

# Empower Pownal Forum Notes

*Compiled from focus group discussions held with over 100 Pownal community members and the VCRD Visiting Team on June 24, 2017*

---

## Home Efficiency Opportunities

Visiting Team: Paul Costello (facilitator), Li Ling Young (Scribe), Hyle Bates, Jon Copans, Liam Fagan, David Howe, Elaine Haytko, Stephanie Lane, Paul Markowitz, Bhima Nitta, Dotty Schnure, Gus Seelig

---

### What are the community Assets in this area? What's working now, what's going well?

- In Pownal we can heat with wood. Growing and owning our own heat. There is concern about the environmental impact, but it works well and is less expensive.
- Solar arrays are enough to provide head and take care of all electric needs. It is possible to be energy neutral through geothermal/air source heat pumps, and electric cars. Those with solar can have their cars powered by the sun, at least when travelling locally.
- In our family we heat with a wood stove, propane, and oil as a back-up. Many combine multiple energy sources for heating their homes.
- Efficiency Vermont program is great. I received multiple rebates, especially on LED's and heat pump hot water heaters as well as a heat pump clothes dryer.
- The federal tax rebate helped with solar, and Efficiency Vermont's incentives help also. Access to financial assistance makes solar more accessible.
- Heat with a wood boiler – using cord wood. Log and chop the trees – total cost is about \$650 annually for heat. Use oil in the summer, and the circulation pump for the boiler increases the electric bill by half.
- Connecting with the various providers, Efficiency Vermont, Neighborworks, BROCC, is overwhelming. People don't know where to start.
- Others don't find the process overwhelming, but want it to be cost effective. Things like insulation are very cost effective. Geothermal and Tesla batteries are not as cost effective. Many people don't have the money to make investments in efficiency and other energy projects.
- Some complained about getting too many unsolicited calls from solar companies.
- Everyone's situation is unique. It is difficult to plan for a multi-year payback when I'm not sure how long I will be in my home.
- Some feel overwhelmed about the process of going solar. There is a lack of knowledge about transitioning to new energy sources.

---

### What are the Challenges in this area? What are the issues or problems to be addressed?

- There should be better incentives for door and window replacements. That is a gap in the rebates.
- Outreach could be much better to promote efficiency programs, especially connecting with the elderly and folks who don't use the internet.
- Something like the winter blitz that Bennington and Williams College do – with students going door-to-door to help neighbors button up, could be great.
- The housing stock in Pownal is really old. Many heat with wood.
- Wood smoke increases pollution during the winter. We should increase the efficiency of both the house and the woodstoves.
- One citizen built their house in 2009 and had to pay \$20k to connect to the grid. They currently don't have a heating systems, planning for wood/oil, but now air source heat pumps have become way more cost effective, so the path forward isn't clear.

---

### What should be done? What action can be taken by the community in this area?

- There are relatively cheap actions people can take. Installing LED's, doing air sealing. Neighbors can help neighbors with these activities.
- Maybe we could have a community sewing event to make heat trapping curtains and door "snakes" for people.
- The mobile home parks are tough to reach out to. It would be great to create opportunities in the parks that would benefit residents, like community solar.
- Energy audits are very helpful – blower door tests and infrared cameras, to figure out what you need done in your home and to show where to insulate and seal.
- This is the first I have heard of Efficiency Vermont. There needs to be better outreach to make people aware of services.
- It would be great to do some projects rooted in the schools – service learning projects so students get involved in the community.
- Maybe we can combine forces with the Promise Community Grant. They are considering a laundromat – maybe we could make it highly efficient.
- We should do some community events. An energy fair where information is available so we can understand better what resources are available.
- Maybe we could train community members so that they can do outreach on their own.
- How about a training for landlords. They are the first line for renters. Renters are concerned about efficiency but don't own the home, so they don't have a reason to invest, or aren't able to.

- We need better understanding of what a heat pump is and how it works.
- It is unclear what the goal of this effort is. We should establish a goal for this initiative – helping those who haven't made efficiency improvements to do so. How do we approach them to be effective?
- People are wary of outsiders, so we need to be respectful and find common ground to speak on, don't prescribe interests and solutions to people
- Could this be a program where we go door-to-door?
- If there are not enough certified energy efficiency contractors in the area, this could be a workforce development opportunity (and challenge.) Home efficiency improvements could be a job opportunity.
- There needs to be better education about financing opportunities. There are low-interest loans for those who want to invest in renewables, but many people don't know how to access them.
- Many in Pownal are short on capital or are carrying significant debt. We need to be sure we have opportunities for everyone.
- Financing could happen through our utility, Green Mountain Power.
- Financing could also happen through the town. It could be integrated into your town bill – is there creative financing in relation to the town?
- Pownal could move their town infrastructure towards carbon neutrality.
- Many are not aware of existing programs. There is also a challenge of helping people understand how the savings achieved over time fit into their budget. Rebates from Efficiency Vermont also help bring down the price.
- Thermal curtains are a very local and affordable idea. Having a town sewing day to make door snakes and thermal curtains would be a good idea to bring everyone together to save money.
- Another simple step is to turn off the lights.
- Acting together our individual projects are a way to help the whole town.
- Projects like solar can spread quickly. When you see your neighbor do it, it can spread. The Town could have good examples to build trust with local homeowners and to increase understanding.
- We talk about the mobile homes, but we also need to remember the other older homes in Pownal that also need efficiency improvements.

---

### Reflections of the Visiting Team

- There are a lot of great ideas and seeds of ideas - what different efficiency ideas might be, how do you learn about them. A fair to learn about these are easy.
- Other ideas like net metered solar mobile home park programs would be great.
- There was the idea of doing a special project with the school.
- Also the idea of a special project with the town offices.
- We can each do something with our homes, but we can also do a bigger project together, then toot our own horns and celebrate our success.
- Acting together to provide door-to-door services and outreach.
- There were a few outreach themes identified - how to reach folks who are not as comfortable with the technology, understanding where to start and how to do it, and what grants and financing are available.
- There was a desire to focus on the “low-hanging fruit.” Start with the easy stuff.
- There was a desire to learn more about the programs and resources Efficiency Vermont brings to the table.
- Some common themes identified include - Pownal residents want what is already available in the state; there is a want for knowledge, both about what are my resources and how do I connect to them, as well as where is the best place to start; energy efficiency/climate work as a way of building a sense of community.

---

## Local Grid Resilience and Residential Renewable Energy Development

Visiting Team: Paul Costello (facilitator), Li Ling Young (Scribe), Hyle Bates, Jon Copans, Liam Fagan, David Howe, Elaine Haytko, Stephanie Lane, Paul Markowitz, Bhima Nitta, Dotty Schnure, Gus Seelig

---

### What are the Current Conditions and Challenges in this Area?

- PV on MF
  - Competition between insulation and PV
  - What is future of incentives?
- Pownal experiences frequent power outages, often from downed tree limbs
- The changes in net metering law makes it hard to develop on non-preferred sites.
- Poor solar installations have given the industry a black eye.
- There is the potential for rooftop solar installations to interfere with firefighting
- Many are interested in going solar, and many already have in Pownal.
- GMPS's Tesla Powerwall offering integrates well with residential solar.
- Contractors provide the legwork on incentives and tax credits
- A resident who owns a parcel at a key intersection in Pownal would like to redevelop it to be zero energy and mixed use. The owner already owns another solar project offsite.
- There are concerns with the amount of larger scale solar that has been developed in Pownal.

- Concern about the impact on Vermont's landscape if renewable energy goals are met.
- Not enough of the benefits from these larger solar projects flow back to the community.
- Does Pownal want to be a generator supplying energy to the grid?
- Not all solar projects are equal – there is a difference between personal, roof mounted solar and industrial scale solar.
- The application of CCHP and solar is not well understood.
- There is little local knowledge about the local hydro project at the Tannery Dam.
- Concern about the susceptibility of the grid to disruptions. There is a need for back-up plans, and fossil fuels may have a role in providing resilience.
- Artificially changing the cost of energy may be unproductive, and state initiatives are impositions.
- Solar fields are disgustingly ugly.
- There are questions about what happens to the “solar” or renewable energy credits.
- It is possible to live entirely off the grid, but it is not easy.
- There was local resistance to the development of a biomass electric generation and pellet manufacturing facility.

---

## Ideas: What Should Be Done?

- Solar on our school rooftop to save taxpayer money and, when paired with storage, this would power an emergency shelter
- We should develop non-grid connected solar to increase our independence.
- Solar should be developed on brownfields, landfills and gravel pits in Pownal, not on forest and ag. lands.
- We should use large solar arrays and the town income generated to help pay for individual, roof-mounted solar. Leverage “bad” installs for “good” installs.
- The benefits of local solar projects should flow back to the citizens of the community.
- What about wind energy?
- There is confusion about the hydro facility in Pownal – and a need for greater education.
- Pownal should explore the possibility of micro-hydro. Anyone with flowing water could generate electricity. There is new technology that allows for hydro-generation without the construction of a dam.
- We should superinsulate the town hall and include solar as part of the project.
- There needs to be an effort to educate the people of Pownal on their options. Going solar is difficult to understand. There is a lot of confusion.
- Renovations provide an opportunity to educate about solar. At the point of permitting the renovation.
- Could Pownal be its own island or micro-grid?
- Is there an opportunity for more hydro in Pownal?
- Why is there no talk of wind? There are manufacturers of very small, very quiet residential scale wind generators – we should explore this.
- We need to respect community property rights, property values, and taxes.
- The technology is constantly changing. How do we know if we install solar or some other technology that it won't be obsolete in a few years?
- Are there medical impacts of solar?
- Do solar panels make toxic waste?

---

## Getting Around Pownal and Connecting to Other Communities

Visiting Team: Jon Copans (facilitator), Li Ling Young (Scribe), Hyle Bates, Paul Costello, Liam Fagan, David Howe, Elaine Haytko, Stephanie Lane, Paul Markowitz, Bhima Nitta, Dotty Schnure, Gus Seelig

---

## Current Conditions and Barriers

- The roads in Pownal get plowed.
- Driving is the only way to get around Pownal.
- We have school buses that serve our elementary school and the middle/high school in Bennington.
- I travel to Albany and Dartmouth to see medical care.
- There is a bus that serves both Williamstown and Bennington that comes through Pownal and stops there. There is no weekend service. The bus is equipped with a bike rack.
- There are on-demand transportation services for the elderly and those on Medicaid.
- For those picking up the bus on Rte. 7, it is best to call the bus service or simply to wave the bus down. There is no parking lot for those driving to Route 7 to take the bus
- Some hitchhike and there is a willingness to pick-up locals.
- The hour to hour time bank is used to connect volunteer drivers with those needing a ride.
- There are many walkers on Rte. 7 and crossing Rte. 7 and it is very unsafe.
- There is no park-and-ride in Pownal.
- Taxi ride to Williamstown costs \$50 and to Albany costs \$100.
- There is no Uber service in Pownal or Bennington
- There are zip cars in the area.
- There are concerns about cyclists travelling through the community. There is economic opportunity, but also bike/car conflicts. Williams students ride side-by-side.
- There are also car/ATV conflicts.
- Zimride is a resource for those looking to carpool who plan ahead.
- Rutland train service skips this part of the state.
- Route 7 and the intersection near the school is a major barrier to a walkable town. Kids are not allowed to walk or bike to the elementary school because the intersection is unsafe.
- The school zone is not a low speed area.
- The churches and the Legion Hall are gathering places. The school doesn't really serve as a community center, other than to watch school performances

---

## Ideas: What Should Be Done?

- Utilize the old rail line/trolley track for a bike path.
- Develop train service to Albany and Boston using existing rail lines.
- Use town land for a train station.
- Train line would provide transportation to commuters, access to medical services in Boston, and would make Pownal a magnet for surrounding towns.
- We should develop ridesharing – we could use the town website or another website to facilitate this.
- Development of a local jitney service could be possible. A van that runs around and picks people up.
- We should restore the trolley service between Williamstown and Bennington.
- We should develop a park-and-ride with a bus shelter. We could partner with the career development center on the bus shelter.
- We should develop some sort of rural shared Uber system, though there are questions about whether the population would be big enough.
- We should complete a car ownership and transportation needs survey.
- We need to be a community that has alternatives available for the elderly and non-drivers.
- Mobility solutions tend to be income based.
- We should recruit an Amazon distribution center to Pownal
- We should develop an electric vehicle charging station somewhere in town.
- We need to make infrastructure improvements to make the town more bikeable and walkable.
- We should develop a pedestrian bridge over Route 7.
- We should support the work of the selectboard that is trying to develop a hiking trail that will connect to the Taconic Ridge Trail.
- We should develop a tourist attraction at the tri-state marker (in the woods).
- We need a traffic light at the school intersection.
- We need a tunnel at the school intersection.
- We need a town center to spur economic development which would lead to better walkability.
- Some in town would simply settle for a good coffee shop.
- The racetrack is in a floodplain.

---

## Small Business Development

Visiting Team: Ted Brady (facilitator), Dane Whitman (scribe), Tom Berry, Chris Callahan, Jonathan Cooper, Ben Doyle, Annette Hoyle, Elisabeth Marx, Haley Pero, Jim Sullivan, Abby White

---

## What are the community Assets in this area? What's working now, what's going well?

- TAM Recycling - TAM takes construction debris, food waste, recycling. 8,000 tons of recycling this year. Employs 11 people, all of whom live in Pownal. Looking forward to two more full time positions. Looking at trash and waste as opportunities.
- 180,000 people in the region, how do we bring those funds up into this area?
- Pownal is a beautiful town with great recreation areas.
- Williams College is a resource: alumni and graduation weekends, bring people up to Pownal. Overnight stays perhaps?
- Pownal has the race track. Can we start conversations about revitalizing the race track?  
- Since we are the first thing people see as they travel from the South, what we do represents not just Pownal but state of Vermont.
- Would love to see more Rail use. Can we use it as a hub? Can we use it to send our business' products out by rail?
- People want to come to Pownal, and want to come to Vermont.
- Business owners currently have to send guests to Bennington or North Adams to go grocery shopping.
- There is the co-op or artworks building that could be used as a marketplace.
- Could have stalls that farmers rent out.
- Could be organic or just locally grown.
- We have a liquor store.
- Guests who come don't want to leave Pownal, they would rather stay.
- All of the greenery is one of the reasons people come stay in Pownal. Vermont is something that she can sell. Natural beauty is biggest asset
- In 1936 this was known as the largest art community in Vermont. People arrived by train and trolley.
- Everybody was around here painting, now people should be here taking photographs.
- If people could come along the main roads and stop, that would be a great thing to cooperate with.
- What we need is 5 Great restaurants.
- Pownal was known as the Little Switzerland of Vermont. We can start coining that once again?
- There is an active arts community in Pownal.
- The track could be a farmer's market, as well as restaurants, and space for artists.
- Since we have so many people doing really interesting things all around Pownal, it would be great to create a map of attractions.
- 150 years ago farm would send down a wagon to pick up people from the train, and bring people up to paint and draw in the farmhouse.
- Now there are classes and workshops. Allowing people with a short amount of time to have that experience once again. People have said that it is too far up in the hills to visit, but there is a long list of people wanting to visit.

- It won't be one or two big ideas, but rather many more small efforts that creates the difference we want.
- Small efforts building up are a great asset
- A great asset is the river. It used to be considered "dirty and scary."
- The Hoosick River Watershed trip is a different way to see the river.
- The mountain is an asset, we take it for granted. The view is beautiful.
- If we can start some businesses, Air B&B's, then the restaurants will follow.
- Air B&B's are easy for us to do.
- The history that is here is underrated. It is a means of drawing people in.
- We have created history related programs with Shaftsbury to bring people in.
- An opportunity in 2020 is that it will be the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of when Dutch and others came to Pownal. We want to make it into a large event.
- Regarding the racetrack, beware that the Boston PanAm railroad is currently there, so there is no access. PanAm says that whoever owns the property owes PanAm money. Anyone who wants to use the area we will need to deal with this issue.
- Lots of in home-businesses and agriculture-businesses in town.
- At the farmers market in Bennington, many of the people vendors there live in Pownal.
- Find a way to capitalize that in a concentrated area or create a map.
- One of the assets is the elementary school.
- We have a lot of large buildings on the highway that are currently vacant. Could become incubators. Furniture store for example.
- Two of her three children have left because there is no employment. They also work remotely.
- Somewhere to work remotely would be great.
- Bicycles, Pownal is pedal town.
- Bike riders coming from Williamstown up to Route 7.
- 1,000's of people coming through Pownal during bike season.
- Proximity. We are southernmost tip of Vermont so easier to reach from New York and Massachusetts.
- Route 7 is now a special corridor because of a consortium of museums: Mass Moca, Clark, Theater, and Bennington Museum (and one other). New York Times advertises them, so there should be a lot of traffic as a result. There is a museum pass that gets you to three of these museums.
- One challenge is that the beauty that you see is not visible coming up route 7. The trees have grown so much that you can't see the beauty anymore.
- Reframing some of these things around the Climate Economy. Local Agriculture. Local food movement is something where we have a lot of activity
- Underutilized asset are the mountains. Alternative transportation. Outdoor recreation.
- Nobody mentioned that we brought the clinic closer to home. That is helping the climate.
- We need groceries and a dentist closer to us.
- Speaking about the solar array. Somebody was upset that there were no jobs associated with that project that weren't associated with that project. It would be great if there was a jobs posting board in town where businesses could post opportunities for people.
- Jackie: Children are an asset. Her son went to Pownal elementary school where she volunteered in nature program called "four winds nature program." Children here love learning, are curious and love living here. If we can enrich their lives they will stay here and grow this town.
- We have a lot of plumbers, farmers, electricians, truckers and excavators and they are good people to call. You can get to know the workers.
- There are a lot of talented people in Pownal. Lots of entrepreneurial spirit.
- Lots of forest resources in Pownal.
- We have the wastewater infrastructure in Pownal. Sewer system serves three village centers.
- A second to the contractors who work in this town. And people that can get to know you.
- Our fire department is incredible. Knows you by name. Responsiveness and professionalism is incredible.
- Front Porch Forum is a great asset. A way to learn people's names.

---

### **What are the Challenges in this area? What are the issues or problems to be addressed?**

- We don't own the track.
- With these "underutilized" properties, it would be good to either own them or not own them
- -Some of the good properties are currently in the floodzone, including the track.
- We're always fighting just to keep this valley the way that it is. We need to see this as not a big energy producer.
- There are high taxes. Terrible for business.
- There is financial inequality here.
- Some people dump illegally along river and in the back roads. Makes things pretty "piggy."
- Main Street does not look good. Route 7 could be improved 100%.
- There is no housing. No low-income housing. Young people can't move into town easily.
- We need to let business in.
- Because of our terrain, there is a lot of work that needs to get done to improve the telecommunications.
- High speed internet and cell service can present a challenge.
- Internet. You need to pay a fortune at certain places to get good internet because there is no DSL
- We need to improve the mobile home parks.
- We need to have affordable homes and then that would take care of itself.
- We should create new homes rather than point at some housing that we do not like.
- Senior housing needs to improve

- The town no longer has any economic development representatives, so no longer any local resources. We need somebody to oversee some of these issues. People have to go to Bennington or somewhere else to get these resources.
- There are not enough jobs.
- There is no manufacturing.
- Other towns are able to offer new businesses tax breaks and other things. Since Pownal was unable to offer a deal to new business we are now missing those places.
- We have never developed future-looking jobs. We need to realize that manufacturing is not coming back. In some places nearby there are solar things and semiconductors that pay living wages, but we can't get these things. We don't have the energy infrastructure. Pool of talent or transportation.
- We are between Williamstown, North Adams, and Bennington.
- They are stuck in between a lot of other development, so they aren't too far away from anything.
- There is a lack of public transportation. A high level of poverty leads to less car ownership.
- People can't get to jobs, or can't get to training.
- Basic needs like a laundromat are missing in Pownal.
- I don't think we can decide what the new business is going to be. We need to invite new people to enter the town. Maybe we need to look at regulation and taxes as a means of bringing businesses into the area.
- We need to be careful about oversimplifying unemployment. We need to recognize that sometimes people don't just need more opportunities.

---

### **What should be done? What action can be taken by the community in this area?**

*Doug Kuzmicki started the session by telling his story and asking the group some questions.*

- A property owner in town is considering how to re-purpose the small cabins and store-front on the property. Interested in hearing from the community about what they might envision. The cabins could be micro-houses or for tourists. The owner would like to do something good with the property that contributes to the community.
- Millennials and generation Z tend to not be people who want big houses and lots of stuff. Some places have embraced this by creating areas where people can put their tiny houses. Tiny houses are brought into the woods, like an Air B&B where you get a tiny house for the weekend.
- Agrotourism, and avid fans of geocaching. Both could draw people in.
- Is there any way to get the track to the point where we can meet with the current owner, the town of Pownal, and the railroad? If there are \$100,000 owed, should we just settle with it being there?
- The building currently at the track may be becoming a safety issue.
- Can we make our own access to the track through the backside and eliminate the Pan Am issue.
- Town road crosses because of the cemetery, so that crossing will stay.
- We need to create a new access point so that many people can meet at the track again.
- If it takes the Town to bring in a new roadway, that could be a great opportunity.
- Backyard sugaring: Property owners have approached him to ask if people would be willing to tap their trees. Would be great to have a land bank, to bring in producers such as sugaring and beekeepers. During the time that they are tapping, creates a lot of jobs, albeit temporary. Brings money into Vermont.
- --Put together a piece about taking the town property from down at the tannery and putting in a passenger rail station to New York City through Schenectady and through Boston.
- If we could once again make this into the gateway to Vermont, would be great.
- Speaking as someone whose family has struggled with unemployment and financial struggles. Food security would be a great thing to address. We need affordable food. When we are struggling we are not buying food at the farmers market. Combining new entrepreneurship with more affordable food. Bartering with friends all of the time. Trading meat for vegetables. Setting up a bartering collaborative. Could bring the community together.
- Straighten out all of the railroad crossing. Taking a comprehensive look. Make the crossings productive for the people who want to do things in the state.
- Have a community garden, that you could be a part of it, and is also a co-op. Town could provide the seeds. Wouldn't have to pay to be a part of the co-op garden. In North Adams they have gardens outside of Mass Moca that are community gardens.
- TAM could recycle anything else to make a business out of it. Old windshields, in Oregon they are fabricating beautiful shower doors and other things out of these items. How much would it cost to create a business, targeting recycling to generate business ideas?
- TAM currently takes all of the waste that they have and can turn it into something new, but it can be very costly to add business component to waste management and recycling.
- --As economy moves more towards distributed generation. We will need maintenance for decades to come. Could there be a school or training here in Pownal to show people how to maintain energy infrastructure?
- For a lot of people this is just a throughway from Williamstown to Bennington. If we had a place to stop, an attraction to just stop. Create a place to stop along the road.
- Camelot village in Bennington, we could have something like that. Something like the Applebarn, where buses can stop.
- Pownal could be an arts community fascinates. An arts co-op could be great. Shared spaces.
- Lots of people have goods and services to share. A comprehensive, up-to-date way to exchange the information about what goods and services we have and are offering. Land, service, and goods.

- Following up on the arts. Like kodak spots. Create a map of plenaire areas, so that artists could find the places they want to go.
- Fueling for electric vehicles in town. Could put something down by the solar plant.
- They need to create somewhere for the kids to go. They don't have anywhere to get off the street. Splash park or rec center. Ages in between high school and younger.
- We could have a rest stop, which would be used as a place for electric cars to charge. We could have a great bulletin board right there.

---

## Reflection of the Community Visit Team

- Number of people who are here and spoke up, people are indeed moving here.
- Recycling business, mobile home park, housing stock, there is now a sewer system. Thinking about energy development there is lots of renewable development.
- Super energy efficient units that you can put on a mobile home pad, what you save in energy pays for the mobile home. Can we upgrade the housing on the mobile homes?
- So much creativity in this room. People are industrious. Thinking about a homeschool collaborative. Such an asset that people all have a lot of creative ideas. Could weave all of these ideas. Find the moments where ideas feel the best and go with them.
- Biggest asset is the people. Natural beauty is a great asset. 170,000 people live so closely to this area. Ben heard a lot about the arts. Bringing people to the table for a step forward.
- Felt the passion that everybody in the area has towards the community. Pownal's location is both a tremendous asset and a real challenge. Some things are already in neighboring cities, so how can we bring it to Pownal? Looking at challenges as opportunities.
- Skill trades people are here. Combining that with Housing. Little spots for cycling activity.
- The people there today represent their community really well. From really small ideas to looking outside the box, it is a tribute to their great entrepreneurial spirit. Lots of referral that is going on within the new community.
- Chain of events, Sense of Place, Looking at future and looking at the past.
- Lots of tremendous pride in the community. Very inherent resilience in this community. He saw thoughts of being an ambassador community for Vermont. Concept of the local food system in terms of high end options and others.
- Saw participants as entrepreneurs, 50 people to show up on Saturday in June to talk about economic development.

---

## Recreation, Trails, Health, and Wellness

Visiting Team: Ben Doyle (facilitator), Dane Whitman (scribe), Tom Berry, Ted Brady, Chris Callahan, Jonathan Cooper, Brad DeBoer, Annette Hoyle, Elisabeth Marx, Haley Pero, Jim Sullivan, Abby White

---

### What are the community Assets in this area? What's working now, what's going well?

- Southern Vermont Medical Center - Satellite Campus. Closer than traveling to the hospital. Pownal-centric Health Center is great.
- Hoosick River. People go down to the river. Fish. Canoe. Kayak. Beautiful River.
- Other bodies of water in Pownal. Recreation oriented. Barbers Pond and fishing access after South St. Road.
- Fishing is awesome.
- Nature Conservancy property over by Quarry is beautiful.
- There are trails and access to the quarry. Very interesting wildflowers since it is all lime at the Quarry.
- The Nature conservancy land is not very well advertised.
- Also the tubs. Wonderfully cold water and stone circles. Teenager hangout.
- Amazing and rare wildflowers.
- Pownal Bog. Has very rare and unusual plant life. Town owned, or privately owned? Where is it?
- The Appalachian trail runs through Pownal, but you can't get to it.
- Access to the Taconic trail.
- Wildlife management area off of Barber's Pond Rd.
- Caves and a good climbing wall somewhere...
- Town forest is close to 800 acres. In the process of going through a legal right of way status.
- Beautiful drives for leaf people, and cyclists
- Burrington road is a wonderful walking road with a great view.
- Hoosick River Watershed Association...HOORA. Regional Organization. They are interested in Pownal. Interest is very much in recreation and trail building. Could be interested with working with people in this town.
- As far as we know there is no trail committee.
- BATS. Bennington Area Trail Systems. Brad DeBoer is president of BATS.
- There is a recreation committee that does a month long program in July at the school. Focused on using the school facility.
- Pownal Little League. Most beautiful Little League field
- Horses are a big part of Pownal.
- The Rescue Squad. Last week went to a free CPR training.
- Pownal has quite a few Wellness Practitioners, Massage Therapists.
- Group called Circle of Life, midwifery.
- Visiting nurses and children's integrated home. Do lots of home visiting with pregnant women.
- Meals on Wheels serves Pownal.
- Hospice is located in Bennington, but takes care of us in Pownal.
- There are also assets in Bennington that Pownal can take advantage of.

---

## What are the Challenges in this area? What are the issues or problems to be addressed?

- One challenge is the amount of private land. Trails cut across private land. Some of the places mentioned cross through private land.
- From the point of view of the owner, people are concerned about the liability of people occupying space.
- No official Green Mountain National Trail through Pownal. Also not to the Taconic trail. We have to move through private land to reach these unofficial areas.
- Better signage would be helpful.
- We don't have big playgrounds.
- Would be wonderful to have trails instead of a playground. But why not both?
- One of the enjoyment issues is that people are burning trash, and that sometimes you can smell that along the trail. Illegal disposal.
- There are very few pedestrian roads in Pownal, difficult for foot traffic because there are no sidewalks.
- Bicycling there is an issue. It can be difficult to find a spot for biking. Need to be brave to go into town.
- We have pulled together a group of people to clean up sites so maybe they could address trash burning on trails.
- There is no way to cross Route 7, especially dangerous while cycling. Kids are not allowed to ride bikes to school because of Route 7.
- Traffic is preventing kids from riding their bikes.
- A road or two on the mountain that ATV's are allowed to ride on, but access to them is difficult. Can make it there with a trailer but could be easier to access.
- There are no mountain bike trails, but there is always interest.
- The state department is closing down the four wheeler trails. There used to be nice trails, and now a lot of people can't go anywhere anymore without hauling the vehicle somewhere else.
- We have tried in the past to locate money to put in improvements for bike paths, etc. We don't have a lot of experience seeking grants. Often find out about grant money late.
- Even though we have a health center in Pownal, it is still difficult to access the health center due to public transportation.
- Access to dental is limited. Need to go to Bennington to get dental.
- Access to healthy food is limited. Need to go to Bennington to get affordable healthy food.
- One asset, there are a lot of farms, but there isn't a lot of coordination so access is limited to get to that food.
- Pownal little league. Only organized sports league in Pownal, so there is a lack of organized activities in Pownal. Lack of things for youth to do in the summer. Month of July program is only in elementary schools.
- No formal swimming in Pownal. Now there is no public swimming. Nowhere for children to learn how to swim.
- There is a sign on the road that says that there are children playing on the road. No place for the children to play.
- Kaitlin Hunt is a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. Children had an idea to give the Race Track sidewalks, bike paths, playground, etc.

---

## What should be done? What action can be taken by the community in this area?

*Ben opened with the recognition that previously mentioned assets are a part of climate economy.*

- Businesses, we need a map so that people know where to go to find things that they want to do. Include Pownal's assets on the map.
- It would be great if property owners agreed to create postings saying that people are welcome to use their property. Personally, I've thought about it. People actively sharing their assets.
- The model of a trail system including private land exists in Kingdom trails up in the northeast kingdom. 53 Private landowners have signed on to make it possible. It is a result of the generosity of the landowners. Also, the trail riders and users respect the private property.
- There is a concern of the legal ramifications of such a system. Vermont has a very strong land-owner protection written into statute. If you are not benefitting from people using your lands, people would have to prove that there was malicious intent to be illegal. Need to read the legal statutes. We could educate people about their liability and exposure regarding recreational opportunities.
- Pownal could create ad hoc town committee to look at trail access, and coordinate with landowners.
- The trails need to be repaired and maintained. Bennington Area Trail Service (BATS) as an example.
- BATS would love to reach out into areas outside Bennington. Trails brings a lot into the local economies. And our population market is greater than northeast kingdom.
- The northeast kingdom has done it. We should access their plans so that we don't have to reinvent the wheel.
- Create bike lane system connecting Berkshire to Bennington through Pownal. Could go along the old rail tracks.
- Create a splashpad play area for kids. Place for picnic and barbecue, could be a space for entrepreneurship.
- Does the state still have money to have funds available to buy unused trailways?
- Jim Sullivan: There are a couple of grant programs, but the amount of money available doesn't get a lot of distance. Purchasing right of way is often the most expensive. Part of the rail track has developed into Bennington. We have given a lot of thought to that. If you don't need to buy right of way you are way ahead of the game.
- We should continue to beautify the Route 7 corridor. Take back on the roadsides one of the greatest views in Vermont.
- We could create a bridge across Route 7. We should also take a look at pedestrian foot traffic.
- Bike rentals or Kayak rentals. We could have a drop off and pick up on Hoosick. Can we reach out to an existing recreation business and bring them into the community?

- Have a business training, so that industrious kids could start their own businesses. Kids could rent their time at the lemonade stand, basically an environmental hub.
- Motorcycle Rally and Motorcycle Runs. If we have an ATV club, then we could have trail trims, and a form of stewardship. Would all be donated time. Motorcycle and ATV folks can bring in that kind of money. Right now, people need to put motorcycles on trailers, even though they live in the woods. As far as we know, there is no active ATV club in town.
- VAST would be a great model for that.
- Having geocaching throughout Pownal would be recreation as well as health and wellness. Only about four in Pownal currently. It's a treasure hunt.
- If there could be a fundraiser, where people raise money towards a bike trail. Could be an event that is a ride. Similar to the AIDS rides.
- There are different models for cycling fundraisers. Would need volunteers and organization to pull it off but could work great.
- The "Red Dragons" used to come through. The "Hoosick River Ride" comes through part of Pownal.
- Could the hospital be a partner in cataloguing the overall dollar value on public health if people are using these trails?
- Using the school campus. Could have a community recreational paths that are on the school's campus.
- Ten years ago they started a community garden. It lasted for about four or five years and then things faded away. We need to remember that you want to be involved, follow through, and stay with it.
- Part of creating an initiative is creating a project sustainably. It can be difficult when there are only community champions.
- Contribute to your own food security by pulling weeds.
- We need to make sure that whatever we create is affordable and accessible.
- Notion of a coop with people contributing time, to sustain a space and selling the food affordably.
- Creating a farmer's stand run. Organize a painted van that has different pickup points from different farm stands. Could carry people from farm to farm, and have farmers go from place to place.
- We could look at how much food needs to be produced to provide for the people in this area. Think about what will grow or not grow as things change over the next twenty years.
- There is a group in Bennington County looking at the gap of affordable lunch being provided during a particular time over the summer. If we could distribute all the different farmer's food in August, this could aid efforts like that.
- We have beautiful farmland but an aging farming population.
- We were able to buy land partly because it was in the Vermont land trust. There is a farm land access program that is trying to work on this. We bartered with farmers: farmers used the pasture and we got some free produce. Pownal is much more affordable than other areas of Vermont, but still tough from a farmer's salary.
- A lot of folks in Pownal don't know how to cook, shop, or meal plan. If we could partner with SVMC to have nutritionists teach in Pownal. Nobody is teaching this in Pownal.
- There could be a community store/community shed. A place for food, clothes, dishes, books. An area where otherwise wasted things could be exchanged. Instead of creating a new program, interdependence in the community. Community Kiosk at the splash pad.
- Along with health and wellness we could teach people personal responsibility. There are lots of opportunities.
- Teaching people how to cook is also a solution.
- Started an hour for hour, time bank. 246 people, was just reorganized so that is owner run and is now the same. Could perhaps transfer over to the same system.
- A discrepancy between a place and a system, an online system vs. a physical space.
- Back to barter space idea, we have a little swap shed at the transfer station. It is not walkable from town, but maybe could be expanded.
- In the country of Belize you pay a dollar to go the zoo if you are Belisian. Can we have a discount for Pownal residents?
- Developing local currencies. Buying token for so many dollars and that becomes credible for local businesses.
- Creating a different class of property in Vermont for homesteaders. Discrepancy from agriculture, and housing. Have a different sort of zoning for something in between. Support and tax structure for homesteaders. We could talk about the tax base with state legislators and work with Farm bureau to find new
- Urging us to think about linkages with the elementary schools.
- Have something at the school, to create a swap shed using that as a local exchange area.
- Copenhagen took parts of the local roads and set aside one lane for bicycles only. Went to a population that is much more car-less. Can we have a lane designated for bicycles.

---

## Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Maps of trails are key. Recreation groups she has been part of have never met in Pownal. Signage could encourage us to think about this as an artistic community. Getting kids involved in social enterprise. You have great assets. I think there is a place about how to get to these places. Stewardship, if people are trashing areas people will not want to lend out land.
- Mapping to do in Pownal. Taking surplus and turning it into opportunities.
- It is about access. Bikes, food, ATV's. BATS is an example. Bring townspeople as well as tourists to Pownal.
- Organization. A lot of these things between assets and further assets are right on the edge of happening, just need a catalyst. Some things in the state. Some things volunteering. Some things are other entities. ATV's. Trails to Appalachian. BATS. Swap Shed. Pownal government. People in the local community.
- Lack of information. Resources that are there that need to be pulled together into a single place. Getting engaged regionally could benefit Pownal. Could become a lynchpin between North Adams to Bennington. Tying yourself into existing networks.
- Bennington section of the Green Mountain Club is quite active. In terms of family nutrition there is a program that needs a reminder that Pownal is here.
- The breadth of the seasonality. There is a lot of things that stretch over the year.
- When we (BATS) need access, we do a great job of pulling together volunteers.

---

## Local Agriculture and Forestry

Visiting Team: Ben Doyle (facilitator), Dane Whitman (scribe), Tom Berry, Ted Brady, Chris Callahan, Jonathan Cooper, Annette Hoyle, Elisabeth Marx, Haley Pero, Jim Sullivan, Abby White

---

### What are the community Assets in this area? What's working now, what's going well?

- We have farmers, whereas many communities do not.
  - Our farms range from small farming to commodity milk.
  - We have good land.
  - The size of farms is decreasing, a number of people are making a few dollars off of agriculture.
  - Some people retired, and then became farmers through retirement to support themselves.
  - A small creamery is starting up. But there are huge pressures on the older traditional farms. It will not work if we do not keep a diversified portfolio.
  - With the lower cost of ownership of property for agricultural land, some property owners can allow farmers to use that land.
  - There is access to farmland, but this if property taxes are raised then people will not be able to live on this land.
  - There is lots of forest in Pownal.
  - Some people make money from leasing out their trees to non-local forestry.
  - It is a good climate for farming. The northeast is blessed with moisture, while other parts of the country are starving for water.
  - Very good maple sugarers, who are very good at what they do. Mid-sized but not industrial. Not doing vacuum pumping.
- Can't say whether or not it is a growing economy. About three people in Pownal are going for market.
  - Pownal has biodiversity in wildlife.
  - There used to be people processing the lumber.
  - There used to be a sawmill but now is a recycling center.
  - Closest mill is a relatively small one in Petersville.
  - Dairy makes a value added project.
  - There is a fellow who has created a portable saw mill, but is small scale. You can purchase timbers from him.
  - A lot of the people at the Bennington Farmers market are Pownal farmers with small value added products.
  - There was interest in a pellet manufacturing location at one point.
  - There are small fields in Pownal. Could more easily support niche products like value added. Mustard and Kimchi relish are all made in your hops.
  - Access to markets are definitely a plus.
  - One Pownal resident runs a hop farm three miles up the road. ¾ of an acre. About twenty people growing hops in Vermont. Bright Ideas Brewing in North Adams will be buying hops from his the next six years.
  - Commercial Kitchen at the American Legion could be a great asset.

---

### What are the Challenges in this area? What are the issues or problems to be addressed?

- Closure of the sawmill.
  - There is no Hemlock on this side of the mountain.
  - There is a culture of farming here, but a lot of farmers who are getting up in their years.
  - Value added products are the way for people to enter farming. Need to produce things in a licensed facility. There is a lack of licensed facilities in the area.
  - Waitsfield, Hardwick, Greenfield MASS, are the closest licensed facilities.
  - Currently the right arrangements are not being made for the American Legion kitchen to be used as a food hub.
  - Berries. What can we do about lowering the license requirements for people to grow harvest and sell? Cost of land is a challenge. State or town needs to lower taxes.
  - PFOA contamination in water supply. Could there be money available for a private company to look at water or bottling facility.
  - Price of milk and raw logs are down. The markets are down.
  - Not enough local brewers to lead the hop production. (*joke*)
- Low availability of labor for local agriculture. There is no state program in Vermont. Farmer has to pay 12% workers comp of payroll. Employees are coming from local area. But there is a challenge of finding people willing to work year-round.
  - Somebody has a seventeen year old looking for work.
  - People who would like to utilize land for agriculture, but don't know what would be the best thing to grow economically in those niche industries. Lack of technical assistance.
  - If we could establish a niche that this valley is known for growing, and get enough people growing it that the industry support us.
  - We can't buy hemp seeds.
  - Everybody is working in their own kitchen. The transportation cost of following through with agriculture. The distribution system isn't working.
  - There is the demand for lamb. But limited access to slaughterhouses due to time constraints.
  - Individual efforts aren't feasible. There needs to be some way to get people together to pool these resources

---

### What should be done?

- Programs available to train young people. If someone needs a butcher, how do we train a butcher? Basic job training.
  - Career development center at local high school has a forestry program but does it have an agriculture program?
- We would need a facility license for a slaughterhouse.
  - We could use a mobile processing unit to for the area.
  - Why can't we look at the demand? If there were less regulation maybe we could address this.

- Is there enough demand? Not enough demand for a slaughtering facility.
- Coordination of existing resources regarding processing facilities and packing centers.
- We need scale. Very small farms might not be able to make a big difference. With small parcel sizes it is difficult to have a sizeable business. Many of these parcels are more along the line of supplemental income.
- There is a lot of part-time niche farming and that's perfectly fine.
- There is no place for dairy around here. Biggest farmer in Pownal had 450 head.
- To what extent is there a social network of farmers? Sharing equipment, communicating, collaborating.
- People don't think there is any existing social network within Pownal.
- A social network would be helpful. If there was a mechanism so that we could get together and create a network. Could be online, or a list, or a meetup.
- Bennington Farm to Plate council used to organize an annual local food symposium. Things like this can be a place to link supply and demand. Bringing together people with needs and people with services.
- Cross marketing, so that we can link people across places.
- Would be great to have somebody who is technologically competent to set up a Pownal farmer Facebook group.
- If there was more help from the UVM extension agency, but UVM pulled out at one point.
- Now UVM is back to set up their Bennington office once again. Re-engage with UVM extension agency.
- You are close enough to New York that their extension agency will come over. The extension program is a national program, it can be good to pull from different states.
- We don't know who we are and we don't know what we do. There is no central place to talk or gab or have a coffee. It is really important to convene.
- One person wants to start a bar.
- Marketing. Opportunities and lessons around marketing. What can the community do to pursue that? Pownal brand. There are resources to support that.
- While there is diversity in what people are growing, we need to meld our resources together into a market. And also need to find a way to get to that market. Market development and distribution. Everybody agree about getting their goods out and making an income.
- Recommendation of the Rural Development Grant program. We can get a town or non-profit organization to say they want to develop a marketing plan. Flexible grant programs. Less-so about dropping off a list of resources, more-so about developing plans with others.
- There is a distance, real and otherwise, between this corner of the state and the areas where these resources exist.
- We learn about grants too late. We lack the experience to put in grants. We need to build capacity about people's ability to access these resources.
- We are not removed from the market, but rather from the capacity to access those markets.
- Farmland access program of the Vermont Land Trust. It is a private program whether you have access to it or not depends on the board of trustees. But actually there is a public element to it. While access is limited, it is not only about a private program.

---

## Reflections of the Community Visit Team

- Farm and Forest Viability Program. One on one business planning with any farmer who enrolls in the program. Purchase of development rights. Farmland Access program will purchase development rights to make a farmland purchase affordable. Funding system to help communities to write grants to pull in this funding.
- None of the farmers in Cabot today ship to Cabot. They have created their own network. The success in Hardwick is because farmers have gotten together. They then demanded that the universal packing center moves into their area. The next action step. Whether full time or part time, how can you leverage each other, support each other, and do things that will be of mutual benefit. Will take a mosaic approach.
- Whatever Bill tells Montpelier to do, they do. Why do we leave where we live? Because half way between where I work and where they work. Agricultural assets help people want to live in Pownal. Vermont's agricultural economy defines Pownal.
- Already seeing impacts of coming together.
- Lots of existing resources that are not making their way down here. The need for scale to be competitive. Opportunities for scale through aggregation.
- Addison and Franklin garden, people getting together seems to be a big impact. It can even be defensive, to mitigate impacts. There is a bit of neglect down here. This location creates an opportunity, since it is tucked between existing areas.
- Local food and agriculture was a consistent theme in all three sessions today. Far less forestry things are touched upon. Forestry could provide a lot of opportunities.
- If there are things that can be discovered in Pownal between residents of Pownal, imagine everything that the peripheral population can discover.
- Sense of community and place. People identified challenges, and opportunities. The idea of little Switzerland was interesting, arts community, and rural community.