

ST. ALBANS CITY
CREATIVE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM



FINAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

June, 2006

Vermont Council on Rural Development

St. Albans City Creative Communities Program

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Introduction

St. Albans is building its reputation as a key cultural and economic center for northern Vermont. From hosting the Maple Festival to creating the world's largest artist's palette as part of the Palettes of Vermont project, St. Albans is a city on the move. One Canadian visitor described St. Albans as "The Gem Across the Border" and everyone on the Creative Communities' visiting Resource Team understood why. From the art in Taylor Park to bold visions of a St. Albans regional arts center, residents have used the Creative Communities Program to look to the future and build partnerships that can expand the momentum and become signature elements in the St. Albans brand.

Many of the participants in St. Albans' Creative Communities process shared a belief that the city sat on the verge of being "discovered"— as a destination for visitors and as an attractive place to locate strong, entrepreneurial businesses that could count on St. Albans' quality of life to help retain local workers. However, participants also shared the question of how to make existing ingredients come together to tip the balance from "up-and-coming" to "established" as a center of activity in Vermont's Northwest corner.

The ideas put forward in community forums suggest the number of ingredients already in place for a booming creative economy. For example, there is the historic architecture. Many buildings have been kept in good condition or restored, others could be restored, and all might become spaces for creative economy business. Taylor Park already provides a commanding centerpiece for the city and is increasingly utilized for community events. The St. Albans area enjoys a robust agricultural heritage, recognized statewide in institutions like the St. Albans Dairy Cooperative and the Maple Festival, as well as cultural amenities like excellent restaurants. St. Albans has easy access to Montreal – providing an urban connection for Vermont area residents and a retreat to a more rural environment for Montreal residents.

The challenge for St. Albans today is putting all of its ingredients together into a successful strategy for meeting community goals. Accomplishing this task will require both following through on proposed projects and engaging more community members in the process of designing and implementing these projects.

The priority projects chosen by St. Albans residents this spring reflect careful thought about what brings together the threads of existing initiatives, while also taking steps forward into new territory. The twin goals of **Arts and Community Events in Taylor Park** and **Organizing Evening Events** reinforce what St. Albans For the Future and the Park Commission have observed as needs for downtown. These mutual interests provide the opportunity for joining forces with existing organizations. **Building an Arts Center** is an ambitious goal, but at the same time one that can bring together arts efforts, give this component of city life a more visible presence, and thereby promote even more activity. The Project Team considering options for **High Speed Internet Access** is farsighted in establishing the basic infrastructure necessary to attract and retain creative businesses. This technology is a fundamental tool in creative economic development that should not be overlooked.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development and Creative Communities Program are deeply grateful to those who helped carry out the creative economy planning process in St. Albans. Local leadership is what has made, and what will make, this effort a success. The Creative Communities Program would like first to thank Mike Curtis who stepped forward early on to chair the Creative Community visit. Thanks are also due to St. Albans For the Future, which has taken the creative economy concept and run with it in St. Albans. The Franklin County Senior Center, People's Trust Company and Northwestern Medical Center have generously supplied meeting space while the Bayside Pavilion Restaurant brought us an excellent community dinner. None of this effort would have happened without the dedication of the local steering committee, and we greatly appreciate the time they took to make sure everything ran smoothly in St. Albans.

Accomplishments in the Creative Communities Program result from local leadership and community effort. However, VCRD is eager to support implementation. We suggest that you carefully review the Recommendations section of this report for concrete resources and ideas, and that you call upon members of the Resource Team (listed at the end of this report) and VCRD staff for help.

Overview of the Creative Communities Program

By 2003, the idea of the creative economy had become pervasive in Vermont, but few policy makers and local leaders had understanding of how to advance the opportunity of the creative economy systematically in state policy or in practice in towns throughout the state. The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) convened the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI) to craft a strategic plan that would coordinate the work of statewide leadership, the congressional delegation and state legislature, and provide community leaders with a guide to practical action. The final product, *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy*, was formally issued at the beginning of the 2005 Vermont Legislative session.

The VCCI report is available online at <http://www.vtrural.org>. It outlines the current strength of Vermont's creative economy and offers recommendations for increasing the contribution that a creative economy can make to the state's overall economic health.

One of the policy recommendations in the VCCI report was to establish a Vermont Creative Communities Program that would jumpstart local creative economy development projects by offering targeted assistance for community-led planning. VCRD received a grant from Jane's Trust to implement this program starting in 2005.

Today, the Creative Communities Program builds on both VCCI's findings and the successful Community Visit program that VCRD has managed for many years. Community Visits offer a way for communities to identify key issue areas and construct work plans for addressing selected public concerns.

The 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?

The Creative Communities Process

The Creative Communities Program consists of three public meetings that generate the brainstorming, prioritized projects, and action steps detailed in this report. The goal is to bring a diverse group of community members to the table who are in agreement in their commitment to a strong future for their community and can begin to work together to identify key steps for ensuring that future. The timeline for St. Albans' process was as follows:

April 11th, 2006 – First Public Forum

In the month leading up to the first forum, a local steering committee chooses 6 issue areas related to the creative economy to serve as the starting point for public discussion.

VCRD invites a resource team to a day of facilitated public discussion in focus groups formed around the 6 issue areas (pg. 9). Using notes from scribes and resource team members, VCRD develops list of themes that emerged during the day as concrete project possibilities. This list (pg. 21) forms the basis for the prioritization session in the second public meeting.

May 2nd, 2006 – Project List Review and Prioritization

The first full community meeting places all issues of concern on the table. The second community meeting reviews and revises the ideas on the initial list and then allows individuals to champion issues seen as top priorities. Through discussion and voting, St. Albans participants narrow the long list of projects that emerged from the first meeting to 4 priority areas (pg. 25), then sign up to participate in work teams on projects in these areas.

May 23rd, 2006 – Project Team Working Day

In the final meeting run by VCRD, work teams for each project set specific strategies, identify available (and potential) resources, and outline a work plan for the next year around the projects selected in the second meeting. A new Resource Team invited by VCRD facilitates the group discussions, offers ideas and resource suggestions and answers questions from their experience. VCRD then writes up work plans based on residents' decisions (pg. 27). Finally, VCRD Resource Team members submit their ideas via e-mail, suggestions, and resource recommendations for the use of the new committee (pg. 33).

Background to St. Albans' Participation in the Creative Communities Program

St. Albans was one of five pilot communities in the Creative Communities Program at the Vermont Council on Rural Development. The other four initial participants were: Hardwick, Rutland, Rockingham / Bellows Falls and Windsor. A press conference in the Vermont State House kicked off the program in December, 2005. Work began with St. Albans in January, 2006.

St. Albans' local creative economy efforts formally began as part of the Franklin-Grand Isle L.E.A.D. program, a leadership training initiative. This group undertook an analysis of the VCRD *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy* report as a step towards crafting a relevant Franklin County project. In 2004, L.E.A.D. participants conducted a series of interviews and small group meetings with local artists, businesses and community leaders to assess the need and desire to promote creative economic development. St. Albans For the Future (SAFF) became a creative economy partner at this fact gathering stage.

The L.E.A.D. group's work eventually resulted in a public forum cosponsored by L.E.A.D. participants, SAFF and the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. The forum attracted 60 enthused citizens to St. Albans City Hall to learn more about the creative economy concept. Participants shared their visions of how St. Albans could build on its assets and move into the future by developing the creative economy. From the input gained at this meeting, the group formally organized its mission and purpose, adopting an official name: Advancing the Creative Economy in St. Albans (ACE).

ACE's first project became a two-day road trip organized in partnership with SAFF, the Vermont Historic Preservation Trust and the City of St. Albans. This trip explored other Vermont downtowns, meeting with community leaders along the way, to learn from places that had moved forward on different elements of a strong creative economy. Trip participants returned to St. Albans with a full plate of ideas for bolstering their city's creative economy.

Another element adding to St. Albans' creative economy efforts was a separate downtown marketing study conducted by Arnett Muldrow Associates LTD. SAFF managed this project. The comprehensive strategic document that the study produced identified the creative economy as one of five strategies with strong potential for advancing St. Albans' downtown. The study recommended an agricultural focus for the creative economy component of downtown development.

The marketing study and road trip also pointed towards the physical infrastructure already in place to highlight through the creative economy. St. Albans has exceptional historical architecture at its commercial core. The Historic District defines an area, including the downtown center, with buildings ranging in date from 1812-1932 that form a spectacular streetscape. At the center stands Taylor Park - a grand public space that serves as a community hub for recreation, gatherings, and community events like the Farmers' Market and annual Maple Festival. Arnett Muldrow appropriately dubbed the park "St. Albans' Living Room".

With some elements of creative economy work in place, St. Albans faced the question of how to move beyond its previous discussions to set firm projects and capture new community input. SAFF and ACE specifically identified three areas to target:

- a) Fostering stronger connections between the different local organizations that have a vested interest in the creative economy.
- b) Keeping the momentum strong and moving everyone ahead
- c) Educating those who do not understand the creative economy concept.

Both SAFF and ACE were relatively new organizations in St Albans at the time of applying to the Creative Communities Program. However, SAFF had already built a track record for accomplishments promoting its goals of fostering community pride, preserving community heritage and ensuring a high quality of life in the downtown. SAFF had partnered with local schools and after-school programs on community service projects. They worked with the local historical society to bring improvements to the St. Albans Historical Museum. SAFF also collaborated with the City's Community and Economic Development Department to write a successful application for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, develop an RFP, and act as project manager for what became the Arnett Muldrow marketing study.

The leadership already present in St. Albans provided a strong platform for beginning participation in the Creative Communities Program. Existing organizations were able to blend creative economy efforts into ongoing economic and community development strategies.

In addition to the building blocks for a local creative economy initiative, St. Albans also presented an opportunity to share their experience with other communities. Franklin County is the fastest-growing county in Vermont serving approximately 45,000 Vermonters, and St. Albans City is the county seat. As the economic hub of Franklin County, a model established in St. Albans, could provide regional benefit to neighboring towns as well as other communities throughout the Northwest region of the State.

I. First Public Forum on the Creative Economy

April 11th, 2006

A local steering committee formed to plan the first public forum. The central principle behind inviting steering committee members was to bring together a diverse range of perspectives on what the creative economy could mean for St. Albans. The individuals on this committee were:

Karen Bresnahan
Mike Curtis
Jay Fleury
Liz Gamache
Ann Levy
Michael Loner
Jen Savage
Leon Thompson
Patrick Warn
Bridget Zurn

The steering committee selected six topics to serve as the starting point for public discussions around the creative economy (see notes below). These topics represented broad ideas that could open the door for participants to bring a range of specific concerns and project suggestions to the table.

The Franklin County Senior Center hosted the forum on a beautiful April afternoon. The Bayside Pavilion restaurant provided a complimentary pancake dinner showcasing the maple syrup that would be featured in St. Albans' Maple Festival celebration in a few weeks. There was plenty of time for in depth conversations during discussion group sessions and informal conversation with the Resource Team outside of the structured sessions.

Creative Skill Development

Resource Team: Chip Evans (Executive Director, Human Resources Investment Council), David Lane (Deputy Secretary, Vermont Agency of Agriculture), Ellen Kahler (Executive Director, VT Sustainable Jobs Fund), Ellen McCulloch-Lovell (President, Marlboro College), James Black (Department Chair, Business & Economics, Johnson State College), Jan Herder (Dibden Center for the Arts at Johnson State College)

What are some of the skills that relate to the creative economy? How do we learn these skills – in St. Albans or elsewhere?

- Creativity can be taught.
- Children learn by watching what their parents do – creativity in adults in the community will trickle down.
- Combining disparate elements within the community leads to learning creative skills.
- Schools should incorporate individual creativity into the curriculum

- The community needs to support creativity in the school system.
- Students should be celebrated / rewarded for creative work. It's not all about sports.
- Creativity comes through exposure to creative things.
- Mentorship is critically important.
- Sustaining and systematic arts programming keeps kids in school, according to recent research.
- We need to justify investment in arts for schools.
- St. Albans needs to invest in "next generation" technology to support creative growth.
- What can we do to harness the creativity of youth?
- People need to have fun with learning creative skills.
- Engage local educational management with the community, and impress upon them our emphasis on creativity.
- St. Albans needs a strong central organization.
- St. Albans needs a large central space.
- St. Albans has examples of arts projects increasing creativity in the community: Rail City Art Train, palettes project.
- There's a pipeline of creative workers moving between St. Albans and Burlington. How do we tap into that pipeline?

Projects Ideas

- Build a center that is a magnet for creative entrepreneurial activity. It could incorporate:
 - Educational institutions
 - Visual/performing arts center combined with educational component
 - Include a private music school
- Host a festival that highlights St. Albans' unique character
- Survey St. Albans' creative assets. One example of an approach to this is the Urban Institute (an anthropological approach).
- Develop programs around bio-fuels and bio-diverse jobs.
- Build creative projects that tie into community health, like healthy diets that incorporate local foods.
- Host people to be the "spark plugs" for new ideas. To get that critical mass movement started, and develop a commitment to maintaining momentum for projects.

Resource Team Reflections

- Assets:
 - St. Albans has affordable housing
 - St. Albans has family community
 - St. Albans in close proximity to other population centers
 - St. Albans is relatively safe
- Develop business networks: When people are in a peer learning environment opportunities are rich for synergistic cooperative experiences.
- Identify artists/businesses, and get them together to talk about what their needs are.

- Make phone calls to State entities for support. Networking and learn from each other.
- A creative economy is cooperative (versus competitive).
- The idea of a St. Albans Festival can be enhanced and complemented with other heritage ideas.
- There's a need to develop business skills and incorporate those skills with vision and passion for the arts.
- St. Albans should stress to the school board the need to incorporate courses that tap into and develop creativity and entrepreneurial business skills.
- St. Albans should look into getting assistance for entrepreneurial business development.

Heritage and Sense of Place

Resource Team: Jenny Nelson (Agricultural Policy Advisor, Office of Congressman Sanders), Peter Gilbert (Executive Director, Vermont Humanities Council), Paul Remillard (VT Farm Service Agency), Alex Aldrich (Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council), Paul Costello (Executive Director, VT Council on Rural Development), Diane Konrady (VT Department of Tourism & Marketing)

What is St. Albans' heritage / what are key characteristics that make this a unique community? How does this fit into the creative economy?

- Transportation is part of St. Albans' history – canal boats, steam ships, railroad, Amelia Earhardt landed on an airstrip here.
- The old trolley not only was part of transportation, but also part of the dating scene and during prohibition there was a lot of bootlegging activity.
- The underground railroad connected the funeral home to other locations with tunnels.
- At one point St. Albans had a reputation as a cultural mecca for surrounding rural areas.
- The town has strong French Canadian and Abenaki heritage.
- The downtown now connects to history: park, public buildings, heritage buildings, churches opera house, RR building.
- The historical society completed its museum renovations: tower with an elevator, stage that is small but nice for a community center, good for art shows, 11 rooms for displays.
- The new generation has a different sense of heritage; the Maple Festival is everything now. But the Maple Festival isn't really about St. Albans or local businesses.
- Youth perceive St. Albans as the "lake city".
- Taylor Park and the fountain are a symbol of St. Albans – an anchor.
- SAFF is trying to rejuvenate the park and use it as a centerpiece / create new uses: outdoor theater, Civil War + Revolutionary War re-enactments.
- The Farmers' Market is expanding and providing a venue for local talent.
- The "Celebrate St Albans" annual event brings community organizations together
- Whatever brings people into St. Albans can have a good economic effect.
- Heritage builds tourism.
- Involving youth in "Celebrate St. Albans" activities re-invests them in community and in beautification projects.

- Wal-Mart threatens St. Albans' heritage / culture / downtown.
- The Design Review Board doesn't think creatively about the look of downtown.
- St. Albans has a reputation as a great recreational / athletic center. Ball fields are being expanded. The Bay Day triathlon has 500 participants.

Project Ideas

- Commemorate Sterling Weed.
- Gain more local control over the Maple Festival – sell local crafts, local ethnic food, local talent (vs. outside vendors).
- Expand local products being sold at the Farmers' Market. Tie in dairy heritage and build the connection between commerce and heritage.
- Rebuild the pier on the lake and build more lake activities.
- Put together a "Heritage Trail" brochure.
- Have a "Wine Route" that includes places with great food and the creamery.
- Use trolley photos in a poster size and market them as calendars.
- Build a Franco-American heritage festival and advertise it in Quebec.
- Build an attractive roundabout at Lake & Federal Streets (look at Brattleboro example).
- Do something with the Federal Street connector.
- Bring back the trolley.
- Do a Trains on Main treasure hunt (following train symbols through downtown) with a "golden caboose" at the end.
- There are many project ideas for the Park:
 - Create a new open space with portable stage
 - Shakespeare in the Park
 - Movies
 - Bands
 - Art in the Park – a "St. Albans Zoo" with sculpture weaving through the park.
 - Pumpkin lighting festival
- Hold a "Highlights Festival" like in Montreal – make a program listing great vendors (of food and events) describe local restaurants, music + art events.
- Start a sailing program, as in Mallett's Bay.
- Develop Wallace Hill and Hardack Parks – there are hundreds of acres there. Good for horticulture, walking trails, bike trails, x-country skiing, and habitat for birds. Put in a ski tow rope for kids at Hardack.
- Build a focus on the food industry – cooking school with local agriculture.
- Have a maple museum to make production visible.
- Bring in Civil War buffs as tourists.
- Have fireworks!
- Montreal has described St. Albans as "The Gem Across the Border" – market St. Albans' "unspoiled" nature to Montreal. Add in a restaurant tour.
- Hold an ethnic celebration in Taylor Park.

Resource Team Reflections

- Try to agree on values as you celebrate heritage & sense of place. Ask what is the gravitational center of St. Albans?
- Make use of state platforms for heritage tourism – list events on vermontvacation.com and the Lake Champlain quadracentennial.
- The trolley could work as both a draw for visitors and an environmental measure. Tie the trolley into lodging (and use as part of advertising).
- Partner festivals together – eg gallery walk with a Shakespeare festival.
- Connect Taylor Park with local agriculture / food.
- Try the Questing program (see www.vitalcommunities.org).
- You can capitalize on St. Albans' reputation for strong sports.
- Look for greater local ownership at the Maple Festival.
- SAFF coordinates most things but needs help / collaboration to have a further reach.

Creative Lifestyle & Community Life

Resource Team: Jenny Nelson (Agricultural Policy Advisor, Office of Congressman Sanders), Peter Gilbert (Executive Director, Vermont Humanities Council), Paul Remillard (VT Farm Service Agency), Alex Aldrich (Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council), Paul Costello (Executive Director, VT Council on Rural Development), Diane Konrady (VT Department of Tourism & Marketing)

How do the type of amenities that define quality of life outside of work contribute to St. Albans' creative economy? How would a strong community life fit in?

- Social activities and community involvement allow individuals to meet other creative people and keep inspiration flowing.
- There are very few meeting places in St. Albans – there was the Kept Writer restaurant (now closed), the Flying Disk is okay but not great.
- Kartula's is an early morning meeting place. The young professional crowd sometimes go to the Overtime Saloon, which is open until 8:30 pm. These aren't satisfactory.
- The Roundhouse and tram center might be meeting places.
- The All Arts Council does not, in fact, represent all arts.
- The new Artists' Guild, inspired by Warren Kimball and his creative economy contributions, seems promising.
- Grand Isle could be a model – their Island Center for Arts & Recreation ("ICAR") combines Mozart celebrations with Lippizan stallion shows at Knight Point State Park.
- There is not a single, effective communication medium. No true local paper (the St. Albans Messenger vies with the Burlington Free Press), no website.
- A large percentage of people are commuting out of town for work which makes strengthening community life even more challenging.
- Public and artists don't usually come together.

- St Albans celebrates athletic achievements but not cerebral ones, e.g. no mention of winner of “Odyssey of the Mind.”
- St. Albans is using some state arts projects – there will be an Open Studio Weekend tour in Taylor Park, public involvement in the palettes project, including at Maple Festival.
- There is a major shortage of public spaces. The recently renovated rooms in the Historical Museum are effectively unavailable because of high rental rates.

Project Ideas

- Renovate upper floors to studio space downtown.
- Gallery space for showing art, not just hanging pieces to decorate restaurants.
- Use Taylor Park, SAFF and the palettes program to bring together arts and the general public.
- Look at the Fishman Building to renovate for an artist incubation space a la the Tip Top bakery building.
- An artists Guild was formed to plan use of the Fishman building – could include performing space, gallery space.
- Bring in affordable broadband for individuals.
- Promote local businesses within St. Albans so that city residents have a sense of the talent in their backyard (even if it’s businesses that don’t sell standard consumer goods /services).
- Information technology networking would help individuals working at home – improve services like web access, duplication services.
- Find a way to help bring buildings up to code.
- Look at local zoning laws to see how they affect redeveloping buildings.
- There’s no Development Office; one should exist to build city leadership.

Resource Team Reflections

- Two major buildings that should be creative economy assets are the Historical Museum and Fishman Building.
- Build a better network of businesses as part of the creative economy.
- Think about a community art garden.
- It’s incredible how much community activity is happening given the number of people commuting out for work. Are there ways to make it easier to avoid that commute (jobs in St. Albans, home office arrangements)?
- Do a St. Albans ad campaign.
- Work with the Artists Guild to create a critical mass of artists. Write by-laws that include a community service requirement.
- Work with schools and create public exposure to celebrate intellectual & academic accomplishments.
- What is St Albans’ signature, or signature project?
- Explore tax planning and tax credit.
- Consider a business incubator – Fishman building or Historical museum.
- Develop leadership

Supporting Innovation & Entrepreneurship

Resource Team: Chip Evans (Executive Director, Human Resources Investment Council), David Lane (Deputy Secretary, Vermont Agency of Agriculture), Ellen Kahler (Executive Director, VT Sustainable Jobs Fund), Ellen McCulloch-Lovell (President, Marlboro College), James Black (Department Chair Business & Economics, Johnson State College), Jan Herder (Dibden Center for the Arts at Johnson State College)

Where is innovation and entrepreneurship strong in St. Albans today? What challenges exist?

- There are a variety of organizations that can support innovation / entrepreneurship: NW Technical Center, Franklin County Business and Professional Women's Group, Franklin County has the most active Bar in Vermont.
- There are also successful community organizations: Rotary, United Way, Hospital Board
- St. Albans has empty space in the downtown.
- St. Albans is close to urban centers – Burlington and Montreal.
- The community has amenities that would attract entrepreneurs – safe community, near lake, good public school system, relatively cheap housing, ski resorts, natural resources.
- A weak spot is the train depot area which needs more work (including parking!) to be inviting to visitors.
- Do the youth have the required skills to start their own business? There don't seem to be mechanisms in place to give them these skills. Perhaps apprenticeships.
- The St. Albans community represents many specialty areas: cheese, chocolate, molding, welding, foods, open source software...Niche activities require high skills.
- Infrastructure for cell phones and high speed internet is a weak point for entrepreneurial development.
- St. Albans needs better training for entrepreneurs.
- What can bring the traffic to and through St. Albans?

Project Ideas

- Start a St. Albans broadband network to provide high speed access. Get local kids involved. Use the EBay model of collaborative competition. Others can provide services to others (within the group of entrepreneurs) for a small fee, combined with ongoing ideas sharing.
- Bring a Business Expo like the one in Burlington to St. Albans that promotes this area, including the natural environment and life style. This project would also bring businesses together to cooperate and (hopefully) build camaraderie.
- Use a common logo / St. Albans script for all business ads from the area.
- Have welcome packets for businesses, showing them what St. Albans has to offer and where to find the assistance they might need.

- Bring in more technical assistance for the community – work with the Chamber of Commerce.
- Work on the Chamber of Commerce website; make it less “static.”
- Create a unique digital culture, get youth involved and imbue a sense of ownership.
- Start peer learning circles, arranged topically by business, and facilitated lunch that build skills without cost.
- Define a shared vision of “St. Albans” and its unique, authentic identity.

Gathering Places

Resource Team: Joss Besse (Director, Vermont Downtown Program), Bonnie Smoren (Executive Assistant, Vermont Council on Rural Development), David Robinson (Business Programs Specialist, US Department of Agriculture), Patricia Menduni (Grants Coordinator, Office of Senator Jeffords), Ted Brady (Office of Senator Leahy)

Where do gathering places, places that are neither work nor home, and places where people come together, fit into the creative economy?

- There are places where people come together today:
 - Library
 - Museum
 - Taylor Park
 - Chow! Bella and other restaurants
 - Flying Disk (caters to teens)
 - Bagel Shop
 - Meetings
 - City Hall
 - Rave (including teen Sundays)
 - Churches
 - School Events
 - Sports Center
 - St. Albans Bay area
 - Post Office
 - Sweet Nothings (place for kids)
 - Hero’s Kingdom
 - Elks Club – Legion
- Is there a difference between a meeting space and gathering space? Both build community.
- Meeting space is limited (both number of places and size of space for a reasonable price). There is even less space for informal meetings where people can just bat ideas around.
- There’s not enough spaces for kids.
- We need more studio space
- St. Albans lacks a central place that is recognized/identified with the city.
- We need something like the Flynn or Ball Center.

Project Ideas

- We could have a multi-use space for meetings that is also accessible as an informal gathering space.
- Look at the space being opened up by the post office moving. That space has been an anchor for Main Street.
- Build a visual arts / studio space center.
- Combine a sports arena with an amphitheater.
- A municipal parking lot could be built underground with the above ground spaces used as a performing arts venue/studio space/office space.
- How do these specific ideas fit in with the larger planning process? Is St. Albans keeping up with other growth centers? How is our downtown going to handle Wal-Mart? Burlington has denser development and draws people downtown.
- Put a wireless hotspot in Taylor Park
- The Rave could be used on nights that it is normally closed for business.
- We need late shopping nights, then the city would be a gathering place.
- Another nighttime activity could be a Friday night art hop.
- We need an inventory of facilities. St. Albans could market meeting spaces to organizations in Chittenden County. We could give virtual tours to people for potential meeting space rentals.
- An open air space with a pedestrian walkway would be great – like Church St.
- There are many things that could be done with Taylor Park, including making it more family friendly. One problem is that it's difficult to juggle ideas for improvement with wishes of people who don't want to see the park drastically changed.

Resource Team Reflections

- Don't think in terms of the Flynn. Something like the Vergennes Opera House may be more ideal.
- Partner with for-profits as a component of any project.
- Utilize pre-existing structures with history.
- Start with what you have. Begin incrementally.
- Marry space to people to make a more vibrant community life
- There are no gathering places for arts. You don't need to build one. You need to create one using existing spaces.
- There has been no talk about use of schools, churches or hospitals.
- Increase and expand on what you have through connections and communications.
- Nurture. Be an incubator space. Look at informal as well as formal spaces.
- Don't focus on big, expensive, high-end arts venues.

Downtown Vitality

Resource Team: Joss Besse (Director, Vermont Downtown Program), Bonnie Smoren (Executive Assistant, Vermont Council on Rural Development), David Robinson (Business Programs Specialist, US Department of Agriculture), Patricia Menduni (Grants Coordinator, Office of Senator Jeffords), Ted Brady (Office of Senator Leahy)

How does a vital downtown fit into St. Albans' creative economy? What makes it vital today, and what are some challenges to the downtown?

- “I moved my business downtown to take advantage of the foot traffic.”
- “My restaurant uses local farm products like cheese and hangs art from local artists on the wall. There is a relationship between food and the creative economy.”
- St. Albans has great things, including the best cheese in the world, but doesn't do a good job with PR or with sharing successful strategies.
People need to want to buy local. Right now some people see it as hard and expensive; price and convenience are part of the equation.
- Downtown should focus on an area of expertise to make its mark instead of offering something for everyone. Maybe restaurants.
- Convenience is key to working families. Everything closes at 5:00.
- We need to go to Burlington for items we need and things to do.
- Parking is very challenging.
- The question is worded incorrectly. We should be asking how the creative economy promotes a vital downtown, not the other way around.
- Downtown used to be the nexus of the economy when the railroad was here. There was more culture. How do we recreate that atmosphere?
- What is the draw that brings people to St. Albans? People will always go to Burlington. This city has to give them a reason to come here. We need a reason to bring day visitors back at nights.
- St. Albans is not Burlington, and needs to market its own character.
- “I have a nightclub that draws 200 people a night. People come from Chittenden County. We should get together and package a restaurant/nightclub deal.”
- St. Albans is on the cusp of a renaissance. We had busy, active streets once and now people are returning and rediscovering their roots.
- Retired people move back when they are tired of the city.
- People want to enjoy culture, without a city atmosphere. The positive things of a small town – like customer care – could be a major draw.
- Montreal is an untapped market.
- The palette program has been great, and there may be a train program with painted boxcars displaying art.
- Safety is an issue. When nothing is happening downtown after dark, people perceive it as unsafe at night. The park is also seen as unsafe; people have seen drug deals there.
- 2nd & 3rd floors downtown can be developed.

Project Ideas

- We could have a taste and sounds of St. Albans festival with artists, music and food.
- We could form more committees and improve networking and personal connections, such as a Director of Downtown.
- Offer more theater as a draw.
- Spend a lot in advertising, include an entertainment aspect, and also be sure that business collaborate on the effort to promote each other and use money efficiently.
- Package deals between businesses. Holiday shopping promotions worked in the past.
- TV is good advertising, with lower rates than the newspaper. Local musicians and other artists could perform in the ads.
- St. Albans should convene a discussion on how to market the city. Developing a compelling message and being consistent helps get a jump on box stores.
- Display local art at the Maple Festival.
- An old-fashioned marquee would draw people.
- Be sure to continue the outreach around the Marketing Study – particularly so that everyone uses the logo.
- Soccer is a big draw.
- St. Albans has a beautiful park. It could host something like Burlington’s Chew Chew Fest.
- The park should have a skating rink in winter.
- Kingman St. should be more pedestrian friendly and closed to traffic (either always or only in the evening).
- There’s space that could be redeveloped for activities targeting young people. The old Shabooms and Gerbody buildings are great spaces in good locations.
- We could do an arts center; that would require heavy fundraising.
- Focus on the Farmers Market. That would bring people. The Farmers’ Market could have more activities, maybe include more products other than food, maybe raise vendors’ fees.
- One possibility is an indoor farmer / flea market.

Resource Team Reflections

- There is a lot of energy recognizing the importance of cooperation and marketing. There is no bad self-image here. You realize that you have a quality downtown that just needs some prodding.
- Leveraging is key here. There are unbelievable marketing opportunities. You need to work on buy-in and leverage that.
- Consider working with Vermont Fresh Network, a place to leverage partnerships between artists and food.
- Restaurants are a great opportunity for leverage. You are correct that the question is not how the downtown can contribute to the creative economy, but how the creative economy can stimulate the downtown.
- The solution is not just telling people about St. Albans. You need to leave the doors open.

- There is a lot of energy here and lots of building blocks already in place. The question is how to market your image.
- The arts should be a component of your thinking. That draws people with skills to a place where they want to be.

II. Initial List of Project Possibilities

The April 11th public forum produced stacks of notes from enthusiastic group discussions. The next step was sifting through the information to form a list of potential projects to advance the creative economy.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development looked through the forum notes, and input from the Resource Team on what they had heard, to pull together the first draft of a projects list. VCRD identified common themes that appeared throughout the discussions and blocked out a list of ambitious concepts that could provide a starting point for project teams to research and refine. VCRD did not filter projects based on feasibility or how closely they related to the creative economy. Instead, this process simply organized the notes, combined small ideas into larger ones, and connected general observations to concrete project possibilities. Later revisions in a public meeting produced the list below:

Design Themed Trails for Exploring the St. Albans Area: The St. Albans area has tremendous resources, but needs a way to organize them both to engage residents and draw visitors. A series of themed trails that bring people to local highlights could accomplish this. St. Albans should work with regional partners to put together a food & wine trail, heritage trail, arts & culture trail, and Civil War history trail.

Build an Arts Center: St. Albans should create a focal point for advancing arts as a point of pride in the city through building an Arts Center. The Center should serve as the major musical venue for northwest Vermont and put St. Albans on the map as a center of culture and innovation. It should offer instruction in music and other arts, performance space, studio space and, potentially, space for incubation of entrepreneurial businesses related to the arts. It should particularly target youth involvement. Were this project to happen, residents should aim for development downtown; several residents have suggested architectural ideas echoing the now-destroyed St Albans Train building.

Expand Agricultural Events to Solidify St. Albans' Position as a Food Hub: St. Albans already hosts a major agricultural event with the Maple Festival – the city should expand the presence of *local food and crafts* vendors at this event. St. Albans should take full advantage of this opportunity to promote local agriculture to the large crowd that the festival attracts each spring. St. Albans should also expand its farmers' market by adding more local vendors, music, and activities to make the market a larger event.

Bring Arts and Community Projects to Taylor Park: Taylor Park is enjoying a renaissance as the center-point of St. Albans community life; St. Albans residents should rally to encourage this development. The park's role in community life should be advanced further by bringing more arts to the park. This effort should include the development of a portable performance stage, movie screenings, art displays, and a sculpture park. Evening activities, such as movie screenings, should be tied to a campaign to improve safety in the park.

Several existing St. Albans organizations have plans for projects that establish the park as a prominent gathering place contributing to a strong community. The creative economy committee would work in conjunction with these other organizations to ensure that their own plans do not duplicate or dissipate ongoing work, but bring an infusion of new energy.

Market St. Albans as an Outdoor Recreation Center: St. Albans has already invested in a reputation as a strong athletic center, it should now expand that effort to further highlight *outdoor* recreation. This outdoor reputation should tie into existing events, such as the Bay Day Triathlon, and also include new initiatives, such as a skating rink in Taylor Park, expanded recreation trails in Hardack and Wallace Hill Parks, biking, and sailing in St Albans Bay and the upper lake.

Improve the St. Albans Streetscape to Improve Downtown Vitality: St. Albans should evaluate improvements to its streetscape and the city's visual character. The intersection of Lake and Federal Streets should have an attractive round about. A "Trains on Main" project, stenciling a trail of trains to follow in search of a "golden caboose", could also be a fun addition. This project could bring the old trolley back to the St. Albans streets. An old-fashioned Marquee should be added along Main Street as an aesthetic improvement, a center-point for town communications, and a way to get word out about community events. These projects should be tied into the plans already outlined in the 2005 downtown marketing study.

Organize Evening Events to Bring Activity Downtown after Dark: A thriving nightlife doesn't appear over night, but St. Albans should set the stage for increasing evening activities. St. Albans should organize post-dinner events that include a cocktail / dinner cruise on Lake Champlain, evening art walks, a late-night shopping day (or several days), movies in Taylor Park, and other events designed to stimulate evening pedestrian traffic and build downtown dynamism.

Initiate a Culinary Education Program: A cooking school (whether a physical building or a series of classes) should give area residents knowledge they need to maintain healthy diets and support the local agricultural economy through cooking with available local ingredients.

Create a Community Business Office for St. Albans: An organization focused on supporting local business as an important part of community life could complement existing programs and provide leadership where there are gaps to be filled. Activities for this office would include raising awareness about the firms currently located in St. Albans, inventorying available commercial and community meeting space, producing a welcome packet for new businesses, and forming cooperative arrangements between small businesses and individual entrepreneurs to bring down costs on items like high speed Internet.

Make a Creative Economy Center: St. Albans faces space needs that could be met through a creative economy center. This center would establish a physical center point for the creative economy in St. Albans by developing studio spaces for artists, class room and gallery space, performance space, public meeting space and a place where community members can

access free high speed Internet. St. Albans could also examine the potential for development of micro-business incubation or community center functions in this key downtown site. The first location to consider should be the Fishman Building, with renovations bringing it up to code while preserving its character and beauty.

Form a Cooperative for Producing High Quality Advertisements: In addition to its potential for attracting new businesses, St. Albans also has many businesses already in the area that need better promotion. An advertising cooperative should be formed to both acquire affordable advertising space (print, radio, or television) and secure local producers who can create high quality ads.

A particular advertising project could be to target a Quebec audience. Montreal is only an hour away from St. Albans. St. Albans has much to offer potential visitors from this market: restaurants, a small city atmosphere, a natural environment, and its own French-Canadian heritage. Businesses and organizations should be brought together to market the city to Montreal and the larger Quebec region.

Promote the Digital Culture through a St. Albans Technology Service

Provider: St. Albans should actively support a local consortium of entrepreneurs who can provide lower cost Internet access as well as technology and communications services such as website development. This activity should both bring new technology to St. Albans and promote existing businesses involved in IT fields. The first priority of this committee is to secure local control over bringing low cost, high speed Internet availability.

Bring a Business Expo to St. Albans: St. Albans is a center for Northwestern Vermont businesses. A business exposition could further establish and celebrate the key economic leadership role of the city. It would firmly associate St. Albans with an exciting business environment, provide a platform for individual businesses to highlight what they do, and draw visitors and potential business developers to the city.

Establish a Continuing Education Program and Peer Learning Networks:

There is a demand for continuing education programs in St. Albans. Classes geared towards adults in the community can provide desired instruction in areas like the arts, health and/or cooking.

In addition to more formal classes, a low-cost way to provide ongoing learning opportunities for St. Albans residents is through peer learning networks. These could engage community members in topics of mutual interest, including particular business fields, arts, and community development. There should be a special network that provides mentoring for High School students. These should also fall under the umbrella of continuing education.

Start a St. Albans Festival to Celebrate Local Heritage: The rich history of St. Albans should be celebrated through a St. Albans Festival. This festival could highlight different ethnic heritages (including French-Canadian and Abenaki), railroad history, agricultural history, and the city's role in the Civil and Revolutionary Wars. All vendors should be local but marketing could reach to the Quebec and Chittenden County marketplaces. Such an event, produced at scale, could be a central draw to St. Albans as a community on the move.

Highlight Agricultural Heritage Through a Maple Museum: Maple syrup is an established part of St. Albans' identity as well as Vermont's statewide brand identity. A maple museum can be a draw for any visitor to the state. The hook of a maple museum should be used to further educate museum visitors about *all* agriculture in this region of Vermont, through both educational displays and an extensive retail section that features local products.

Improve the Manufacturing Sector: St. Albans should actively attract jobs in the manufacturing sector with businesses that will remain committed to the community and *local* economic development.

III. Priority Topics **Selected May 2nd, 2006**

The People's Trust Company provided a conference room for the second public forum on May 2nd. This Community Meeting is the center point of the democratic decisionmaking that takes place through the Creative Communities Program, where residents select priority areas that will become the focus of year-long project teams. This is a forum where ideas flow freely, arguments are offered, perspectives shared, and people have the opportunity to champion their beliefs and then vote their priorities.

After discussing and revising project proposals, voters used a weighted system, starting with 8 votes to distribute among the topics, which cut the list to 8 possibilities. After a second discussion session, voters received 4 more votes to distribute and reach the final topics. This system allows voters to select multiple topics and also indicate their degree of enthusiasm for each topic by potentially giving multiple votes. Level of interest is key to this process, as the end goal is to find projects that St. Albans residents will line up behind to make happen.

St. Albans originally selected four projects (listed below) but in a later meeting combined the Taylor Park and Evening Activities priorities to reach three (see p. 27). The priority issues selected by St. Albans are:

Bring Arts and Community Projects to Taylor Park: Taylor Park is enjoying a renaissance as the center-point of St. Albans community life; St. Albans residents should rally to encourage this development. The park's role in community life should be advanced further by bringing more arts to the park. This effort should include the development of a portable performance stage, movie screenings, art displays, and a sculpture park. Evening activities, such as movie screenings, should be tied to a campaign to improve safety in the park.

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Build an Arts Center: St. Albans should create a focal point for advancing arts as a point of pride in the city through building an Arts Center. The Center should serve as the major musical venue for northwest Vermont and put St. Albans on the map as a center of culture and innovation. It should offer instruction in music and other arts, performance space, studio space and, potentially, space for incubation of entrepreneurial businesses related to the arts. It should particularly target youth involvement. Were this project to happen, residents should aim for development downtown; several residents have suggested architectural ideas echoing the now-destroyed St Albans Train building.

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IV. Action Plans May 23rd, 2006

Once priorities were established, community members organized into Project Teams to implement the ideas generated during the earlier strategic planning sessions. Each Project Team has a chairperson to run sessions for the next year while Mike Curtis is serving as chair of the overall process. At the first team meetings on May 23rd, committee members worked closely with a facilitator and small resource teams to develop step-by-step action plans, and to devise a list of human and financial resources to help achieve their goals. Two projects, evening activities and Taylor park, were combined into one initiative.

This final phase of the program marks the time when residents begin the exciting work of turning ideas into action.

Build an Arts Center

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Project Team Members:

Chair: Mike Curtis (mccurtis@adelphia.net)

Cathy	Ainsworth	cainswor@sover.net
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Leo	Thompson	wunwish@yahoo.com
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Action Steps:

1. Inventory All Spaces in St. Albans

2. Tour of Arts Centers Around the State

- Like 2005 Creative Economy Road Trip
- Possible centers include SPA, Bennington, Catamount Arts

3. Start Small Projects / Activities Under Idea of St. Albans as an Arts Center

- Use smaller projects to build momentum, basis for exploring connections with groups like SAFF.
- Examples of the type of projects: palettes, Swing Festival, arts classes

4. Discussion with Opportunities for Growth Group

- Identify where there are opportunities for partnership, and where the groups are talking about two different things.

5. Position Paper on Arts Center

- Develop a one pager to use for marketing the concept both inside and beyond St. Albans

6. Identify Potential Grant Resources

7. Continue to Expand Partnerships

- Taking this project to the next level will require a good mix of artists *and* businesspeople.

Potential Resources / Resource Needs:

- Preservation Trust – organizing a tour of other arts centers, space inventory, technical knowledge
- VT Arts Council for small events
- Congressional Delegation for funding
- HUD
- Business leaders as major contributors
(Note: Business leaders should also be at the table for their expertise in how to make the project a success, see #7 above)
- Vermont Community Foundation
- City expertise – for example assistance from the Development Director to write grants.

Promote the Digital Culture through a St. Albans Technology Service Provider

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Project Team Members:

Chair: Patrick Warn (patrick@vermontopentechology.com)

Mike	Curtis	mccurtis@adelphia.net
Hilary	Denault-Reynolds	vtbatman@yahoo.com
Liz	Gamache	l.gamache@stalbansvt.com
Michelle	Monroe	coordinator@nswsd.org
David	Vanslette	vanslette@vanslette.com
Patrick	Warn	patrick@vermontopentechology.com

Goal: “To provide high speed Internet infrastructure for St. Albans as a way to promote the creative economy by providing the services needed to retain and attract creative businesses / residents into the future.”

Action Steps:

1. Meet with a small number of community leaders to help identify stakeholders.

Potential stakeholders:

- Emergency Responders
- Hospitals
- Home business owners – or people who would *like* to work from home
- Commuters who might prefer options closer to St. Albans
- Import/ Export Companies
- Municipal functions, Utilities (eg connecting water & sewer, real time meter monitoring)
- Employers that let some employees work from home (e.g. IBM)
- Businesses that would use hot spots to attract customers
- Employers who “get it” re. Internet needs (e.g. Mylan)
- Emerson Lynn (or he could recommend others)
- Tim Smith
- Chip Sawyer (who might have research available)
- Pat Travers
- Young people / residents who see Internet as part of location decisions

2. Invite stakeholders to a planning meeting and form the full committee after that.
City government will need to be engaged and excited.

3. Use stakeholders meeting & goals to start effort for educating St. Albans community members about how *their* lives will be improved with high speed Internet. This is an ongoing effort throughout the action plan.

Possible ideas:

- St. Albans web application – including targeting commuters who want to feel connected. For example calendar, blogs, video's of local events, etc (this would be later stage promotion)
- Vignettes for the paper
- Tour / talk to other Vermont communities who have invested in high speed Internet. (Laura & Al Duey have database)
- Learn more about the business impact – for example businesses who have made location decisions based on widespread high speed access.
- Ties to youth and education.
- People from diverse careers who can talk about the importance of the Internet (VCDA did a similar panel last fall)
- Hot spots as an attractive way to think about Internet use in town.
- Pre-empt questions of aesthetic impacts and tax impacts.
- Educate about what Internet means beyond the Worldwide Web.

4. Define the scale of the project including technology and cost, including other applications such as video, phone telemedicine and emergency services.

At the same time:

- 4a. Inventory Saint Albans Businesses to document their broadband usage (for possible aggregation)
- 4b. Explore WiFi Service / Hot spots

5. Determine if a provider will provide the required service (and have back up plans).

6. Set next steps based on information learned about what is possible, costs, and available provider.

Bring Arts and Community Projects to Taylor Park / Organize Evening Activities

Bring Arts and Community Projects to Taylor Park / Organize Evening Activities: Taylor Park is enjoying a renaissance as the center-point of St. Albans community life; St. Albans residents should rally to encourage this development. The park's role in community life should be advanced further by bringing more arts to the park. This effort should include the development of a portable performance stage, movie screenings, art displays, and a sculpture park. Evening activities, such as movie screenings, should be tied to a campaign to improve safety in the park.

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Project Team Members:

Chair: Jack Tremblay (jtremblay@directdesigninc.com)

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Jack	Tremblay	jtremblay@directdesigninc.com
Jeannette	Warn	jeannette.warn@gmail.com
Jeff	Young	jeffeyoung@yahoo.com

Action Steps:

1. Background Work – Taylor Park

- Work on Taylor Park should promote existing strategic plan and include work to prepare the park for accommodating multiple uses.
- Coordinate with city entities: police, fire, city manager, rec dept., park trust
- There is existing programming to maintain. For example: Farmers' Market, stump carving, Summer Sounds, community park sale, palettes project, Rail City Festival, Revolutionary War reenactment, VT State Firefighters' parade, gathering for 9/11, health & fitness, summer open house, scarecrows at Halloween, Veterans' Day, holiday lighting.

2. Explore a Big Theme for a Park Event: Illuminate St. Albans

- A festival of lanterns in the park that both highlights the space and provides an evening activity
- The festival should target all age groups

3. Carry Out Existing Strategic Plan for Taylor Park

4. Develop One Night a Week for St. Albans to be Open in the Evening

5. Do an Excellent Job on Existing Events

- See Step #1 on background work

6. Coordinate Promotion Efforts

7. Other Ideas for Future Exploration

- Scavenger Hunt
- St. Albans Quest (see Vital Communities: www.vitalcommunities.org)
- Movies
- Restaurant night with tasting tour
- Early Bird / Tickets special (cross marketing)
- Classes / workshops in the park

Potential Resources / Resource Needs:

- First goal = organize volunteers / generate new volunteer base
- Plan financials for projects without an existing budget (eg Illumination Festival)

St. Albans Recommendations

Resource Team members represent a wide array of professionals from across the state, and agree to serve as partners and advisors to the St. Albans Project Teams. Their recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the community'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 on pg. 38). The following are recommendations compiled from the Resource Teams' comments.

General Recommendations:

The group working on the creative economy now has a lot of energy, but that core needs to expand to include more people and a more diverse group within St. Albans. The creative economy should be about bringing the entire community to the table to plan for the future.

The **Vermont Humanities Council** can help non-profits find new ways to engage people in town – there is a small grants program to support community initiatives of certain kinds (call **Peter Gilbert** at (802) 262-2626 with questions), a one-book statewide community reading program in which students and adults across VT read one book and participate in related activities, public talks, reading and discussion series, and more. Program resources and assistance for literacy audiences include literacy training for childcare providers and parents, and weeklong day camps during the summer for middle schoolers.

One component missing from selected projects is networking with creative economy *businesses*. What are the needs of creative local businesses? Are they tied in with other organizations, community work, and the region? SAFF's downtown marketing study might have some initial answers. The next step is to actively engage businesses in collaboration.

There were many good ideas that came out during the initial brainstorming that can be incorporated into priority projects as a way to build identity. Don't let go of the "Gem Across the Border" theme. Don't forget the discussion around agricultural heritage – more people from this sector can be brought into the planning. Also, don't lose the entrepreneurial spark that was identified as important. For example, the **Farm Service Agency** can provide micro-grants that get kids involved in producing for the Farmers' Market at Taylor Park (contact **Paul Remillard** Paul.remillard@vt.usda.gov)

Bring Arts and Community Projects to Taylor Park / Organize Evening Activities

SAFF has taken the lead on evening activities and Taylor Park activities – this project team should work in collaboration with SAFF's committees. SAFF has the advantage of projects already in motion and the sustainability of being an established organization vs. an ad hoc committee. It doesn't make sense for two groups to compete for attention / funding / volunteers.

Movies could be a simple addition to the park – but should be discussed with the Welden Theater and the Drive-In to avoid impacting their movie screenings.

Emphasize people first. Find out what makes people *want* to come out to the park before you decide what *should* bring them out to the park. Start with a block party, a place for a BBQ or celebration. Music and movies probably have that type of cache more than fine arts.

Visit **Knight Point State Park** as an example of a large scale arts / park partnership in the Lake Champlain Islands.

Build the local knowledge bank for park upkeep through the **Master Gardener** program.

Build an Arts Center

An arts center plan will require St. Albans to form an exceptionally strong project committee. The first objective should be selling the community on why arts are something to invest in – and at the same time get feedback from the community about what types of arts & cultural activities are needed. This effort needs a broad interest base.

The March 30th discussion returned several times to what St. Albans values as a community – that kids don't get the message that arts and cultural endeavors are as important as sports or other activities. How can this project address those concerns?

St. Albans may not have an arts center now, but does have places for art. The Historical Society Museum should be a prime venue. Collaborations with the school should also be explored, especially if youth involvement is a priority.

Another interest base to consider is Burlington. Is this project sufficiently different from the Flynn and arts venues in Burlington? Does it set a unique identity for St. Albans? The instinct to place the center in an historical building and to tie in to the Rail City history is a way to start setting up a unique identity for a *St. Albans* arts center.

A comprehensive feasibility study should be the first step before fundraising for an arts center. This would include identifying what the community sees as important for the project, what resources are currently available in St. Albans and the region, and investigation of possible redundancies. Without evidence of full community support it will be hard to attract funders to a project of this scale.

The financial feasibility study for a proposed arts center should include budget projections, estimated amount that can be raised in the community before looking to outside sources, clear capital campaign plan, and collaborators to donate labor to the process.

Rural Development's Community Facility Direct (or guaranteed) loan program may be able to assist in delivering capital related to construction costs. Very early involvement with the agency is critical especially if the arts center will be a "start-up" non-profit. One recommendation is to bring an experienced non-profit real estate owner/operator/investor to the table to "own" the

facility. **Burlington Community Land Trust** (Brenda Torpy) might have some technical advice for the organization - board constitution, fund raising, capital campaign, and project development. Phone: (802) 862-6244.

Early discussions should be held with the **Agency of Commerce and Community Development** (Molly Dugan – (802) 828-3211) to determine if there is a role that Community Development Block Grant money can play in this project. The City of St. Albans (Jane Kiser) would likely be the "applicant" should CDBG money become involved. Understanding the priorities of CDBG and what synergies would make the application stronger (i.e. downtown designation, low-moderate income benefit, etc.) should all be explored.

Jan Herder at the **Dibden Arts Center (Johnson College)** is available to talk with the project team working on the Arts Center about their concept. E-mail: Jan.Herder@jsc.vsc.edu

The **Preservation Trust** could potentially provide a tour of centers that have been successful (802 434-5014).

Promote the Digital Culture through a St. Albans Technology Service Provider

Assess what businesses see as their technology needs and also brainstorm with them about what could be possible with better Internet access.

Look at ways Internet connections tie into regional initiatives.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development has the **Vermont Rural Broadband Project** that can give advice. Laura & Al Duey (who manage the Broadband Project) were on the Resource Team visiting on May 23rd. They maintain a list of Vermont community broadband projects on their project website, www.VTRuralBroadband.org

Enosburg attempted a broadband project in 2003 – tied in part to attracting a major business (Canadian yogurt factory) to town. Try talking to the town manager, **Gary Champy**, or **Gary Fiske** at North Country Cablevision. Gary Fiske can be reached at 933-8843 or gfiske@nccvt.net.

Topsham Telephone Company's parent company completed a project to bring fiber to all homes in Gouverneur, NY. The contact for Topsham Telephone Company is telco@topstele.com, 802-439-5325. The President is **Don Ceresoli**. **Chris Campbell** was at the meeting discussing the NY project. He is the Director of the VT Department of Public Service Telecommunications Division, and can be reached at 802-828-4074, chris.campbell@state.vt.us

USDA provides loans for start-up and expansion to companies through the **Intermediary Relending Program**. Currently, **Franklin County Industrial Development** (Tim Smith / Connie Burns), **Vermont Community Loan Fund** (Sam Buckley) and the **VEDA Small Business Loan Program** (Tom Porter / Marie Dusseault) all have capital available to lend for

business development. The nature of the business collateral (i.e. intellectual property & specialty use equipment) could be a challenge in securing traditional financing.

USDA also provides **Rural Business Enterprise Grants (RBEGr)** to non-profits and municipalities to help facilitate business development. If there is a planning, feasibility study, marketing or other technical component needed to launch this effort, they may be able to help. Franklin County Industrial Development has experience with the RBEGr program and the City of St. Albans is also an eligible recipient. Grant applications are accepted year-round with awards typically announced in March and August although timing can change from year to year. Contact **Sherry Paige** at USDA: (802) 828-6034. In limited cases RBEGr funding has been used to capitalize revolving loan funds for economically viable projects that cannot qualify for bank or other subordinate debt.

The Fund - a local revolving loan program sponsored by the **Economic Development Council of Northern Vermont** (located in St. Albans) may also be a resource for technical assistance and funding. Contact either Bill Farr or Connie Stanley-Little ((802) 524-4546)

Build a partnership between the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (Economic Development) and a private for-profit provider (like Soundtivity) to launch this venture. There could be the opportunity for the State to further leverage financial assistance.

Talk with **Ruth Wallman** at the **Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce**. They recently introduced a wireless system in their community with support from VCRD.

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