

MEMO

Georgia Vermont Town Plan Update

Public Meeting Notes **DRAFT**
Open House Input Summary
October 24, 2023 1:00pm - 5:00pm Georgia Fire & Rescue



Introduction:

An Open House was held at the Georgia Fire & Rescue Meeting Room to collect public comments and ideas related to the Town Plan Update. Attendees were provided a series of boards with questions where they could attach notes and comments. The following represents a transcript of the written notes provided, as well as notes taken from verbal conversations with the public. In cases where the written comments are unclear, a [?] follows the word(s) which are uncertain. Photographs of the comment boards have been provided on the project webpage.

OCTOBER 24TH OPEN HOUSE - PUBLIC COMMENTS

BOARD 3 - What do you think are the most important issues in the Town of Georgia today?

- How quickly Georgia is growing and the infrastructure to support it.
- The maintenance of existing roads and safety
- Appropriate and quality growth of Georgia
- Child care
- Senior activities
- No more building in wet/swampy areas, lots of homes being built on very wet land (may not technically be "wetlands")
- Community events
- Community organizations
- Activities for older citizens
- Safety, lack of police presence
- Affordability for our fixed income residents
- Transportation
- Sidewalks along Ballard Road
- Safe bike lanes
- Preserving natural areas
- Lack of effective law enforcement
- Constant 4-wheeler races on Georgia roads
- Loud trucks doing burnouts on residential roads
- Unsightly cluster housing developments diminishing rural countryside
- Wetland area protection vs development
- Remembering small town is OK
- Affordable housing - rebirth of smaller housing developments

- A better way to alert the public about Town information “A Sign Board”
- Community events, engagement
- Community spaces
- Too much sprawling growth
- Holding businesses accountable for property maintenance (i.e. Dollar General)
- More recreation programs, for adults as well as kids
- Needed businesses in Georgia, including pharmacy and convenient restaurant
- Lack of child care
- Housing - need more services in town before expanding low income housing
- Police presence (more needed)
- Community events + spaces/reasons to come together
- There have been rumors about new town hall new town library etc. What is the succession plan(?) on old building if this is true, Ex. Town garage old and new
- The present form of taxation is not working
- Housing in general needs restructuring - landlords need control over tenant behavior
- Lake quality
- Keep the rural feel
- Appropriately sized and placed growth
- Walkability
- Not paying for SV WW - limited benefit for a majority of residents
- Uncontrolled development ruined my small hometown I grew up in. Flood plains were built on causing home flooding
- Redistricting areas to allow for subdivision / more affordable housing
- Preserve landscape farmland open space
- Keep town historic small town feel
- Better road maintenance (i.e. should complete paving a road instead of sporadic parts)
- Developments/Growth that are a typical to a small historic town
- It would be nice to see a Homestead Act in place where certain areas have min. Of 5 acres example
- Consider providing for more environmental responsible transportation i.e. electric car power restoring
- Need to preserve the environmental sustainability of landscape and Lake Champlain
- More safety
- Keep zoning acreage
- Quality of education
- Housing
- Transportation
- Air & Water Quality
- Green Energy!

BOARD 4 - What would you like to see CHANGE in the Town of Georgia?

- More sidewalks
- Limitations on local gov't positions
- A restaurant
- A more central park
- Making sure new town building fit the environment they will be in Ex. town garage (again)
- More areas restricted from major development
- Local places to eat/gather still WITHOUT drive-throughs
- Creating a town that is one town, and not parts of another (Fairfax, Milton and St Albans)
- New Library centered with municipal or small business - similar to Milton or Shelburne
- Also - keep new bldgs looking like New England architecture
- Cell phone coverage
- Designation of South Village (State Designation Program)
- Our own Post Office
- Youth group volunteers - for needy citizens, for town projects
- More responsible oversight of lakeshore protection and improved stormwater infiltration on town owned property - roadsides, Town Beach
- Limit development
- A plan to increase tourism and agri-tourism
- An increase of social media coverage of what is happening with the Town
- No more cluster housing visible from roads
- Less development
- Strong law enforcement presence
- Enforce laws w/ 4-wheelers racing on roads, truck burnouts, trespassing
- Return of quality education at GEMS
- A more diverse selectboard
 - ^ agreed!
- Walkable town space, increased business in high density area
- A revaluation of a noise ordinance policy
 - ^ yes!
- Municipal WS/WW in SV and ex. Town Hall area
- Speed limit on Rte 7 35 mph to the highway
- Better law enforcement coverage
- Easier Accessory Dwelling Unit approval/regs.
- A tool for affordable housing
- More community based activities
- More support for local businesses
- To be able to have drive thrus
- Better law enforcement and first responder coverage
- More development in Center, less in village
- Value Agriculture and small business over industrial development

- Bring back the Parade!
- Continue Town Green gatherings
- Plan should have some focus on Equity
- Like to see more emphasis on small town and open space
- New library & town office in the South Village
- Better community communications
- Less sprawl more cluster housing
- Adding a Town Manager that way the Selectboard could spend time forward thinking!
- Develop Library as multi-age community center with resources, services, supports
- Promote Universal Accessibility
- More focus on climate change & support for green energy
- Road improvement fund to pave some dirt roads
- Better contracted police services. NO Police force!
- Landlords who rent out rooms or apartments are often victimized by tenants. In frustration they refuse to rent again. With housing at such a premium, we NEED more places for people to rent.
- Increase cell phone coverage.

BOARD 5 - What would you like to see STAY THE SAME in the Town of Georgia?

- Rural quaint town / farming community
- Open space
- Rural nature / not Chittenden Co.
- Small safe village
- Don't turn it into Winooski
- Space + natural areas clustered business area
- Keeping Georgia a small town! Not a suburb
- Keeping the individual sections of town - Georgia Center, West Georgia, Georgia Plains, East Plains, South Village
- Keep the same rural nature of the town
- Limit residential development - now a constant flow of contractor vehicles, residential traffic is rapidly increasing
- Small town Ex. Stafford, VT
- Agriculture
- Keep Ag areas while building up/welcoming more businesses + affordable housing in high density areas (i.e. by the highway)
- Agricultural, support farms and open areas
- Leave Georgia agriculture including South Village
- Celebrate the history - both human and natural - of this area, i.e. appropriate road names - don't leave it up to developers
- Small town character!
- It is great to welcome residents to town committees and activities

BOARD 6 - Do you have any suggestions for specific places in the Town of Georgia?

- Focus development in already developed + congested areas (South Village)
- Keep rural areas open
- Traffic signal needed at Rt 89 intersection
 - ^ agree!
 - ^ Yes!
- Transfer of Development Rights for South end and south village
- Strip mall for food/clothes places for example, dunkin donuts or a pizza place
- Possibility of a trail system around Arrow Lake
- Better traffic flow 104A/Rt 7/189
- Keep Industrial development in South Village
- Better traffic flow at Rt 7 and 104A intersection
 - ^ YES
- Sharp curve sign for Polly Hubbard Rd
- Widen Road along Georgia Shore or put in a bike path
- Better traffic control around Exit 18

BOARD 7 - Do you have any suggestions for the HAMLETS in the Town of Georgia?

MELVILLE LANDING

- Walking path at the Beach.
- Additional land purchase for the Beach/Park

GEORGIA CENTER

- Historical signage on the Town Common
- Georgia Center should be made the 'Center' of Georgia
- Geo Center - Need to consider alternatives to stormwater management that is responsible for excessive sediment loading in ditches on Town Common

GEORGIA PLAINS

- Enforcement of speed limits
- Keep growth on 89 side

SOUTH VILLAGE

- Drive thru coffee shop
 - ^ Yes!
 - ^ Yes!
- Needed businesses: services - pharmacy, take-out restaurant, etc.
- Restaurant - Not a CHAIN

- Remove the stipulations / change restrictions for the housing along 104A between Route 7 and Georgia Health Center
- Town NOT pay for sewer that only serves to benefit a very select few but will be a tax burden for everyone
- Better/SAFER traffic flow BEFORE any new housing or businesses
- Don't make the South Village a ghetto should be mix
- Safe walking/bike path or sidewalk along Ballard Rd, Rt 7, in business areas
- Walkable/bikeable connections of developments in south side
- Better traffic flow especially at 5pm
- A park/playground ballfield walkable distance from the big developments in the south end

EAST GEORGIA

- Additional land + trails for recreation

OTHER

- Where is the hamlet of North Georgia??

BOARD 8 - What words might you use to describe your future vision for the Town of Georgia?

- How about a local newspaper!
- Keep small town character we already have!
- Develop more in Center
- Agriculture
- More traffic control along Exit 18 area
- Better law enforcement/first responder coverage
- Hamlet
- Village
- Agriculture
- Small community
- Historical
- Quiet
- Stable
- Green/open space
- Keep it rural and taxes low by limiting costly residential development
- Responsible, limited growth in already developed areas (South Village)
- Keep rural areas open + protected from development
- Growth will happen but keep it a quality town
- Seeing the Town take care of its properties/maintain them. Keep the historical presence
- A real town center there/where events would occur for gatherings
- Small town community feel while adapting to the growing world
- Georgia is already a bedroom comm'y
- Conduct Quarterly "listening" meetings like this to increase resident participation and trust

- LOCAL PROJECTS for towns people to work together on

BOARD 9 - Are there any questions you would like to see us ask in the upcoming town-wide survey?

- What % of the budget will be allocated to our road maintenance
- Town government changes: A qualified Town manager
- What kind of percentage of new comm/residential do we want to see in town (inc. SV)

OPEN HOUSE - OTHER VERBAL NOTES AND COMMENTS

- Learned about this event on Facebook, but think it would be good if you also advertised on other social media platforms, perhaps put up more posters?
- Concern about development proposals in South Village - developers don't maintain properties, code enforcement issues
- Don't like some of the new stuff being developed down in Williston - large buildings chopped up into different color blocks, it should blend into the surroundings
- Town Beach Recreation Area - a pavilion was gifted to the town, but eventually couldn't be agreed on so offer was eventually withdrawn, problems with design, concern about it blocking view of lake
- Beach could use a more modern snack bar and better restroom facilities
- Fall Fest held at recreation area - should encourage more uses and activities like this
- Recreation area largely used by sports programs but it has many other potential uses and possibilities, it shouldn't be only one thing. No passive recreation opportunities, can't walk dog, fly kite, etc. It is supposed to be a community space. Look to make it more inclusive of the wider community.
- Recreation area has issues with drainage on fields sometimes
- Looking at statistics and demographic data - Franklin County data is not always a good measure of local conditions in Georgia, Chittenden County is a closer comparison
- See Milton Independent article - Georgia Beach project
- Wetland areas and flooding in the South Village area - these wet areas could be used as flood water storage or flood mitigation potentially, but we don't know yet, should be careful how we use them, could be used to our advantage
- Search for potential municipal sewer system locations, need to find what areas might be appropriate, however two potential spots already taken
- Having the Library and Town Offices located in South Village as part of new development would be nice
- Overall water quality protection should be incorporated into town plan
- People can no longer afford the taxes in many communities, people who have lived here for generations often can't afford to stay
- Want to protect the viewshed looking west across town over lake, but we need to catalog what the viewshed is first. Property on one side of Ethan Allen height capped to protect view
- Should keep the local road names tied to actual local history, not just made up
- South Village - why do housing above commercial, it is noisy, you have 104A there
- Georgia Center - should be more concentrated
- Land along Mill River Road - need this for housing, would like to see more flexibility w/ subdivision regs, currently is 5 acre zone now
- "HULA" style flexible incubator space, similar to what they are doing in Burlington, potential for South Village, or something similar to Taylor Park in St Albans

- May be useful to inquire in the survey about how long each resident has lived here for, and where they moved from.

[* * END MEETING 5:00 pm * *]

Written comments collected via the project online comment form (to date) are copied below:

- Would like to see PUDs allowed in the L1 District.
- The ban on first floor housing within the South Village does not make housing more affordable, yet this is a stated goal of the Town Plan.
- State designation program for south village district (and municipal water and sewer)
- Build the sidewalks that have been in the town plan for years. (Ballard Rd, Rte 7) It's probably the cheapest thing we could do to increase activity in the town.

MEMO

Georgia Vermont Town Plan Update

Public Meeting Notes **DRAFT**
Public Workshop Summary
October 24, 2023 6:00pm Georgia Fire & Rescue



Introduction:

A public meeting was held at the Georgia Fire & Rescue Meeting Room to collect public comments and ideas related to the Town Plan Update. Michael Allen from Regrowth Planning began the meeting with a brief presentation about the Town Plan update, including the goals, steps and projected schedule of the effort. This presentation was followed by an open discussion period, where comments and questions were taken from the audience. The notes from this discussion are provided below. This is not intended to be an actual transcript of the conversation. A copy of the presentation slides have been provided on the project webpage for reference, as well as a link to a video of the meeting.

WORKSHOP NOTES

Comment: Wanted to clarify that we don't have a Recreation Center, and we don't have plans to have a Rec Center. It's a Recreation Area.

Comment: Concerned about traffic flow in the 104/Route 7/I-89 corridor - it gets backed up at certain times of the day, there are no signal systems, trying to get off from 104A onto Route 7 is a problem. Having the bank driveway directly opposite makes it harder.

Comment: Just getting off the interstate is a problem. If you are heading north, you have to sit there for a long time.

Comment: For it to work we need to change the interstate offramp from a single lane to two lanes, people create two lanes. That area needs work, especially if that area is going to grow like our town plan envisions.

Comment: There is a transportation study for that area, but there have been studies for many years, though not much has been done.

Comment: We are always trying to find solutions for cars, but we shouldn't forget other modes of transportation such as bicycling and walking. I run on Route 7 and that can be harrowing. I know several of us who run or jog in the area, but unless we get in our cars there is not really a place for us to run. As we are thinking about changes to improve vehicle travel, we should also think about bicycles and pedestrians too. Not just "Complete Streets", but also thinking about open space and parks where we could have dedicated off-road paths. This could really help grow the appeal of the town. We have land right now that could be designed for this, get the bikes off the road, connect some of these resources. Would be good to plan for this now before things get built up too much.

Question: What are some of the other communities where you have done this work?

Moderator: Have been a practicing professional planner for about 20 years now, more recently worked with Chatham NY, Woodstock NY, Williston VT, Mount Holly VT, Pawlet VT, Warrensburgh NY, Schroepfel NY, and others.

Question: Are you aware that there is a Georgia South Village Transportation Master Plan.

Comment: I don't know how much there is we can do with Route 7 and 104A being state routes, state jurisdiction with VTrans, they have the final say in any of those decisions.

Moderator: Correct, they do, however having these recommendations in an adopted town plan will give us more leverage than if they are not addressed in the plan.

Comment: We need to put more thought into the Energy portion of our town plan. All of these towns are going to be going through a huge energy transition over the next 10-20 years, I don't think we have put enough thought into it as we probably need to. Also not sure if our current plan meets state standards with regard to energy. Need to address energy use, as well as supply.

Comment: Solar "farm" development is happening in the area, although it isn't happening in a negative way, people don't really have concerns about it, but we want to do it in a planned way to provide some guidance. Although the state has the final say in these matters, if towns have an adopted plan with the right energy strategies, they have more say than if they don't.

Moderator: Can you clarify if you are looking to set goals for more specific fossil fuel reductions, or more general policies?

Comment: Personally I think we do need to have demand-side reductions, weatherization of town buildings as well as individual buildings. The automotive side will probably happen independently of us, but we can start thinking of what we want to have happen when some of the gas stations begin to close.

Comment: One of the reasons we are looking to update the town plan has been to look at what do we do for new public water and sewer, what opportunities. It is something which limits our growth potential.

Comment: I'd like to see a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) policy, where you can get more density in one area in order to conserve more space elsewhere, so you aren't just growing everywhere.

Comment: Our town plan currently calls for protecting prime Ag and forest land, but other than asking people to leave that as their open space when they do a PUD (Planned Unit Development), we don't have much recourse for them to work with that, we don't have a way for them to swap with another piece of property, we don't have other options.

Comment: Because some of the farms are going out of business, but their fields are still available, you have farm equipment which travels very long distances to go serve other fields and then has to travel back to where it is needed next, we end up with large tractors needing to be on the roads which adds to our transportation issues. Can get stuck behind a tractor at all different hours of the day. It adds to the congestion and wear and tear on the roads.

Comment: Concerned about quality and consistency of cellular coverage, from a connectivity standpoint, connectivity with future technology, commuting families. Route 7 could benefit from better cell coverage.

Moderator: What about broadband internet?

Comment: Not good coverage, there are still a lot of places that don't have it.

Comment: Broadband is a very popular topic right now and there are a lot of people working on it, but people seem to have forgotten that we still need to be able to use our phones.

Moderator: Is there a bigger priority between improving cellular coverage or broadband?

Comment: Depends if you already have broadband or not. Some of the new cellular service with 5G is better. One or the other needs to come in with better coverage.

Comment: It is important to coordinate with adjacent town and municipalities with some of these goals, such as coordinating the north end of town with St. Albans in terms of roadway and pedestrian infrastructure. The south end of town with Milton. Would be good to customize or coordinate infrastructure with these other communities. St Albans Bay area with the Georgia north shore area. Would be helpful if there was better collaboration.

Comment: The town is bringing sidewalks out to about a ¼ mile from where Georgia town line starts, so there is going to be a gap.

Comment: At the end of the day, all of our suggestions are going to involve costs to the municipality, so we should be mindful of affordability of these ideas.

Moderator: Would like the town plan update to really focus on identifying what the major priorities are that we should be focusing our efforts.

Comment: Regarding costs, I don't want to be paying for sewer in the South Village, which is going to be benefitting very few people but potentially costing everyone, even with grants. There has already been pushback where they want to develop more housing, but there is less interest in brick and mortar businesses, when that is the reason we would provide the sewer, so it seems like we are getting pulled two different ways. I don't want to see my taxes paying for a service like that. Same with the town center designation - why are we pursuing this if it only benefits a select few. I don't want to be paying for someone else's sewer when, if my septic system goes, i'm on the hook for the 30-40k. Vast majority of the town is not going to be able to hookup to it.

Comment: Ditto.

Comment: That's why I say we need to keep our mind on affordability. If we are talking about water and sewer there, what is the plan for making it support itself?

Comment: At the same time, for a reasonable cost, if we can save more green space by having more density there instead of houses out in the farm areas, and it becomes more self-sustaining down there, perhaps with a shared system with Milton. Then maybe it does make it worthwhile.

Comment: Milton has a sewer district, but it doesn't come up to the Georgia town line.

Comment: It would be nice to have the town plan address the lake and water quality. It is a huge asset to the town, people are buying \$400-600k camps, would be nice to keep the water nice. Even though that topic is a statewide issue, it would be good for us to address it also, and I don't think the town really does that much right now on this issue.

Comment: This is a planning issue, like when you have a couple of fallow fields there that got turned into developments, they have no sewer there. So you have a field where there are now 12 new septic systems right on the lake, does the town have a say in how that is developed. It would be nice to give that more thought.

Comment: Having the town address this issue is a good way to open potential funding opportunities, which can leverage grants.

Comment: Moved to Georgia shore 33 years ago, every one in front of us was all little camps. They were grandfathered in years ago. Now they are all brand new homes now. Very few camps anymore, mostly year round homes on postage-stamp lots. They have to park in the road just to take their groceries into the house. Camp is right on the water and they have no land, no idea where they put their septic system.

Comment: Some properties have their septic on the other side of the road.

Comment: One of the conflicts with the conversation about South Village and housing, it has been argued that housing affordability could be addressed by providing more smaller units in South Village with a denser population center. We don't know if that will prove itself out. But that is a problem we have with the cost of housing right now. Rental units are practically non-existent.

Comment: Short-term rentals are also causing some complaints, at least out by the lake, where the guests are sometimes being a nuisance to adjacent property owners. How do we deal with that as a town?

Moderator: Are you experiencing a lot of problems with short-term rentals, or just a few?

Comment: There are a few, we are hearing from property owners that they are concerned.

Comment: In Georgia, there are few places that are full year-round short-term rental properties. This is more of a summer season issue, which is the time when short-term rentals here are more popular. As was stated you have a few camps along the water, those are more likely to be rented out as a short term rental, and they have conflicts with the houses near them. That is really more of the issue here, it's not really a loss of housing stock. A lot of communities experience a loss of housing stock from the popularity of short-term rentals, but that is not really what we are experiencing here. It's mostly summer residences on the lake being rented out.

Comment: We should take a good look at how Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) can be utilized to improve housing costs in this area. This is being done at a state-wide level as well.

Comment: Wondering about the 70 acres on the other side of South Village, I know there were plans to try and develop that, but there were issues with the infrastructure that was needed to do it. Is there an update to this?

Moderator: I think that is still being looked at, though we should be asking ourselves what sort of development would we like to see in South Village, if we could choose? What is needed here?

Comment: A Restaurant.

Comment: The Library would have been a great place for a nice restaurant.

Comment: Pharmacy, Hardware. All of these things used to be here but they aren't anymore.

Comment: There is a bunch of stuff in the South Village area, and then there is St. Albans. So there is half of us who just go north to St. Albans to do things. We can get what we need up there, so we need better connections up there to get to it. Route 7 is basically a highway now, which i'm not excited about, but if we could think about improved connections there like biking paths or something that would be good.

Comment: Restaurants, food, pharmacy, coffee - these are things that people will still go to locally and is an opportunity to socialize. Also a lot of people are working from home. It would be good to have some of these places locally so you don't have to go to the next town to get them. I would rather have these things here in town. Georgia Market is busy.

Comment: We are very fortunate to have Georgia Market. They have reduced hours now but still nice to have.

Comment: We do not want to lose the one market we have in town.

Comment: This town plan will go into effect and be valid for about 8 years, so we need to think about the next 8 years or so, but while that is happening we will have new people move to the area and have more demand.

Comment: Appropriate scale mixed uses, like a Georgia-scale version of Maple Tree Place where it doesn't feel like big box stores but some of the businesses are complementary to each other and are what the community needs. Physical proximity. Think about kids and teenagers before they can drive, what do they need or want, how do they get there? What about a Fieldhouse or something where kids can go without having to drive down

to Essex or a small movie theater. Some of that could be supported by the growing population and more density. Recreation, fitness, entertainment.

Moderator: Where do people socialize locally?

Comment: Schools mostly. School events, sports.

Comment: It is the school activities, but it ends at each grade. But the community breaks apart when each family follows their kids to where they choose to go to high school.

Comment: And not everyone has school age kids, or kids at all.

Comment: One of the issues is, this meeting room here at the Firehouse is one of the biggest community gathering spaces we have available. To actually have a community event, it becomes an issue.

Comment: I've always felt like there is the School, and then there is the Town. There is not a lot of universal use of the school facilities. I have suggested that during the summer when kids are out of school they could move the books from the School library to the town library so they could be used by everyone, but this didn't happen. As a town resident I pay for these amenities but I can't use them, and it is that way with a lot of things. The school has these facilities and amenities, but as a resident you don't really have access to them. They have the largest buildings in town, publicly owned, but aren't really accessible. We aren't taking full advantage of the resources we have. The school fields could be used for summer sports instead of the Town Beach.

Comment: We can't get access to school property because the school is maxed out. We are one of the few growing school districts in the state, which is fortunate, but we are also bursting at the seams. Basketball practice goes until 8 or 9 at night because they have to stack the different teams. St Albans has gone through some expansions, but there is only so much money to go around. We should take a look at what we have as a community, and what other communities have as a whole. Some of what we have is underutilized. We can't afford another pool, but we have one nearby in St. Albans. Should take an inventory of all these things and coordinate, join them so these become shared resources and we aren't building something new which is already provided next door.

Comment: It's hard to be a destination town when there is so much already provided on both sides of us.

Comment: What can we offer that they don't already offer. We are one of the few that has a great beach area, we could extend it out and link to other beach areas? Between Georgia, St. Albans, Milton - none of us are that big, we should work together where we can. See what they have and what they don't have, and work together to share resources. They are already talking about expanding basketball courts, a great indoor space, or an ice hockey rink. Is there a way to get our kids up there without having to drive on Route 7, otherwise kids get isolated.

Comment: The town does have a center, owned by the Church, Georgia Plains Baptist, Jimmy Center. Would it be possible to reach out to them and ask if there are ways to open this up as more of a community center? I think the church would be open to having more visitors, something for the seniors, something for the youth, could the town rent space for some of these things?

Comment: As far as I know that is open to the community for a lot of the activities they do there, though its not that big.

Comment: Would like to see a little bit more interaction with the churches. A lot of churches are underutilized these days, and would love the interaction. If we could put it into the plan to recognize these assets of the community it would help remind everyone they are here and support them more, regardless of individual religion. Should be acknowledged as part of the community.

Comment: I'm involved with the "Bone Builders" group at the Catholic Church twice a week, and have really enjoyed it, for people who have osteoporosis or help building up muscles as you get older. Has been a great social event, we need more of those types of events or activities to keep contact with your community members.

Comment: We had a hard time finding a space large enough, and we spoke to some other churches who said they only used their space for our members. Its great that we have these churches but they may not be willing to always share space with outside groups.

Moderator: What about a traveling event which takes turns at the different churches?

Comment: Maybe if the town approached the churches with this idea to ask it might be received better.

Comment: Some churches have reservations about hosting different things perhaps because of their insurance requirements or something, but perhaps there is a way to work through that.

Comment: There used to be a dance company, they would also do Zoomba there, but they had to move out after rent got raised. Same with day care, they had to move out. The economics of this need to be somehow addressed where we are not forcing out local amenities or services, it is harder for these small locally-owned operations to compete against larger companies.

Comment: We had a gym here locally, but that didn't last long. The pizza shop. We had these things but they all left or shut down for whatever reason. What is preventing these businesses that we want from staying.

Comment: We are not a "go-to" location, we are more of a "be-from" location. Everyone goes to St. Albans or Chittenden, most people unless you work from home go outside of the town to go to work and then pick up the shopping they need there on the way home. Having Milton and St. Albans on either side of us - do we want to try and duplicate what they already have because I don't see that as being economically feasible. We would be in competition with them. We need to be strategic with our growth in a way that it doesn't overload our capacity.

Comment: Since you will be putting out a survey, many of us work from home, I would like to understand how much of the population here works from home now, and how often? A lot has changed in the past few years.

Comment: My concern is some of the big apartment complexes that people have talked about putting up in town. Concerned how that would affect our town, how it would impact our schools, the demographics of the people who would come. In St. Albans I watch how the people with vouchers go from apartment complex to apartment complex because they are kicked out, going from Swanton to Albert to Richford to St. Albans to Milton and bringing their kids to each school along the way, which impacts the schools. Everyone needs housing but we need to be cautious how that affects us.

Comment: I am curious what the demographics are here in town right now, how many seniors we have vs. younger families, etc. The seniors won't be around forever, and when they are gone their houses would be open for younger families to live in. If we put too many houses in now, will we really need them?

Comment: Would like to see more senior housing, since most of us would want to still live in the town, but wouldn't want to take care of a large house. That would open the older house for the next generation to have it, but we wouldn't have to move to the Carolinas or Florida. A senior community, one floor.

Comment: Not a lot of condos, I don't want to live in a condo.

Comment: 2 bedroom ranches.

Comment: That comes down to density, the ability to walk to things.

Moderator: Well for walkability it would want to be somewhere like South Village where you have amenities nearby you can walk to, transportation, water and sewer etc.

Comment: Senior housing mixes great with local businesses in a mixed use environment.

Moderator: The mixed use model does not work as well for senior housing if the housing is on the 2nd or 3rd floor of the mixed use development, because that housing wants to be at ground level, so instead you may need it mixed use but horizontally, not vertically.

Comment: So much commercial property in St. Albans is empty, with people buying things online now, people aren't opening businesses, they are consolidating offices. The plan now has that first floor commercial office space but I don't think it will work, it will sit empty.

Comment: The old campground behind Dollar General, had heard that had been purchased to become senior housing, is that still happening?

Comment: They had purchased the property, but there is no formal plan yet, they have had sketch plan review but nothing set in stone yet. But it will probably be multiple uses, not just one thing. They are looking to use the entire property.

Moderator: We have heard from some people that there are concerns about the track record of some of the developers who sometimes don't take care of their properties and they are left in disrepair. There may be something we can implement at the local town code level which could address that concern.

Comment: That works both ways, as a property owner I have a hard time getting contractors nowadays to do normal repairs, a developer with many properties probably has same difficulty getting maintenance done. Been waiting on one guy for 3 years.

Comment: For South Village do we want more space for businesses, or do we want to move away from more space for businesses, because first floor commercial isn't as viable? We have discussed getting water and sewer to enable more business there, maybe we need to pick a lane. As a community we need to decide. What is the right proportion of commercial vs residential. Multistory would be more efficient, but would it actually work.

Moderator: Finding the right mix of commercial and residential will be important, but we don't have full control of the private sector. Generally speaking, commercial development is usually more profitable for the tax base than residential. I'm not imagining senior housing taking up all of South Village.

Comment: But a 60 or 45 unit senior housing is already planned there.

Comment: It is planned, but lots of things have been planned there.

Comment: How would this work with the existing traffic problem which we already have there? Isn't that going to compound the problem?

Comment: The traffic problem is already terrible. If you add more people it would get worse.

Moderator: Some of the traffic problems are because of the existing roadway configurations. The question becomes, if we agree that South Village is the area we want to promote some more growth, then how much growth do we actually want there, within the limits of what we can handle.

Comment: Some discussions with VTrans are needed, if we had a ramp to go south and another ramp to go north that would take care of quite a bit of that congestion, at least for the interstate.

Moderator: Has there been any discussion of a wider market feasibility study of what is already available in the area and what would be needed or successful here locally?

Comment: Fairfax is a small community and they have a really good restaurant and hardware store, post office, grocery stores etc is a small community but they somehow seem to get all those things.

Comment: If a feasibility study was recommended in the plan that would increase funding chances for it.

Comment: You could control what you had in South Village if there was enough desire for it, if it is a desirable enough location you can put whatever stipulations on it you want and they will still come. The problem is there isn't a lot of desire for businesses to be there, so you don't have that level of control.

Comment: And the thought was with more residential there it would increase the desirability of walkable commercial, but it becomes the cart before the horse.

Comment: There are 2 things missing to draw businesses into the South Village. A dense population base, and public sewer/water. The developers get incentives for building where there is sewer and water and that helps them on the financials.

Comment: You said you would be updating the demographic data as part of this update, it seems like that data is something we need up front to be able to use as part of this discussion. It may help inform this debate. When will that data be available?

Moderator: It was going to be updated over the course of this effort, but that is a good point we may want some of this information earlier and so I can prioritize that earlier. There is an issue with some of the data however since the US Census data right now isn't very up to date and also seems to have some irregularities so not sure how much we can rely on it. May have to look for other sources.

Comment: How can we incentivize the community to respond to the community survey? Have you had success in getting good feedback?

Moderator: Depends how the survey is implemented. Due to cost constraints we are not currently planning to direct mail it to every household because that is expensive. Have done direct mailing in the past, which can get better Moderator rate around 30-35% which is very good. Not sure how to incentivize it. Planning to make it available for pick up but also available online.

Comment: What about a partnership with the school to help distribute the survey?

Moderator: Have done that in the past, would be good to help get some younger respondents also, so we can look into that option.

Comment: We sometimes make the mistake of assuming 100% of the people want to respond, when in reality the 35% who respond may be everyone, while the rest of the population believes that their elected and appointed government representatives will just make the correct decisions for them.

Moderator: Survey may be opportunity to get a better handle on current demographics since census data appears questionable.

Comment: Census data may be the best data we can get right now.

Moderator: Possibly, but concerned a lot changed during covid that was not accurately captured. I think census data missed a lot. A lot of people moving up from downstate and buying real estate, moving to rural areas.

Comment: A lot of that was not actual data, it was more an impression that people had that people were moving in from out of state, but where were they moving to? We don't have a lot of real estate in Georgia to buy, unless someone moves out, and people weren't moving out during the pandemic.

Comment: We do tend to lose a lot of families when their kids get to high school, they move out to follow the school, many to Essex.

Moderator: What are the issues that make young people or families to leave the area, what is missing here, what can we do to help retain them?

Comment: One of the things that makes Fairfax unique is they have a K-12 school system, when families settle there they stay. Our kids either go to St. Albans or Essex or Milton, Fairfax and it splits everything.

Comment: It's not even the school system, it is the extracurricular activities that pulls people away. Our neighbors had high schoolers which were involved 5 days a week in different after school activities, so they were away more than they were home. Why stay here, might as well move to where their activities are. Love the fact that we have school choice, but it comes with a drawback.

Comment: That is something unique we need to consider in local planning.

Comment: Our town plan needs to address equity one way or another. Either say that we are very equitable and that is great, or aspire to be more equitable. Should either affirm or aspire, in terms of inclusion and diversity, etc. That plays a role in affordability and transportation and many issues. Northwest Regional Plan addresses equity in each of their chapters and could be used as a model.

Comment: Perhaps in the survey a question about the willingness of the community to invest in itself, take on more responsibility. For example, the state would be happy to give up responsibility of Route 7, even just from Milton town line to Interstate. The town does not have the stomach for taking that over, however it would open up a lot of possibilities for planning and redesign of that corridor, sidewalks, speed limits, etc. We would gain control of it, however we would have to pay for it. This is an important question if we want to see something change there.

Moderator: Has there been any discussion of a phased transition of responsibility?

Comment: No that wouldn't work.

Comment: We are already asking way too much of the part time volunteers of the local boards and selectboard. Another question is do we have the stomach for more community engagement committees, handled by the selectboard, to find other volunteers needed to get some of these things done in the community. Special task force committees, transportation, housing, energy, trails etc. Need more volunteerism.

Comment: People ask why don't we have a parade anymore. We don't have a parade anymore because no one stepped up to keep it organized and going. Summer activities. These things happen because someone stepped up to volunteer to make it happen.

Comment: Many would agree it is harder to learn what is going on in town, unless you have kids in the school system, how do you get involved in things, learn what is going on.

Comment: One of the comments on the boards was about having more community events to get involved in, a group effort day, we do very well with Green Up Day, recently an issue was brought up about the Veterans Cemetery lacking maintenance and all of the sudden there was a crowd that went up and took care of it. The community could do more of this.

Comment: Like the trails thing, I did not know there was an opportunity for this.

Comment: There was a request to look into connecting the 4-wheeler trails in Milton and St Albans or Fairfax through town, but it is illegal to ride them on local roads. Did not get much support.

Moderator: Reminder to everyone to check the project webpage for materials, copies of this presentation, and they can use the comment form to submit ideas and concerns.

[** END MEETING 5:00 pm**]