



Marlboro prioritizes its future

By JAIME CONE / Reformer Staff
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MARLBORO -- Building a community center and improving walkability in town were the topics of choice for Marlboro residents at the Vermont Council on Rural Development Community Visit meeting..

Held at the Marlboro Elementary School and attended by more than 70 members of the community, the meeting's goal was to narrow the number of potential projects the town could tackle in the near future.

The community visit is designed to help the community consider the challenges before Marlboro, prioritize needs, build teams and action plans to address them, set strategies to get needed resources and gain connections with the advice of state, federal and nonprofit leaders.

At the first meeting last month, more than 150 Marlboro residents attended sessions over the course of the day with a group of 28 state and federal leaders. They looked at the strengths of the community and the challenges ahead; the discussions covered nine topics ranging from land use and infrastructure to community vision and sustainability.

Paul Costello, executive director of the VCRD, and his team of professionals, went back and reviewed the information they gathered. They went through more than 25 pages of notes, and based on the common themes they found, they pulled together a

list of 18 opportunities to improve the town.

The list included developing an elder housing project, establishing a Marlboro farmer's market and building a Marlboro "village" in the town's historic district.

After two hours of discussion, the list was narrowed down to just two areas of focus: Creating a Marlboro community center building and a path that residents could safely use to walk or bike across town.

In the list of opportunities, the VCRD elaborated on each of the 18 ideas based on suggestions they heard at the March forums.

"Residents could create a stronger sense of Marlboro and improve the connections with others in the community by building or adapting a facility to serve as a unifying Marlboro Community Center," said the paragraph about the center.

It continued, "features could include programs and activities ranging from meeting rooms and senior services to a gym, tourist information and a WiFi center, library and ready room, entertainment space, parent/children play group room, community kitchen, teen center, cafe, or even a pub."

The idea of having a teen center in town may appeal to the one and only teen who attended the meeting, who said he and his friends drive 30 minutes to Mount Snow so they can snowboard.

"There's nothing in this town for my friends and I to do," he said.

Among others, Michelle Holzapfel, Marlboro resident, championed the community center idea,

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asking residents to reconsider voting for the also much-discussed "work to expand Internet and cell service" idea, which was also on the list of opportunities.

"We can communicate any time by meeting with each other," Holzapfel said. "To me, the community center could cultivate us knowing each other better than Broadband; I've never felt so alone as when I'm e-mailing everybody in town and not talking to anyone."

She suggested the town look into turning the Skyline Restaurant on Route 9 into a community center.

"It's a jewel of a place. We have a willing seller at a very reasonable price," Holzapfel said.

"And it's got a kitchen," she pointed out.

Julianne Mills of Marlboro spoke out in favor of creating a system of bike and walking paths. The high speed at which cars drive through town makes her afraid to walk along Route 9, she said.

"I live a mile away from school and I can't even walk my daughter there because of the traffic on Route 9," she said.

Meeting attendees agreed that a logical route would connect the school, the post office and the town's general store.

After two rounds of private voting, there was a consensus among many of the residents that the winning ideas were tangible and within the limits of what the town could achieve.

"From my point of view, you (town residents) always

choose wisely, but it's really important to make choices by asking, 'what could we line up behind and make real,' and I believe you've done that," said Costello.

He said that he would approach his team on Friday to begin gathering resources that could be pooled to bring the projects into fruition.

The VCRD will also find towns that have recently built a community center. It would be helpful to bring some people who have already gone through the process to Marlboro, he said.

Before leaving the meeting, residents had the opportunity to sign up to be on a task force for each project.

The third and last community visit will be on May 24, when Costello will follow up with the town. Residents will determine "where are we now, what are the next steps and what are some of the resources from the Feds, the state and other that could be useful," Costello said.

He said he would also bring experts to work with the planning commission and the energy committee, which residents said could use some help in making progress.

"I'd be glad to bring teams to do that, and we'll have four teams next month," Costello said.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 6:30 p.m. at the Marlboro Elementary School's Outback Gym.

Jaime Cone can be reached at jccone@reformer.com or 802-254-2311, ext. 277.

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