

Pittsford Community Meeting

April 10, 2009

Meeting Notes

1. Bob Harnish of the Pittsford Community Corporation (PCC) welcomed everyone and provided background of when and why the organization had formed. He noted that in town meetings conducted in 1997, the citizens of Pittsford indicated a desire to enhance the feeling of "community" and spoke of the need for a village green, a community center and the preservation of its traditionally rural community. In an effort to assist the Pittsford Planning Commission achieve the objectives of the Town Plan and the aforementioned goals, several participants in the 1997 meetings formed the Pittsford Corporation, a non-profit organization. The Corporation's sole purpose is to act as a mechanism for funding projects to implement and support the objectives of the Town Plan. Whenever possible, actions of the Corporation shall be designed to create a positive impact on the health, welfare and economic environment of the Town.

He shared the exciting news that the organization was in the process of purchasing the 15.3 acres of the Forrest Farm and they really wanted community input into what the people in Pittsford would like to see and had asked Smart Growth Vermont and Preservation Trust of Vermont to help seek public input.

2. Noelle MacKay, Executive Director of Smart Growth Vermont, thanks everyone for joining us on a Saturday morning. She mentioned that we had held a community kick off meeting (link to notes), five focus group meetings and had a survey for residents to fill out on line or at various local establishments. Through this outreach, we asked residents in Pittsford what they would like to see on the site; what would enhance village living and what concerns they might have. The following were projects that gained general support from those that participated:
 - a. A town green with a gazebo for music, events and farmers market
 - b. A restaurant
 - c. A café or bakery
 - d. A community center – to hold meetings, family events (birthdays, anniversaries, family reunions, etc.)
 - e. Senior housing

After hearing what the community would like to see on the site, we invited today's speakers to talk about their experience successfully creating similar projects in their community. We thought that it would be a good chance for members of Pittsford to learn how other communities had succeeded, their partners and any lessons learned.

3. Paul Bruhn, Executive Director of the Preservation Trust of Vermont, welcomed everyone and explained what a wonderful opportunity the property could be for the community. He hoped today's meeting would inspire folks to volunteer and get involved.

4. The first speaker was Joanne Harrison, President of the Board of River Arts in Morrisville
Contact: www.riverartsvt.org; 802.888.1261

Joanne provided a handout that summarized her points. She ended by emphasizing how this has been one of the most successful projects of her life. She had a wonderful 30-year career in teaching, but this project has broadened her skill set – she has now written grants and can ask people to “invest in the future of their community” by supporting the project. She encouraged people in Pittsford to get involved as well.

5. Next was Linda Ramsdell who owns the Galaxy Bookstore in Hardwick and is involved with Claire’s Restaurant in Hardwick, a community supported enterprise.
Contact: www.clairevt.com

Linda told the story of how Claire’s came to be. Many in the community had realized that there was a need for another restaurant in Hardwick about five to six years ago. They had found a space, but could not find an operator so they shelved the idea for several years. Then they found a local chef interested in working with them to create a new eating establishment in town, but they had no building. There was a fire in town and the building was being rebuilt by Housing Vermont with commercial space on the first floor and housing on the upper floors. They worked with Housing Vermont who created a second company that owns the restaurant and all the equipment – thus assuring that the community will have a restaurant space into the future. Linda and her partners talked with Robert Fuller who owns several restaurants in Vermont, including the Bobcat Café in Bristol. Community members had approached him to create a restaurant and he said he would if 12 people invested \$5,000. The folks at Claire’s decided to try the same thing. They had several “angel” investors at the \$5,000 level, but also sold 20 \$1,000 shares to local community members who can redeem their investment with food and drink at the restaurant over the next 4 years. The restaurant has been a wonderful success and they buy the majority of their food from local farmers – large and small! Linda stressed that the dream took a while, but they never gave up. She emphasized the need for communities to have places where people meet and exchange ideas. That is how ideas like Claire’s become a reality!

6. Next was Lyssa Papazian who has been involved with the Putney General Store
Contact: 802.387.2878. Papazian@gaw.com

Lyssa shared the saga of rebuilding the Putney General Store through a series of photos (link). Participants saw a photo of the Store as it originally stood in the 1800s. The General Store has been at the heart of Putney throughout the town’s history. When it was damaged by fire in 2008 and the current owner realized that it was not feasible to rebuild, the community came together – businesses donated, school children held fundraisers, Preservation Trust of Vermont helped, the Housing Conservation Board donated, people wrote grants – and they were almost completed with the renovations and they had a new operator. Unfortunately tragedy struck again when an arsonist burned the General Store to the ground. Nothing was left. That has not stopped the community and they plan on rebuilding again. Why? They realized how important the store was to their community – as a meeting place, to help draw people to other businesses in town, as a place where the kids get ice cream. She highlighted how this project brought the community together because it stands for the values of the community – not just the economy or the building.

7. The final speaker was Nancy Owens of Housing Vermont
Contact: www.hvt.org; 802.863.8424; nancy@hvt.org

Nancy had a powerpoint presentation on a senior housing project in Cavendish, Proctorsville Green, along with a handout that provided a summary and photo of other senior housing projects they had been involved with around the state. The project in Cavendish was several phases. The first phase involved the removal of existing structures on the green, including a smokestack and foundation of an old mill that suffered a fire in 1982. The town then created a village green – installing curbing, sidewalks, benches, lighting and parking. The next phase involved the redevelopment of the historic Pollard Block into eight affordable apartments, with space on the ground floor for the Post Office and a local yarn and fabric shop; construction of a duplex apartment across from the Green; construction of four townhouse homes available for first-time homebuyers; renovation of the Freeman House which provides six apartments for lower-income seniors. Nancy highlighted that this project is near schools, churches, the town library and other shops and services. The new village green is now a stop on local bike tours and the project has spurred other renovation projects in town.

8. Noelle thanked the speakers and opened up the discussion for questions, comments and dialogue on how Pittsford could help their dreams become a reality.

Questions for the Speakers:

- ***What is the population of Morrisville to support River Arts?***

2,500 in the town, about the same in the surrounding towns

- ***Does the organization (River Arts) operate in the black?***

Yes. The organization does not develop a new project or program until a funding stream is identified. The programs and events also pay for the upkeep of the building.

- ***Average age of the volunteers involved with these projects?***

In Putney, the median age was around 55 and they tried to involve the schools – all the schools raised money for the general store. Paul from PTV mentioned that in general, these projects are led by older folks as they have the time and experience, but most have a heavy dose of younger support.

It was also mentioned that getting younger people involved may require changing the programs that are likely to resonate with young families – like a community garden or farmer’s market.

- ***Do any of these communities have bus service?***

Putney has a bus Route along Route 5 that travels that corridor. Nancy mentioned that Proctorsville has AOT enhancement money. Morrisville has a bus route that serves the mountain and the community is also investing in sidewalks. Members of the audience felt bus service would bring in business from customers outside the town and could be a good thing.

- ***What jobs has this created in Hardwick?***

There were the jobs created in the restaurant – servers, kitchen, etc. Linda also mentioned that Hardwick has a lot of great local producers – Pete’s Greens; Jasper Hill; High Mowing Seed; VT Soy; Vermont Natural Coatings – and they are developing a new food center. There is even a new book – The Town that Food Saved by Don Hewitt – that talks about local food in Hardwick.

Questions on the Forrest Farm:

- ***Would these projects be a net gain for the tax rolls?***

Yes. The property would stay on and the businesses and homes would pay taxes. Linda mentioned that Claire’s has created jobs (servers, cooks, etc.) and also pays sales as well as rooms and meals taxes. Nancy said that they pay property taxes on their properties.

- ***What is the status of the Post Office?***

- Bob Harnish of PCC shared that the US Postal Service has contracted with a developer in Burlington, Frank von Turkovich, and Frank is working on siting the new Post Office. He said that there is space on the Forest Farm if Frank is interested.
- A member of the audience said that the Plains Road site had not been successful and had gone to the Vermont Supreme Court and was denied.
- Noelle mentioned that during the focus groups, participants felt that the post office on the Forrest Farm would be a positive thing for the village.

- ***Has anyone considered traffic to Route 7 and how projects on the site would impact traffic in the area?***

Noelle mentioned that traffic numbers, design options and potential impacts cannot really be determined until there is a concrete project as each – housing, restaurant, and community center – would all generate different traffic numbers and patterns. However, during focus group meeting, participants were clear that traffic safety, aesthetics and alternatives would need to be a top priority.

A member of the audience mentioned that Pittsford is in line for Route 7 improvements so we should be thinking about this issue now. AOT is considering a 3rd lane going north near Kamudas so folks can turn.

An audience member also asked about a roundabout on Route 7. Noelle and Paul mentioned that many communities have a love/hate relationship – they either love them or hate them. Brattleboro likes their roundabout and are planning another while a proposal in Williston has divided the community. So it is an idea to consider with traffic engineers and the community.

- ***Will be there any tax payers’ dollars?***

Bob Harnish responded - No, PCC does not plan on asking the town for support for this project. Others from PCC mentioned that they were planning on seeking grants and support from state organizations. Noelle jumped in and said that grants were important, but that support from residents, businesses, school children, etc. were all going to be critical to success. She noted that all the speakers today mentioned community support – through fundraising, investing, donating time. Only with grassroots support could a project come to light. State organizations

do not have all the funding and they often look at community support when determining which projects to get involved.

- ***What is the cost to purchase the property?***

Bob answered. \$650,000 needs to be raised over 3 years. The terms – they have already paid \$10,000 for the option and they need to raise another \$50,000 by August, 2010. They then have 15 months for ½ the purchase price. Mr. Forrest has offered to carry half the price.

Questions for the Participants?

- ***Is the community interested in doing the projects mentioned today?***

- Yes from everyone.
- Several people expressed their excitement and said that they would like to be involved
- Someone else mentioned that they see a mix – a multipurpose center; a place where the community can interact, housing.
- One gentleman said he would love to see a hardware store or pharmacy if it was feasible.
- In response to the pharmacy, Lyssa mentioned that they were looking into working with a pharmacy to have the General Store be a drop off for prescriptions.

Comments:

- Let's not wait for there to be a fire before we start!
- Representative Butch Shaw had several comments. He noted that he sees several of the panelists and moderators of today's meeting in the Montpelier supporting various programs that benefit local communities like the Downtown Program. He mentioned that at first he had been skeptical about PCC and any project on the property. However, after sitting down with members, he felt that they were trying to do something positive for the community and that people should talk with them and get involved.
- A community member mentioned that her house sits across the road and she would see what ever changes would occur. She has lived in other communities and she strongly suggested that the community should take charge if they want to control what happens on the property.

Final Thoughts:

- Contact PCC if you want to get involved:
 - Contact info – 802-483-6220 to ask questions, volunteer or learn more about the project