including potential shelters).
- Help Athenaeum, Academy, Fairbanks Museum work together on joint ticketing.
- Name a "Theater District" and invest in joint marketing and coordinated events. Build a film festival.
- Capitalize on Geotourism opportunities. Combine resources for joint marketing – including "adventure maps" of St. Johnsbury and materials for merchants to show visitors where to go for cultural events / sites.
- Build workshops for craftspeople and artists in vacant downtown spaces.

Establish St. Johnsbury as a Leading Destination for Visitors to the Northeast Kingdom

- *Improve management of online information for visitors.*
- *Improve signage in town.*
- *Promote St. Johnsbury as a recreational center.*
- *Construct a compelling story for St. Johnsbury that brings the desired brand identity to life. Market this story, including in the Welcome Center.*
- *Celebrate the past.*
- *Work in collaboration with surrounding communities and organizations to form a Northeast Kingdom package to attract visitors.*
- *Initiate a "Passport to the Kingdom" program with NEKTTA.*
- *Expand the Victorian Christmas Festival and promote it through Vermont.*
- *Promote St. Johnsbury's local pet friendly sites. Tie in to statewide pet-friendly system and to Dog Mountain.*
- *Establish St. Johnsbury as an online destination including a better website, expanding free wireless Internet coverage and integrating wireless access into marketing efforts.*
- *Position St. Johnsbury as the health capitol of Vermont, including a strong holistic component.*
- *Build on water recreation, tie in with the 3 rivers.*

- Coordinate presentation of St. Johnsbury as a *hub* -- historic and present.
- Draw businesses into a collective marketing campaign like Stowe has done with its area association.
- Highlight Caledonia County's Scottish and French-Canadian heritage.
- Expand St. Johnsbury as an open studio destination.
- Create a "Market Day" around the Farmers' Market. This event should be an echo of the Market Days in Victorian times.
- Advance artisan agricultural products particularly related to St. Johnsbury as a maple center.
- Establish railroads as a theme, including rides and artifacts.
- Sell St. Johnsbury as a destination for business.

Highlight St. Johnsbury's Strong Cultural History

- *Highlight local cultural organizations with an annual festival celebrating the arts. First Night has been a strong celebration of St. Johnsbury's culture.*
- *Highlight aspects of the region's history of innovation and railroad heritage.*
- *Form a Cultural Committee with representation from the Athenaeum, Museum, Catamount Arts and St. Johnsbury Academy's Morse Art Center.*
- *Pay greater attention to arts and culture as part of school activities, including extracurricular events.*
- *Use arts and culture as part of teaching at every level including continuing ed.*
- *Establish an annual symposium on "Victorian Life" in St. Johnsbury.*
- *Promote major events with "collectible" posters that feature the work of local designers.*
- Promote historic institutions and architecture.
- Market St. Johnsbury to Academy alumni.
- Highlight Caledonia County's Scottish and French-Canadian heritage.
- Create a "Market Day" around the Farmers' Market. This event should be an echo of the Market Days in Victorian times.

Priority Projects

- Highlight local cultural organizations with an annual festival celebrating the arts. First Night is a strong example and could be expanded.
- Establish St. Johnsbury as an online destination including a better website, expanding free wireless Internet coverage, and integrating wireless access into marketing efforts.
- Build a better web presence for St. Johnsbury targeted to a business audience, including an online marketing plan, database of resources and space availability, and a "virtual ombudsman."
- Create an Eastern Avenue Park that can be a location for major downtown events, including a site for the Farmers' Market.



Action Plans December 12th, 2006

Community members from throughout St. Johnsbury have organized into Project Teams to implement the ideas generated during the earlier strategic planning sessions. On December 12th, committee members worked closely with facilitators and small resource teams to refine the concepts outlined in the November 2nd forum and start to put action steps to the large ideas. Volunteers stepped forward at the end of planning to be conveners for the next Project Team meetings, when the teams will set more detailed action plans and each select a Chair. The Resource Team members, listed at the end of this report, are available to lend ideas as the projects move forward. Their initial recommendations are in the following section. Please note that the two Internet groups joined together into a single project team.

For updates on project work and more information about joining a project team, please contact Sally Cavanagh (sallycav@verizon.net) or Charlie Browne (cbrowne@fairbanksmuseum.org).

Develop an Eastern Avenue Park

» **Develop an Eastern Avenue Park:** Create an Eastern Avenue park or parks and other open spaces that can form an arts corridor between Main and Railroad Streets and be a location for major downtown events, including a site for the Farmers' Market.

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Goal:

The Eastern Avenue Committee of the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative has the overall goal of supporting revitalization work along Eastern Avenue as a way of bringing better unity to the downtown area. The initial focus for this work will be improving the site of the Farmers' Market by moving into a larger location with better visibility from the street and better access. Building from the Farmers' Market project,

the Committee will foster partnerships with arts and cultural events / exhibits along the Avenue. A long-range goal is to create a sheltered year-round structure for the Farmers' Market and other community events.

Action Plan

1.) Information Gathering

- Explore possible farmers' market sites along Eastern Avenue. Current location is in the town parking lot adjacent to Murphy's parking lot.
- Talk with Murphy's parking lot owners about any current plans for use of that space. Survey other possible spaces and find out about any plans for their use.
- Talk with St. Johnsbury government about the town parking lot and also where farmers' market space along Eastern Ave. might fit into the town plan.
- Talk to St. Johnsbury WORKS! about where the farmers' market in particular and Eastern Avenue in general fits into the St. Johnsbury WORKS! vision for downtown.
- Acquire previous Eastern Ave. planning session records.
- Make a brief information sheet on the Farmers' Market, its contribution to community, culture and economy in St. Johnsbury, and current pressing needs.
- Initial brainstorming of possible funding sources to pay for any significant projects that might emerge from this conversation.
- What is the town's existing vision for Eastern Avenue?

2.) Preliminary Conversation with Property Owners

While identifying possible locations, develop talking points that include the follow areas:

- Longevity – how long can the Farmers' Market be assured of lot access if they don't purchase the land outright.
- Does the owner have plans to make basic changes, like leveling the lot or repaving, which could benefit the market.
- Does the Farmers' Market have permission to make changes that the owner won't (including landscape plantings).
- What are current costs for maintaining lot – and which would switch to the Farmers' Market if they began weekly use.
- What is the legal structure of use agreement (will it be a lease, donation, purchase, etc.)
- How does the Farmers' Market final location fit into St. Johnsbury's bigger vision for Eastern Ave. and downtown.

3.) Build More Specific Plans for Farmers' Market Area

A final project proposal for relocating the farmers' market should include the following components:

- A strong presence for the Market on Eastern Ave.
- More space for the Market to grow
- A flat surface
- Landscaping changes – e.g., removing “weed” trees and bringing in new plants.
- Landscaping maintenance
- Outline of what St. Johnsbury could gain with an improved Farmers' Market location

The group will use these goals to outline a specific proposal, budget and potential funding sources.

4.) Beyond the Market

With a well-established farmers' market, the Eastern Avenue Committee can look strategically at partnerships that contribute to the overall vitality of Eastern Avenue. A key partner would be Catamount Arts. Specific partnerships would depend on conversations with others and on revisiting the Town Plan and downtown plans to match their goals. Possibilities include:

- Direct Partnerships with Catamount Arts
 - Cross-marketing (for example, events that draw people to both the Farmers' Market and Catamount)
 - Outdoor exhibits in a renovated farmers' market space
- Christmas Food Fair and other holiday events with local food.



5.) Beyond the Summer

The final phase for the Eastern Avenue Committee will be to explore the feasibility of creating a covered structure for a year-round farmers market. If a first analysis suggests that a winter market is feasible for St. Johnsbury, the Committee will develop a new set of action plans for that goal.

Resources

- Town offices and David Jacobs for previous Eastern Avenue studies.
- Town clerk and local listers for property inventory.
- A facilitator for “big picture” discussion.
- Local stakeholders to bring to the table in planning: planners, landscape architects, architects.
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and USDA for planning grants.

Highlight Local Cultural Organizations

» **Highlight Local Cultural Organizations:** Highlight local cultural organizations with an annual festival celebrating the arts. This celebration does not have to be a new event. First Night is an example of one event with a strong celebration of St. Johnsbury's culture that could be expanded.

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Goals & Ideas for Project Characteristics:

Outcomes

- Awareness of St. J. as a destination for arts and culture
- Interactive elements/ hands-on
- Multi-generational
- Increased self-esteem of the town
- A celebration- having FUN!
- Something that brings out the locals
- Something that offers educational opportunities
- Decreased poverty (through a community becoming increasingly focused on incorporating artistic elements within it)
- Increased mental health of community
- Something that builds community
- Mentoring opportunities in the arts for youth
- A critical mass expected to make things happen
- Recreate or develop what has been lost in the community



First Goal: Coordinate current arts infrastructure

1.) Identify Key Players

Identify the key players. Players discussed included the artists' guild, Catamount Arts, Athenaeum, First Night, St. J.

Academy, Fairbanks Museum, Kingdom County Production, Burklyn, Hardwick's NEK Arts Guild, Circus Smirkus, Town Admin, Lyndon State College, Bread & Puppet.

2.) Share Information

Communicate and establish regular meetings to share information on what each is doing.
"Take the temperature of these various entities collaborating." A. Aldrich

3.) Look for Synergies

- Opportunities for shared outreach
- Shared mailing lists
- Physical space
- Community calendar of events

4.) Expand Outreach

Generate community-wide awareness for what arts & cultural organizations currently offer.
Expand outreach to media, schools, public notice boards, community organizations.

Media include: Caledonia Record, the Chronicle, Green Mountain Trading Post, The Point, VPR, VT Broadcast Asso'n, North Star Monthly, Hardwick Gazette, Littleton Courier, Amonoosuc Times, Burlington Free Press, Times-Argus, 7 Days, VT Guardian, NE Kingdom CoC. A. Aldrich also noted that if the calendar of events were submitted to VT Council on the arts it would get disseminated to all these media outlets anyway and get on his website & calendar so that could save a lot of effort.

Second Goal: Explore event possibilities that highlight the arts, growing from discussions between groups in Goal #1.

1.) Explore options for building on existing events

Possible events to build on include:

- First Night
- American Cancer Relay for Life
- Fairbanks Museum Arts Festival
- Outgrowth of Catamount Film Festival
- Resurrect Maple Syrup Festival
- Fall Foliage Festival
- Summerfest
- Burklyn Craft Festival
- Lyndon Institute Dance Festival
 - Resource: Rebecca McGregor
- Dog Mountain- Stephen Huneck
- Burke- Apple & Strawberry Festivals
- Bread & Puppet
- VT Young Playwrights Festival
 - Resource: Susan Anthony
 - Resource: Jay Craven
- Caledonia County Fair

2.) Explore Options for a New Event

If expanding existing events is not chosen as the appropriate next step, then start a new event.
New Events to consider:

- Host an Annual Award supporting creativity/innovation.

- Build an event around things from the community- such as creating art from junk retrieved from the river.
- Host hands-on activities in front of North Church
- Develop a 6- 8 performance annual series fashioned a la Prairie Home Companion.
 - Goal:
 - Generate 800 person attendance per show
 - Bring exterior and local talents
 - Generate broad awareness for St. J.
 - Needs
 - \$140,000 budget
 - Fundraising
 - Sponsorships
 - Organization ownership
 - Town collaboration
 - Smart writing
 - Strong artistic vision and talent
 - Ironical/satirical
 - Inclusion of guest artists
- A festival/event celebrating Yankee ingenuity: real, genuine, from our own community: the NE Kingdom individual.
- Link any of the above with the ability to lead to other complementary arts activities such as open studios or educational opportunities.

Important Elements for Expanded or New Events

When the event, or expanded, event occurs incorporate the following important elements:

- Events should include great food, particularly local food.
 - Resource: Athenaeum director, who is also a cookbook author
 - Resource: St. J. Academy Culinary Arts Program
- Anything that will bring in visitors from outside St. Johnsbury should have a clear guide to lodging.
- The process must be iterative and the groups must be committed to the long haul.
- The event must be authentic to St. Johnsbury "this place."
- The event must be multi-generational, appealing to all age groups, and be able to be passed on to new generations of committed volunteers and organizers.
- The event must be planned incrementally, the group must be patient and let the event build itself over time.
- The event should also be viewed as an opportunity to identify what the local/regional artists have to offer the community.



Improve St. Johnsbury's Online Presence

» **Improve St. Johnsbury's Online Presence:** Create a St. Johnsbury community site that effectively represents the many components of St. Johnsbury that make this city unique. The initial pages would be designed to appeal to all visitors, then channel them to components targeting particular audiences (key audiences to be determined). The website would include easily navigable pathways to information about the city's economic, cultural, community, recreational and municipal activities. Finally, launch of the site would include marketing strategies for drawing visitors and integrating with other St. Johnsbury promotional efforts.

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Action Steps

Elements of Site Design Clear theme that gives website a unified feel; dynamic; constantly updated; chance for interactive components; integrated; unique; incorporating components of existing branding studies; searchable; depicting vibrant economy and economic future; creative.

Steps to Forming an Action Plan – Questions to Answer

1.) Establish Unique Role for Web Group

What are the goals of the current downtown group working on web design? Where do the goals overlap and how will the efforts be integrated? Are we duplicating an existing project?

2.) Form Partnerships

Who else is working on websites in / for St. Johnsbury?

3.) Set Outreach Strategy

Who are the local stakeholders in this project? How do we include them in the entire process? Including outreach to public.

4.) Identify Specific Target Audiences

What are the particular audiences we want to target? How do we draw them through the website in a way tailored to their interests? Examples of audiences:

- a. Businesses – current and potential
- b. Visitors – passing through, extended stay, currently in town, and large groups (e.g. weddings)
- c. Residents – current and potential
- d. Division by demographics, particularly age
- e. Division by area of interest – e.g. culture, recreation, etc.

5.) Build Pool of Websites to Link

What existing websites will be linked into the final product? What criteria will be used to decide inclusion (e.g. quality control)? See list of existing online information at end of notes.

6.) Explore Needs for New Content

What content is currently not available online that this group will generate for the website? See list at end of notes.

7.) Plan for Site Design

- a. What are other sites that have the same look as what we want? (see Elements above)
- b. Who will do the final design?
- c. Specific outline of the site.

8.) Plan for Logistics

- a. Who will be in charge up keeping information up to date?
- b. Who will write website text?
- c. Who will develop new content where it needs to be added?
- d. Who will be the liaison with other websites that will be linked to this website?

9.) Plan for Marketing

- a. Make this site a top search engine hit.
- b. Partner with statewide organizations for directing people to the site.
- c. Educate local residents about how they can benefit from / use the site.
- d. Generate publicity around initial launch.
- e. Sustain ongoing marketing.

10.) Set a Budget

11.) Conduct Fundraising

Information Online Today

*Note – these websites may not be up-to-date or appropriate for inclusion, this is simply a list of everything available.

- ❖ St. Johnsbury Municipal Site
- ❖ NEK Chamber (regional)
- ❖ NEKTTA (regional)

- ❖ Schools (elementary through college)
- ❖ Cultural and Arts Sites (e.g. Catamount Arts)
- ❖ Attractions
- ❖ Recreational Opportunities
- ❖ St. Johnsbury Works
- ❖ Churches
- ❖ State government
- ❖ Hospital
- ❖ Accommodations
- ❖ NVDA
- ❖ NCIC
- ❖ Non-profits
- ❖ Services
- ❖ Caledonian Record and other media

Key Missing Online Information

- ❖ Current events calendar
- ❖ Good recreation guides
- ❖ Online classifieds
- ❖ Advertising of wireless hot spots
- ❖ Virtual tour
- ❖ Full business directory, including professional services
- ❖ Virtual ombudsman / concierge
- ❖ Overall quality of sites is often low
- ❖ Stories told about St. Johnsbury
- ❖ Site establishing St. J as *the* gateway to the Kingdom

Update on Internet Presence Work Following Public Forum

Many groups around St. Johnsbury agree on the importance of having a strong web presence, including a central website that offers a good representation of St. Johnsbury and connections to existing community web resources.

At the same time as the Creative Communities process began in St. Johnsbury, a group of downtown business and property owners began to meet to determine how best to market and promote St. Johnsbury, with an emphasis placed on downtown St. Johnsbury. This group similarly reached the conclusion that St. Johnsbury needed a coordinated website that would appeal to both visitors and the local community.

The two groups, the Downtown Group and the creative economy group, have started the process of combining efforts. As of the publication of this report, the Downtown Group was developing a Request for Proposal for website development and had invited members of the project team for Improving St. Johnsbury's Web Presence to join them (provided that they did not intend to respond to the RFP).

For more information, please contact Linda Fogg at stjworks@kingcon.com or (802) 748-7121.

Creative Communities Resource Team Recommendations to St. Johnsbury

Resource Team members represent a wide array of professionals from across the state, and agree to serve as partners and advisors to the St. Johnsbury Project Teams. Their recommendations, recorded here, encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of St. Johnsbury's unique assets and needs. It is hoped that community members will turn frequently to these pages for concrete ideas, resources, and support. Resource Team members are eager to support the Project Teams as they begin their work. Call on them for help (contact information is found at the end of the report). The following are recommendations compiled from the Resource Team's comments.

Develop an Eastern Avenue Park

The **Trust for Public Lands** has a goal of conserving land for *people*. The combination of landscaping a lot in downtown St. Johnsbury while supporting the working agricultural landscape surrounding the downtown could appeal to this organization. More details are available online at: <http://www.tpl.org>

The **Project for Public Spaces** is another organization that might have an interest in the farmers' market / downtown gathering space combination. They provide training, technical assistance, and information to communities. They can be found online at: <http://www.pps.org>.

The **Northeast Farming Association (NOFA-VT)** in Vermont recently hosted a Direct Marketing conference that featured presentations by Vance Corum, a national expert on farmers' markets and author of the recently published The New Farmers' Market. You can find out more about NOFA and their support for developing farmers' markets at <http://www.nofavt.org>.

At Vermont's Agency of Agriculture, a good resource for local agriculture and marketing is **Steve Justis** who can be reached at (802) 828-3827.

The **Intervale Foundation** in Burlington has significant experience working with downtown locations for farmers and farmers' market. While their initial focus was on reclaiming land for fields, they have many projects and may have advice for building farmers' market space as well. Contact **Lindsey Ketchel** at (802) 536-5030 or Lindsey@intervale.org.



The **US Department of Agriculture** promotes rural development in many ways, including assisting towns and non-profits develop community facilities and establish farmers markets. Contacts: www.usda.org, St. Johnsbury, Vermont office (802-748-8746).

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) provides support to conserve historic properties. They also have an interest in viable agriculture in Vermont. Contacts: www.vhcb.org,

Montpelier, Vermont office (802) 828-3203.

Preservation Trust of Vermont supports acquisition and rehabilitation of historically significant Vermont buildings. As with VHCB, they also have a larger vision for supporting strong downtowns in the communities they work with. Contact Paul Bruhn, www.ptvermont.org, Burlington office (802) 658-6647.

The **University of Vermont's Department of Community Development and Applied Economics** has assisted some communities in strengthening their local farmers' markets. Contact **Dan Baker** at (802) 656-0040 or dbaker@uvm.edu. Another resource is **Allen Matthews** at UVM's **Center for Sustainable Agriculture**. Allen's contact information is (802) 656-0037 or allen.matthews@uvm.edu.

Depending on how broadly the Eastern Avenue group thinks about its parking lot plans, there could be a place for tapping some community gardens resources. **Jim Flint** of **Friends of Burlington Gardens/Vermont Community Garden Network (VCGN)** is probably the leading resource in Vermont for creating and sustaining a community garden. Contacts: www.burlingtongardens.org, 802-861-GROW. **New England Grassroots Environmental Fund (NEGEF)**, Montpelier, is particularly interested in community garden work and offers grants up to \$2,500. Contact, **Ginny Callan**, www.grassrootsfund.org, (802) 229-1734.

As the Eastern Avenue group continues its development and works towards greater collaboration with Catamount Arts, an excellent resource will be **Charlie Hunter** (who was part of the Resource Team that attended December 12th's meeting). Charlie has extensive experience with both visual art and music performances and is also on the board of the Bellows Falls farmers' market. His contact information is flyradar@sover.net or (802) 463-3669.

Highlight Local Cultural Organizations

It's impressive to see the range of people who identify with the arts in St. Johnsbury, from full-time professional artists to residents who enjoy the arts in many forms. The framework used to bring focus to the arts community should include space for multiple groups and ongoing conversation, instead of a single perspective setting the agenda.

A good way to be sure you get everyone who might be interested in collaboration to the table is to cross check your invitations with the **Vermont Arts Council's** online arts directory (<http://www.vermontartsdirectory.org/>). The directory currently lists 48 artists and arts organizations in Caledonia County. This list isn't guaranteed to have everyone, so check for organizations that aren't on the list (and you can encourage them to join the directory). Simply helping everyone share information on a regular basis is a major accomplishment and potential partnerships will naturally emerge.

One thing to be clear on from the beginning is what information will not be shared. A particular example is in sharing mailing or



e-mailing lists, which has become a concern with rising amounts of SPAM.

Rutland recently initiated a process of developing greater collaboration between its arts groups. **Whitney Lamy** helped lead that effort and can be reached at director@crossroadsarts.com or (802) 775-0356.

The Arts Council can help get word out about all events, such as performances, gallery openings, and community suppers, through the **Vermont Arts Calendar**. This calendar is also a way to keep track of what's going on in your own backyard (<http://www.vermontartscouncil.org/ArtsCalendar/>)

If the coordination work moves from talking to implementing projects, the **Vermont Arts Council** does offer grants for Local Arts Partnerships. Planning grants of up to \$2,500 and implementation grants of up to \$10,000 / year are available to arts organizations starting working partnerships with other community organizations. Contact the VT Arts Council's Director of Community Programs (802) 828-3778.

The background work done on information sharing will be crucial to the next step of deciding whether to pursue sponsoring an event to celebrate arts and culture. An important thing to keep in mind is the impact that such an undertaking would have on management capacity. The Project Team's original instinct to build on an existing event is probably the most practical approach. It also prevents this group, which is focused on coordination and collaboration, from working in a way that *doesn't* coordinate or collaborate with established local activities.

If the group ultimately decides to go forward with an arts festival, or any large event with an entertainment component, there are several conferences that will provide good information along with networking opportunities:

- **North East Regional Folk Alliance** - (<http://www.nerfa.org/>) – An annual conference at Kutscher's Country Club in the Catskills every November. Good panels, good networking opportunities, manageable size, but very performer-based.
- **Ontario Council of Folk Festivals** (<http://www.ocff.ca/>) -. This annual convention is held in October each year and is a fantastic resource for those contemplating building an event. The fairly small size (around 300-400 registrants) makes it manageable and unintimidating and allows one to meet just about everybody present. There are panels on how to break down the tasks inherent in a festival, Committee/volunteer recruitment, sponsorship, etc. Dozens of small communities in Ontario have vibrant festivals with devoted patrons returning year after year - there's no reason why New England couldn't!
- **North American Folk Music & Dance Alliance** - <http://www.folkalliance.org/conference/>. A wonderful opportunity to see a vast number of musical acts loosely falling within the 'contemporary folk' genre. The conference is huge (maybe 1,500+ registrants) and heavily skewed toward performers. There are useful panels, mentoring and networking opportunities, but it is more diluted than either OCFE or NERFA (above).

Agreeing on an appropriate event, particularly an expansion of an existing event, to promote St. Johnsbury's cultural assets will be an important visioning exercise, as many groups come together to merge goals and strategies. An outside facilitator can help with these discussions. Contact the **Vermont Council on Rural Development** for facilitation help (802) 828-6024.

Successful advertising for events can be difficult; publicity is an area that requires some expertise. There are publicists who can help set a publicity strategy for an event. Or the event group could dedicate one person to managing publicity.

Finally, in planning an event meant to highlight St. Johnsbury's unique character, think of all the other assets that could be supported by an arts-focused event. For example, tying in sales from local businesses, bringing people to downtown or to the area's unique recreational assets, or serving local food.

Improve St. Johnsbury's Online Presence

Although the Internet group chose to focus on webpage design and not infrastructure, it's important to understand how infrastructure fits into the creative economy and economy in general. Businesses interested in locating in St. Johnsbury will expect broadband availability not only in their offices, but also for their employees at home (which will include both downtown and more rural areas in St. Johnsbury). Acquiring broadband access for the entire town of St. Johnsbury might have a place as a goal on this committee's radar screen. Having a visible Wi-Fi presence in downtown, including providing computers in key locations for people without laptops, will help establish St. Johnsbury as creative and modern.

Before designing the web site establish goals, audiences, and themes. The design and content will flow once these are established. Market keywords for the unique aspects of the town. Some of this background work might already appear in the O'Neal branding study.

Some of the website content possibilities identified in the first group meeting will require constant maintenance that goes beyond the work of an occasional volunteer or submission by organizations. The calendar of events in particular will need a person to not only update submitted events but also seek out local events and ensure that items have a consistent format.

Consider some St. Johnsbury-centric applications, such as web-casting public meetings or school events and local-interest forums.

Mobile hand-held devices are increasing rapidly as travelers' Internet access tools. These have small screens and often use lower-speed connections than true broadband. Make sure you accommodate these in your web design. Delivering St. Johnsbury web site content to hand-held devices will be especially important to visitors who are already in town and a citywide WiFi capability will be a benefit.

Build a section of the web site with content directed at visitors already in town. Marketing to people already in the area is different than marketing to a broad web-wide audience.

The brainstorming session on December 12th provided a good starting point for identifying what websites already exist. A next step will be to get an up to date picture of what these websites offer, how they are managed, and whether they would be interested in participating in this project. The project team could put together a short list of simple survey questions and distribute using www.surveymonkey.com, with follow-up phone calls where need to non-respondents. All St. Johnsbury businesses need a web presence, even if it is only used to present contact information.



St. Johnsbury's web presence should tie in closely with its brand identity. The existing branding study sets a good foundation for this identity. However, there needs to be feedback on the O'Neal work, a way to channel that information into the specific application of a website and determination of how the website will serve larger creative economy goals. The **Place Creative Company** has a sophisticated and fun workshop called "Brand Focus" that could help. Contact Dave Speidel, Steve Crafts or Keri Piatek (<http://placecreativecompany.com>).

Funding sources will be important for both launching and maintaining a successful website. One resource for researching opportunities is: **Everything Technology: Directory of Technology Grants** (<http://www.technologygrantnews.com/free-cash-grants-catalog.html>). More locally, a fundraising team could talk with the **Vermont Community Foundation** about its **Sustainable Communities** grant program (<http://www.vermontcf.org>) or with the VT / NH branch of USDA about **Rural Business Opportunity Grants** (<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/nofas/index.html>)

Appendix: Excerpted Creative Economy References in the Town Plan and O’Neal Branding Study



Town Plan

- “We recommend that the Town recruit new businesses falling within the creative economic sector, and work to retain those we have.” (p. 40)
- “Attracting “First Dollar” jobs . . . supporting and expanding those industries with a pre-established base, [and] nurturing entrepreneurial ideas for products and services from within our own community are [all] equally important.” (p. 48)
- “St. Johnsbury has a distinct advantage in having numerous artistic, cultural organizations and buildings located within the community.” (p. 56)
- “There are a significant number of cultural and educational resources within the St. Johnsbury Community. . . we recognize that St. Johnsbury was founded as a working class mill town, but with a strong cultural heritage. We need to encourage educational institutions to preserve the heritage left to us.” (p. 65)
- “We should support local artisans.” (p. 65)
- “We support the efforts of the Cultural and Historical Preservation Committee in its promotion of the arts as a viable means of education.” (p. 70)
- “What is significant about the 15 [“first dollar”] businesses [in St. Johnsbury]. . . is that all but four were started and are owned by local individuals. . . “ many of these owners state that “. . . they value the quality of life here [and that is a reason why] they are working to make it possible to stay here.” (p. 100)
- “Technological development could bring in rental income in space [in the Pomerleau Building] that is currently unused through a cooperative agreement with institutions such as Springfield College or Lyndon State College. Such facilities could also assist start-up entrepreneurs as incubator space. The “creative economy” could be served with studios or classrooms.” (p. 123)
- “We recommend that the Town work with and support St. Johnsbury WORKS! in its goal to improve the downtown historic district. . . specific attention should be paid to develop and locate signage appropriate to historic and cultural landmarks.” (p. 150)



St. Johnsbury. . .

10 Steps to a Winning Brand Identity

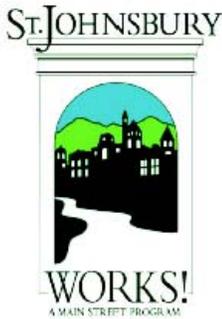
1. *Enhance the visual appeal and shopping experience of historic downtown St. Johnsbury.*
 - a. "Historic St. Johnsbury" banners;
 - b. Use empty windows as sales tools; and
 - c. Cross promote among stores.
2. *Attract more visitors to St. Johnsbury.*
 - a. Partner with Northeast Kingdom Travel & Tourist Association;
 - b. Position St. Johnsbury as must-see attraction; and
 - c. Track economic impact.
3. *Celebrate our rich past!*
 - a. Welcome Center displays;
 - b. Train rides; and
 - c. Victorian Christmas Festival.
4. *Generate more downtown foot traffic.*
 - a. Special downtown nights;
 - b. Develop Bay Street; and
 - c. More professional offices.
5. *Establish St. Johnsbury as a new business incubator.*
 - a. Conduct feasibility study and execute recommended plan;
 - b. Assist in permitting processes; and
 - c. Include established businesses in efforts.
 - d. Look for the "fresh idea."
6. *Improve telecommunications infrastructure.*
 - a. Support current PCS/wireless broadband initiative; and
 - b. Make it happen!
7. *Clean up Bay Street approach.*
 - a. Paint Ralston building and other buildings with projected use;
 - b. Complete Three River Bike Path/Trail; and
 - c. Develop riverside park.
8. *Construct a compelling story for St. Johnsbury.*
 - a. The Fairbanks Legacy of entrepreneurship and community improvement;
 - b. St. Johnsbury's pride in cultural and downtown preservation; and
 - c. New investments being made in local "creative economy," stimulating economic opportunity.
9. *Market St. Johnsbury to residents, visitors and business prospects.*
 - a. Communicate through local press, and enhance public relations work;
 - b. Develop quality information materials depicting town assets; and
 - c. Target business niches identified in incubator feasibility study.
10. *Set measurable goals and track success.*
 - a. Net new jobs;
 - b. Net new businesses; and
 - c. Net new private and public investment.

*"Get things moving and
keep them moving!
Make it happen!"*

Recommendations for Change from O'Neal Strategy Group © 2005

St. Johnsbury... the essence of Vermont.

*An Authentic Town in a Beautiful Setting,
Where the Past Comes to Life and Where
Creative Innovation is the Key to the Future*



SUCH ARE THE FINDINGS of a Branding Study conducted in Summer, 2005 by St. Johnsbury Works! with the help of Donchian Foundation funding, and a lot of community volunteer time, energy and support. St. Johnsbury Works! retained the services of experienced brand marketing specialists — The O’Neal Strategy Group of Connecticut — to determine answers to these questions:

- “What is it that makes St. Johnsbury special?”
- “What is St. Johnsbury’s unique and authentic story?”
- “What is it that sets St. Johnsbury apart from other towns in a highly-competitive marketing environment?”

*People Already
Have Strong
Positive Associations
with St. Johnsbury:*

**Historic Downtown
Fairbanks Living Legacy
Beautiful Setting
Authentic
Artistic, Creative**

THESE ARE THE IDEAS AND IMAGES that resonated with over 300 interviewees. These are the reasons why residents of the town and region are proud of St. Johnsbury. When we market St. Johnsbury to residents, businesses, and travelers, these associations form the foundation of our promise that St. Johnsbury is a special place to live, work and visit.

*St. Johnsbury’s Brand
Needs to Reflect
Both Past and Future
(Pride & Hope) to
Be Effective.*

**Doorway to The Northeast Kingdom
Entrepreneurial
Innovative
Dynamic
New Creative Economy**

THIS IS WHERE WE ARE HEADED. Adopting a can-do attitude, and working together to bring about positive change, residents and community leaders are taking steps – baby steps and giant steps – to ensure St. Johnsbury’s core brand identity is a promise made to the future. St. Johnsbury Works! is pleased to help organize this effort.

TO LEARN MORE about plans for a future St. Johnsbury that is “the Essence of Vermont,” visit www.stjworks.org, call 802-748-7121 or e-mail stjworks@kingcon.com. Find out how you can help make St. Johnsbury a truly special place to live, work and visit.

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