

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Pittsford Focus Groups and Community Survey

Summary prepared November 17, 2009



Background

Pittsford is a small community located eight miles north of Rutland. Route 7 runs through the center of town with a sharp 90 degree turn at the intersection with Elm Street. The Pittsford Community Corporation, with an eye towards creating opportunities for new development and more "depth" in the heart of the village, is in the process of buying the Forrest Farm (at the top of Elm Street). Their goal is to develop it in ways that strengthen and revitalize the village center. They have asked Smart Growth Vermont and Preservation Trust of Vermont to assess what community residents would most like to see on the site.

Methodology

Focus Groups:

Between September 21st and September 30th, five community focus groups, each with between eight and ten participants, were held with different segments of the population: Merchants, Community Groups, Adjacent Neighbors, Other Neighbors, and Civic Group - based on each participant's primary interest or affiliation. However, it is important to note that groups were not mutually exclusive in that any individual could have fit in any of several groups. (That is, a person who was a member of a community group but was also a local business owner could just have easily been assigned to either group.) Therefore, there was a significant amount of overlap of opinion across the groups, and statements regarding the perspective of one group versus that of another are tentative at best.

Each group was asked the same series of questions and asked to be as honest as possible in their responses, with the understanding that everything would remain anonymous. A staff member from Smart Growth Vermont facilitated each group.

1. What do you consider the heart or core of Pittsford?
2. There are many things that are important to have in a village if it to function as a true community center where people can fulfill most of their day-to-day needs. What do you see as the most important things that make a village in general a great place to live or a special place for you?
3. Please share with us one thing – a service, building, or feature – that the village had historically that has been lost, or something it currently has that you value and wouldn't want to lose.

4. What is Pittsford Village missing? What specific services, businesses, or other uses on the Forrest Farm would have the biggest impact on village life?
 - a. Of the things that Pittsford doesn't have, which do you think are the three most important? That is, what three changes to the village would do the most to make it stronger?
5. How will the services, businesses, and other uses you've suggested for the Forrest Farm benefit the community?
6. How often would you visit or shop at these services or businesses if they were located at Forrest Farm?

Community Comment Cards and On-line Survey

PCC, Smart Growth Vermont and Preservation Trust of Vermont wanted to encourage people in the community to participate and share their thoughts on the future of the property and understand that people have various comfort levels with participating in small focus groups or at larger community meetings. Thus, we placed comment boxes and cards at five (5) public locations around town and developed an on-line survey on Smart Growth Vermont's website. The results are summarized in this memo as well. We asked three questions:

1. What is Pittsford Village Missing? What specific services, businesses, or other uses at the Forrest Farm would have the biggest impact on village life?
2. How will the services, businesses, and other uses you've suggested for the Forrest Farm benefit the community?
3. How often would you visit or shop at these services or businesses if they were located at the Forrest Farm?

Focus Group Results

Q1: What is the heart or core of the Village of Pittsford?

There were many answers from the groups ranging from geographical town lines to individual's favorite spots but a handful of locations were mentioned over and over. The most common was the corner of Route 7 with Kamuda's, the Post Office and the Library, as someone said of that area "No matter where you go you run into someone you know." The school and the churches were brought up by multiple groups as more the emotional heart of town, along with the Town Green and rec center. Physically the heart can be described as "...a little bit oblong, not too wide, but long. Like a cucumber." The general consensus agreed that Pittsford is definitely a town of sprawl and that, although it "would never be a Brandon", could be denser.

Specific Responses:

- Route 7 seeing as it cuts the town in two
- Historically the village is from Plains Road to Route 3
- Library, Post Office and Kamuda's
- School is the emotional core
- Rec Center
- Churches
- Village Green
- Keith's I and II
- JR's
- Maple Museum

Q2: What are important features to have in a Village?

The answers to this question were numerous and very specific, everything from jobs to a Bingo Hall. Some of the themes were retail and professional space, recreation and community space, housing and food service, and medical facilities. Also mentioned by most of the groups were basic items that make a town look like a town such as sidewalks, lighting, benches, a gazebo, and the ability to move around town without a car.

Q3: What has been lost or what wouldn't you want to lose?

It seems that every place of business and landmark in Pittsford was mentioned as something the town does not want to lose; Kamuda's, the Police Academy, and Maple Museum. Many groups mentioned the loss of the Municiple Office to the "downtown" area and the inconvenience it would be if the Post Office were to have the same fate. The school, library, rec center, and churches were also highly important. Things that have been lost from the area included many businesses and services that the community would like to see return such as a hardware store and a doctor's office.

Things lost

- Hardware store
- Municiple Office downtown
- Central Meeting Location
- Hydro Energy businesses
- Laundromat
- B&B
- Doctor
- High End Restaurant
- Bakery
- Farms
- Dentist
- Ice Cream Shop
- Furnace Brook Market Place
- Vet
- Attorney

Things not to lose

- Kamuda's
- Chuches
- Library
- Maple Museum
- Post Office
- School
- Rec Center
- Police Academy
- Sidewalks
- Hilltop Tavern
- The view from Forrest Farm "The Town Farm"
- Covered Bridges
- Keith's
- Food Shelf
- The Green
- Mobile Station
- Homestead on Forrest Farm
- Senior Housing
- Grocery Store
- Open land
- Historical Society
- Pizza place
- Bank

Q4: What is the Village of Pittsford missing?

Each focus group was consistent in that Pittsford is in need of more commercial activity and suggestions were varied - everything from art studios to light industry. These businesses would then create jobs, a tax base, and require additions in housing and leisure activities, all of which were mentioned as things Pittsford is missing. All groups were adamant that new growth should not take away from the businesses that are already in town and "the use of the land needs to enhance the land plot." The top uses for the Forrest Farm were a Community Center with a entire host of uses, professional space for a variety of services and businesses, a park or community green that is "gazebo worthy," and senior housing options. The only group that offered different themes was the adjacent neighbors and their suggestions were more focused on agricultural and recreational opportunities to ensure the land remains primarily as it is today.

Specific Suggestions:

Gazebo	Retail and professional space
Traffic management	Medical center
Community Center	Senior Housing
Indoor meeting place	Small cottages
Farmer's Market	Mixed use, housing and business
Weddings, meetings, and events	Low and medium priced apartments
Restaurants, coffee shop, bakery	

Q5: How would these businesses/services benefit the community?

Each identified suggestion had different benefits but they all played into the same idea: to make Pittsford a more vibrant community, to draw in travelers who pass through on Route 7, and to provide the towns people with more local options for their daily needs and activities. People wanted to change the fact that the Pittsford community is very spread out and there is no central place for people to gather and get to know one another. They would like the resources to host cultural events and educational opportunities, to have something to offer families with young children and be a town where children want to stay to raise their children.

Q6: How often would you use/visit these businesses/services?

Answers varied from daily for the grocery store to quarterly for the Town Clerk's office. One community member stated they would move thier business from its currently location to the Forrest Farm, but another was not wiling to change doctor's just for the convenience. Older participants felt that the senior housing would be something they would consider as a great alternative for them when their house maintenance became too much.

Survey Card Summary

Question 1: What is the village of Pittsford missing? What specific services, businesses, or other uses at the Forrest Farm would have the biggest impact on village life?

The most common answer was a community center with both indoor and outdoor space, especially with activities for the youth of the town. Many people also mentioned professional space and moving the Post Office and Town Clerk to the property because it would be safer and/or more convenient than their current location. Housing was also at the top of the list and a few people did mention that it was nice as a community farm. There were also a group of people that think it should be left as is.

Question 2: How will the services, businesses, and other uses you've suggested for the Forrest Farm benefit the community?

The community of Pittsford would like to keep its members and its money in the town and not have to travel to Brandon or Rutland for daily needs. Giving the town a Town Center, an identifiable place to meet and gather, go for a walk or grab a bite, would unite the community and perhaps draw in others from neighboring communities.

Question 3: How often would you visit or shop at these services or businesses if they were located at the Forrest Farm?

Answer varies based on the development of the Farm but many respondents said "as much as possible."