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Key Leader Interviews

February 2009

Key Leader Methodology



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Key Leaders Were Invited by Letter / E-mail, With Follow-up Phone Call

Questionnaire Was Sent in Advance of Interview

11 One-on-one Interviews With Selected Key Leaders

- 8 at Marlboro Technology Center
- 3 by phone

Key Leaders Represented Many Groups

- Healthcare
- State Government
- Town Managers
- Education
- Entrepreneurship / Self-Employed Business
- Public Housing
- Human Services
- Citizen Action
- Service Organizations

Numbers Indicate When More Than One Person Made a Similar Comment

Respondents and Their Responses are Confidential

High Priority Factors That Impact Quality of Life in Windham County



High Priorities

% Rated

High Priority

▪Jobs and employment	70%
▪Affordable housing	50%
▪Education (adult learning beyond high school, high school completion, public education improvement)	50%
▪Health insurance / access to health services	40%
▪Services to help elderly stay in their homes	30%
▪Public transportation	30%
▪Outdoor recreation, including open space, parks, bicycle paths, etc.	30%
▪Entertainment, arts, and culture for youth / after school programs	30%

Key Leaders' High Priority Issues in Windham County

Highest Priorities

- Jobs and Employment
- Affordable Housing
- Education
- Healthcare

Other High Priorities

- Elderly in their Homes
- Public Transportation
- Outdoor Recreation
- Youth Programs

Demographic Factors



Strengths

- Population is not homogeneous, but interesting and diverse
- Not too many people to service [i.e., it is manageable]

Weaknesses

- Large elderly population
 - Less concerned with jobs and education
 - Fewer volunteers
 - [Negative] impact on schools, workforce, and economic development

Ideas to Improve Demographics

- Attract younger people in larger numbers

Jobs & Employment



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Strengths

- Strong business community
- Local ownership
- Proud history of craftsmanship and inventors
- Location, location, location

Weaknesses - Employment

- Low paying jobs with no health insurance / tourism based economy
- Lack of jobs and job development
- Lack of trained workforce
 - Exodus of youth
 - Certifications and upper level skills hard to find
 - Recruit out of area
- Many people have more than one job
- Weak business and arts connection – missed opportunities
- Finding qualified people for lower wage public sector jobs vs. private sector jobs
- Location of wind turbines a barrier to alternative wind energy production

Jobs & Employment (continued)



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Ideas to Improve Employment

- Create small businesses / grow entrepreneurs
- Develop a regional economic development plan
- Change and support the business culture to attract youth
- Expand non-tourism jobs
- Expand tourism beyond the snow
- Package jobs with flexible hours, transportation, summer/winter combinations
- Create more incentives and remove barriers
- Move toward a livable wage
- Seize energy efficiency as an economic opportunity

Affordable Housing



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Weaknesses

- Lack of workforce housing / affordable housing / low income housing
- Some people with jobs have no housing
- Housing stock is rentals / little starter home opportunity
- Waiting lists for Housing Authority units
- Little upward mobility potential for lower income residents

Ideas to Improve Housing

- Housing Committee is looking at senior, young starter, tourism employee, and affordable housing
- Provide multi-generational housing
- Provide support services to tenants – how to get references, use services, move-up
- Put resources into eldercare to keep people in their homes
- Churches are donating land [for housing development] in some areas

Education



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Strengths

- Good private and public education
- Colleges – World Learning, Marlboro Tech, Landmark

Weaknesses

- Quality varies from town to town, among age groups, and segments of the community
- Detriments to school success – large families on public assistance, with less family support
- Facilities – old, need repair or replacement
- Expense – fixed facility and teachers at the top of the pay grade

Ideas to Improve Education

- After school programs for elementary and high school students
- Better, higher quality schools
- Increase interaction between towns and colleges
- Educational system and workforce development “need to get together”
- Priority funding for infant and early childhood development, early Headstart and Headstart

Healthcare



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Strengths

- Medical and professional resources are more available – Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, The Brattleboro Retreat, Private Practices
- Wellness, lifestyle services
- Hospital in town can take care of almost all physical needs locally
- Alternative practices, healing community
- Community oriented providers

Weaknesses

- Access to affordable medical, dental, mental and specialty care
- Shortage of primary care providers
- Respond to rather than prevent, illness
- Higher percent of Medicaid
- Providers have huge loans
- Restrictive laws for mid level practitioners to practice without a physician
- Proximity of hospitals (Wilmington)

Ideas to Improve Healthcare

- Increase access to basic primary care
- Provide loan forgiveness for healthcare professionals
- Fund health care services (Federally Qualified Health Center, single payer)

Mental Health and Substance Abuse



Strengths

- The Brattleboro Retreat can take care of almost all mental health needs locally

Weaknesses

- Need for affordable and available mental health care
- The Brattleboro Retreat cannot respond to hospital Emergency Room [cases]
 - No State reimbursement unless person is committed
 - The Brattleboro Retreat needs to have programs in place
 - We deal with a lot of emotional/mental disabilities in the community

Ideas to Improve Mental Health and Substance Abuse

- We are committed to better integration between BMH and The Brattleboro Retreat and collaboration with Grace Cottage in Townsend
- Changes in State regulation to better integrate mental health services in the community
- Better ways to deal with substance abuse and mental illness than Corrections
- The Brattleboro Retreat involvement in replacement of the State hospital

Dental Care



Weaknesses

- Lack of access and availability of dentists
- Lack of affordable dental care

Ideas to Improve Dental Care

- Fund dental services

Land Use & Infrastructure – Political Climate



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Strengths

- Political climate – inclusive, open
- Energy and passion
- Politically progressive
- Better communication to see things in a Regional way

Weaknesses

- Discord and factions
- Land use regulation almost anti-business
- Diverse views by region
- Not in My Backyard philosophy (NIMBY)
- Not set up as a County to work together
- Vermont Yankee – 2 camps, pro and con

Ideas to Improve Political Climate

- Get to the middle, less polarization on issues
- Get creative about solutions to problems – we're not doing it
- Balance cost of electricity and jobs with downside risk
- Increase efficiencies in permitting processes
- Reach out to other towns to benefit to all communities
- Merge Bellows Falls Village and Rockingham Town Government

Land Use & Infrastructure – Taxes



Strengths

- Tax structure and funding enables local control

Weaknesses

- High taxes
- No sales tax in NH – Vermont suffers
- Tax structure and funding for public schools are not coordinated
- [The many] non-profits are tax exempt / provide no local revenue

Land Use & Infrastructure – Land Use



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Strengths

- Desirable location
- We like the way we are
- Large vacant buildings – opportunity to use
- The River is an asset
- Brattleboro and Putney are huge assets
- Zoning is being updated to make [development] easier
- Air and water are pristine
- Many recreational opportunities
- Do a good job protecting the environment

Land Use & Infrastructure – Land Use



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Weaknesses

- The West is owned by out of State people
 - Want Vermont with conveniences
 - Threatens our way of life
- No skate park in town
- Politics around the River
- Not moving forward, could fall behind and apart
- Topography for cell phone and broadband coverage

Ideas to Improve Land Use

- Preserve outdoor space to maintain quality of life
- Develop a skate park (Austine School for the Deaf possible location?)
- Use the River as an asset – bicycle path, etc.
- Keep the environment intact
- Generate energy locally
- Publicize community land use assets, e.g., community calendar of hiking trips

Transportation



Strengths

- A lot of public transportation (Deerfield Valley)
- Many transportation options (1-91, Amtrack, Bus CRT, train, etc.)

Weaknesses

- No transportation in the Route 30 corridor
- Roads have lagged, but now improved
- Large distances between lots of small towns, winter roads, isolation

Ideas to Improve Transportation

- Develop public transportation for students, families, and workers
- Expand Deerfield Valley public transportation
- Route 5 improvement

Public Safety



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Strengths

- We do a good job in public safety
 - 24/7 fire and police
 - New Chief in Brattleboro
- Improving relationship with police and community (Brattleboro)
- Wilmington is a crime free area
- Personal level of service, comfortable calling the DPW
- Low crime and responsive police (Rockingham)

Weaknesses

- A lot of drug related crime
- Child and spouse abuse

Ideas to Improve Public Safety

- Continue to reconnect citizens with leaders, businesses, the Housing Authority
- Redefine crime – change the laws (e.g., marijuana)
- Expand our reparative justice program to reduce impact on jails and families

Human Services



Strengths

- A lot of services in place / non-profit network for low income population
- Great library

Weaknesses

- Too many human services / no umbrella / “trip over each other”
- Collaboration – not horrible, there is some, but still lacking
- Brattleboro a magnet for service seekers
- [Lack of] quality of some agencies is a detriment to community well-being

Ideas to Improve Human Services

- Fund affordable childcare
- Locate State and private non-profit offices in Home Depot space

Community Involvement



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Strengths

- Many people involved / many volunteers
- Abundance of smart people and talent
- Friendly and welcoming community, know each other
- Quality of life
- Civic engagement is a great asset

Weaknesses

- More talent here than is used
- The same faces give a lot
- Civic engagement can be counterproductive – e.g., River Garden

Ideas to Improve Community Involvement

- Find more ways to engage others
- Recruit minorities as volunteers, outreach, etc.
- Educate ourselves about different cultures
- Mix people together

Arts & Culture



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Strengths

- Tremendous, vibrant arts and culture atmosphere
- Arts and culture create small businesses
- Lots of free scholarships for those unable to afford

Weaknesses

- Arts and culture don't generate jobs or tax revenue
- Class issues around arts and non-arts groups

Ideas to Improve Arts and Culture

- More public arts
- Artists in the streets

Faith & Spirituality

Strengths

- Good tolerance for diversity

Weaknesses

- Could be harmful if attitudes are not tolerant

Advice to United Way



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Engage the Community in Implementation of the Assessment (9)

- Give town governments feedback on this report, to endorse it.
- Align with the congressional delegation, the Windham County Delegation.
- Involve the Chamber, Jerry Goldberg, and Rob Simpson at The Brattleboro Retreat.
- BMH will allocate a staff member to pursue this agenda [even if it is not in our sector].
- Make the community aware that we are going to do something about [the Assessment].
- Meet once a month and produce a quarterly progress report. Promote what you are doing and how it is helping, with good stories.
- Manage the press and involve them. There is talent in the community to assist in public relations.
- Be an advocate for towns or organizations to do things.
- Provide the impetus so that we do something with the Assessment.

Advice to United Way



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Facilitate Collaboration Among Non-Profits (8)

- United Way could facilitate the convening of groups to tackle problems and target resources.
- Help [non-profit] organizations get together to develop a more coordinated approach to assistance and better allocation of resources. Are there ways to deliver services more efficiently? An economic crisis is an opportunity to look at this.
- May be value in the many (people had various numbers, up to 298) non-profit human service organizations working together, e.g., being in one building. United Way could play a role, e.g., bring the 35 early education programs to a legislative breakfast.
- Create an Alliance for Human Services to get more bang for the buck.
- Delivering [non-profit] services under one umbrella / building will help the consumer.
- Act as a facilitator [in implementing the priorities of the Needs Assessment], by making sure the County is asking questions and working together to address issues. Keep the process going rather than being a funding source.
- Help us get to consensus building to create an economic development plan; help us facilitate the process.
- Dovetail into the Town Plan, work with town administration, to create conversation between the town and the agencies to have input and guide where/what we do.

Advice to United Way



Provide Consultation To Local Non-Profits (5)

- United Way's role is to teach, be the community conscience, hook up people to look at larger issues.
- Help others to think outside the box. Organizations need coaching to pull it off.
- Help clarify goals and outcomes for organizations, define better outcomes, not just process outcomes (handing out brochures). Rather the goals should be to increase by 10% the number receiving food stamps. Funds targeted to outcomes will foster more donations.
- Help agencies reduce expenses.

Advice to United Way



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Fund Direct Services (5)

- Use the Assessment's core needs to focus for the next X years, to assure accountability. Put as much energy to tackle the top 3 issues directly, as you did in the Assessment.
- Decide on the top 5 funding priorities.
- United Way's value is to fund quality of life issues which, without United Way, would be identified as needs, e.g., childcare. Continue to give grants to help services along. United Way needs to sustain some providers indefinitely, they can't put all their money in sustainability.
- Give out money
 - Micro loans, micro gifts, direct donations.
 - Start an organization or credit union to fund elder services, kids, people who fall through the cracks.
 - Require that grantees buy locally.
- Fund operations, not just particular initiatives. Sustainability is unrealistic. Someone has to fund ongoing maintenance. Issues may be less of a priority today because we have funded it over time. United Way needs to continue doing what they have funded...they are the backbone. Donors are increasingly looking for the effect of how the money is spent, but we also need to maintain operational structure.

Advice to United Way



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Foster Sustainability (2)

- Use Help Empower Youth as the model of sustainability, with proven effectiveness by class performance and attendance. Give organizations the opportunity for “stretches”.
- United Way’s role is to assist sustainability.

Other Suggestions and Comments (1 person each)

- Put resources into data that bases priorities and funding on correct and objective data, with clear projections.
- Conduct a critical assessment of the quality of area human service agencies.
- Someone could coordinate volunteer activities - A Volunteer Bank where maybe United Way could manage funding and in-kind donations, mix people and require that people in the agency participate with volunteers.
- We are lucky to have United Way. They are in tune with community leadership.