

# Addison County COVID-19 Recovery Forum Notes

Compiled from breakout group discussions held with over 75 Addison County Residents and a Visiting Team of State leaders and resource providers, hosted by the Local Solutions and Community Action Team of the Governor's Task Force for Economic Recovery, held virtually on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

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## 1. Rethinking Employment & Supporting Business Recovery

**Visiting Team:** Jon Copans (Facilitator), Mike Winslow (Scribe), Stephanie Bonin, Fred Kenney, Chris Saunders

**View recording [here](#).**

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### What do we want for our community in this arena?

- Business owners will be engaged.
- We will take advantage of the skills and drive of people moving here due to Covid. Those coming in will bring families here too.
- CEO and CFO roundtables happen along with sector or issue related meetings.
- People come to visit and then stay, bringing their businesses and supporting local businesses.
- Customers will do for the businesses (i.e. buy their products and give them a chance) rather than asking what they need.
- Businesses will have strong succession plans.
- New businesses open and are accepted by the community.
- Existing physical spaces are utilized.
- This is a great time for downtown areas to take businesses back from what's been lost to on-line retailers.
- E-commerce by local businesses expands hours of operation.
- Resources are shared between businesses.

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### What is holding us back from achieving this?

- Lack of broadband
- Each Business has specific challenges (this was reiterated by many participants. Businesses are inundated with information and it became confusing. The challenge was trying to understand individual needs, discern trends, and find solutions.
- People are concerned about what happens when it gets cold? We have settled into new reality with lower foot traffic, fewer customers, but when the weather turns even that is likely to diminish.
- There are challenges in understanding available programs. Businesses aren't sure if they should take advantage of grants when they don't know how they're going to recover.
- There's a reluctance to invest capital in businesses. Lack of confidence in future outcomes and lingering uncertainty make business owners risk averse with regard to loans and investments.
- Being able to see pathways forward and possibilities is a challenge. What resources can be applied to future ideas?
- Some businesses lack the technology for a full transition to on-line interactions. An example was given with regard to music lessons, where they were unable to provide synchronous music playing.
- It has been difficult to bring multiple communities together to one shared space.
- The long construction project in Middlebury has compounded the difficulty of adapting.
- Until people feel comfortable coming back to group gatherings, we're only finding temporary solutions.
- The longer the event goes on the fewer business owners are engaged in discussions like this. How do we engage businesses rather than talking among ourselves?
- We're missing casual/serendipitous discussion where ideas are shared.
- The capacity of businesses to interact are constrained. It's important to identify what formats actually invite engagement.
- Communication is fragmented.
- We are all talking to the same people. There are so many outreach groups and the target audience can't deal with that many opportunities.
- What's the appropriate way to get the best value from local businesses without expecting them to do everything? Local retailers can do some things better than larger firms, but they can't do everything.

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### Are there promising practices, strategies, or programs emerging today in your town or region in this arena?

- A Middlebury College student did direct follow-ups with businesses one-to-one to assess needs and gather information.
- Individual stories are most compelling.
- We need good start up business classes.
- We need local delivery options for local products.
- An E-commerce website servicing restaurants, the farm community, and retail is being set up by Middlebury College students and professors. The program would allow quarantine students to still buy local products, but has potential beyond that. If successful, not every business would need to set up an Ecommerce web-site. Rather they can take advantage of the communal resource.
- The Farmer's Market has transitioned to a show up and pick-up model rather than customers shopping at the market.

- The partnership between Stone Mill and the Vermont Book Shop allowed pre-ordered book pick-ups at times when the retail space wasn't open.
- Synergy of "local" is a big opportunity, facilitated by interconnectedness in the community.
- Businesses transitioned to meeting new needs. Distillers shared their alcohol to make hand sanitizer. Sewers began making masks.
- Shared restaurant space for different meals, so a space that previously served maybe two meals per day would now serve three but with different businesses running the different meals. Farm stands shared retail space too
- Royal Oak Coffee surveyed customers leading to increased hours. They took advantage of social media.
- We need a company to deliver products that might be ordered from local businesses on-line. A service that would be generic across local businesses.
- Perhaps they could utilize spot drop-offs rather than home delivery.
- An app-based system like InstaCart Utilization could help meet the need, but there are not yet enough people willing to provide the service.
- Relationships with local businesses have blossomed. There's an openness to new ways of doing things and meeting needs.

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## What are your ideas for local or state action to address these challenges and/or to work towards more equitable recovery and renewal?

- Better connect student meals to local agricultural products.
- Include non-profits when looking at the business ecosystem.
- Short term Stimulus dollars don't make an important difference in the long term. Seemingly large amounts of money become very diluted when spread too thin.
- Bulk purchase of Personal Protective Equipment at the state level for provision to businesses, schools, child-care centers would likely reduce cost per unit.
- Buildings need to be retrofitted to address ventilation issues.
- Allocate funds for technology. Allow businesses to determine the best way to advance health and safety measures in their own individual spaces.

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## Recovery Team shares strategies and resources available to help communities in the region move forward.

### Stephanie Bonin

- If businesses need to be innovative and turn on a dime, so do all of us. Covid has made the future arrive faster. Where are our downtown communities headed? Stephanie has seen her role as an advocate for downtown community, her store serves as a hub, a meeting place, a connector.
- DBA began a 1:1 project in March - webinars weren't cutting it for getting information out to the community. They set a goal of saving 80% of downtown by intense 1:1 interactions and follow up. Contacts are recorded in a giant spreadsheet. They gave a real-time understanding of business needs. Two Projects developed:
  - 1) dining parklets - (an idea that would have never flown prior to covid. Questions about converting public parking to private businesses would have presented problems, yet 12 parklets of 2 parking spaces each were approved. Once the Governor allowed open dining, businesses were ready to take advantage. One business went from a 90% reduction in business to 45%.
  - 2) Everyone Eats - This program touches three sectors: feeding the community, saving restaurants, and protecting farmers. The program is giving out 850 meals/day five days/week. All meals need to have at least 10% locally sourced food. Brattleboro saw an 80% increase at 2 of 9 participating restaurants due to the program. This is not a one-time influx of money, but on-going.

### Fred Kenney

- We need new ways to connect with our businesses. We can't keep doing it the way we've been doing it. Look forward to what the issues are going to be in the next months. We will need to retrain the workforce to adapt to the new situations. Heating bills may be the next thing human service need we face. Broadband expansion is critical to all of this. Figure out how to take advantage of people moving here. Get them involved in the community and help transition businesses to new ownership.  
Chris Saunders
- Take advantage of Addison County's passion for buying local. Communicate about meeting basic needs including heating, food and housing. Make sure there are resources there to keep the lights on until things are in a better place. Provide specialized help for business infrastructure (especially broadband).
- Challenge and priority to get another COVID relief bill passed. (Senator Leahy is trying)
- Need to focus on going forward – to workforces which are diverse, flexible and supportive of employees. We cannot go back (COVID, Climate and social justice), such as on-job training (vs needing a degree or certificate), how do we seize this transformational moment.
- Broadband is a critical backbone
- Need to re think the new reality of office space. How will downtown adapt to the lack of employees because of the lack of the
- Old strategies will not work.

- Encourage people back into downtown office space otherwise it will be a demise to downtown.
- Office space should be converted to much needed housing. And this would bring more people into towns.

## 2. Building Community Unity

**Visiting Team:** Paul Costello (Facilitator), Richard Amore (Scribe), Kevin Wiburg

View recording [here](#).

### What do we want for our community in this arena?

- How do we build unity, support the marginalized communities, and build community for folks stigmatized and marginalized?
- The role K-12 education and schools play in community unity – with the challenges of school consolidations, school closures, and union discussion.
- How much the town and college have leaned on each other for support, information sharing, and been a wonderful thing that has come out of COVID. COVID has strengthen the relationship with the town, community, and college.
- Town is participating in weekly meetings with key leaders, colleges, hospital, state health department, and distribute an e-newsletter to residents and neighboring towns.
- Closer town and gown relations are developing and building off COVID partnership.
- Can we do more unifying events between college and town or neighboring towns. Events can connect folks and build community unity.
- Transportation project in downtown Middlebury has disrupted the community and unity, but clever responses, with Neighbors Together forming, to help support the downtown and local businesses. Neighbors Together is raising funds, promoting shop local, to support downtown businesses during transportation project and in COVID times
- Middlebury has hosted a number of successful events, received a marketing grant from VTrans, to help promote downtown businesses, and circulate Middlebury Bucks, a local currency to keep dollars local.

### What is holding us back from achieving this?

- Anxieties, uncertainties, and worries make us more disconnected
- Lots of suffering, pain, and exhaustion in the community
- Transportation project in downtown Middlebury was a barrier, but local responses have helped
- Disbelief in “basic sets of facts”. It’s a challenge to community understanding and discussing personal values. Social media feeding this and dividing one another.
- How do we work as citizens together, what is the foundation of civil society, in such a divided national (and local) dialogue?
- Mental health impacts of COVID, social isolation, overdoses, traffic fatalities are higher, and higher levels of depression

### Are there promising practices, strategies, or programs emerging today in your town or region in this arena?

- Ideal Middlebury has approached the selectboard about advancing racial equity systemic racism discussions in Middlebury about municipal practices, policy, and a bigger community conversation
- Neighbors Together form in response to transportation project in downtown Middlebury, and promoted the downtown and local businesses, foster unity in a challenging time
- Addison County mutual aid was launched by a group of citizens to help local residents with food, meal delivery, and support the most vulnerable
- Backyard conversations initiated in the school district, to allow for a community conversation, hosted by parents, and provide an opportunity to discuss various issues and hear parents’ concerns and voices
- Impressed with the level of artist and musicians rallying to support community unity in Addison County with virtual offerings. Town Hall Theater has offered virtual performances, daily theaters, opera, and other creative offerings
- The zoom platform has given a way to advance discussion of racial equity and connect to a larger audience
- United Way launch Addison County responds to help support local residents during COVID

### What are your ideas for additional action still needed locally, regionally, or at the state level to address these challenges and/or to work toward equitable economic recovery and renewal?

- Universal broadband is needed to help support an equitable economic recovery
- Broadband is fundamental to equity – without you lack access, participation, and education, and workforce participation
- COVID has revealed the urgent need for universal broadband in response to equity and access
- There is a divide between the wealthy and lower-income, people of color, service workers, in response to COVID and its impact.
- Youth engagement is needed for civic participation and how can we cultivate new community leaders, and connect with folks not always represented

- Transportation challenges and lack of access to transportation
- The challenges of affordable housing in Middlebury and Addison County. The county and specifically Middlebury needs more affordable housing options
- Town of Middlebury works well with the Addison Community Trust rehabbing housing, receiving VCDP grants, even using Vermods in Waltham
- Need more worker housing and affordable housing in Middlebury
- The need for a living wage to help support housing affordability
- Increasingly concerned with local real estate market being hot and raising home prices in Middlebury and Addison County
- Survey conducted about empty storefronts in downtown – and one of the things that rose to the top was a bodega, local market, cultural center, or gathering space.
- When we say community – it means something different to different people.

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## Recovery Team Share Strategies and Resources Available to help communities and the region move forward.

### Paul Costello

- Vermonters are at a turning point, about who we are as Vermonters, and how we can be more inclusive, in the way we identify ourselves
- Typically, in public meetings – more affluent folks, older folks, more liberal folks attend – not inclusive nor representative of the entire community. Perhaps, the format are barriers for their participation and their views
- We are more culturally divided and don't connect as much with varying perspectives and views
- How do we educate a sense of civic responsibility and encourage civic participation and leadership?
- Freedom and Unity – could be two different things to different Vermonters. One for Freedom, and one for Unity.

### Kevin Wiburg

- Lots of challenges to unity in Vermont and elsewhere in the country. Privilege is a big challenge to unity – and folks are being left behind.
- One of challenges we face in Vermont, is that we need to lift the veil of Vermont exceptionalism. Vermonters need a definition of Vermonters that's inclusive, not how many generations back your family goes in Vermont.
- Vermont is fortunate to have direct access to state decision makers and leaders
- In Addison County and in Vergennes, issues of city leadership fracturing regarding unity and inclusiveness, racism, and policing.
- Systemic racism is present in Vermont, and it's a big challenge to community unity

- Local volunteerism is a key lever and is bringing together community unity
- Community engagement is key to unity and should include people of lived experience
- Grass-roots solutions to community issues is key to building community unity
- Some bright spots in response to COVID – Vermonters are growing foods for others, victory gardens installed, food giveaways with local produce and agriculture, the important role of libraries, and wi-fi hot spots, that state bring on Xusana Davis, and Director of Racial Equity within state government, the Everyone Eats program, and revitalization of general stores as community gathering spots.
- Work and engage with larger employers in the region, and look at innovative models, like first time home buyer stipends, matching down payments, and help lower the barrier to housing affordability

### Richard Amore

- Investments are needed in civic infrastructure in Addison County and Vermont – from investing in community gathering spaces like village greens and parks, town halls, community centers, senior centers, cultural centers, art venues, and local businesses to build community unity, social capital and weave back community life and civic participation
- Really bright spots in Addison County, from housing in Bristol and Vergennes, to planning efforts like the multitown bike/ped study, and Neighbors Together group in response to transportation project in Middlebury – lots of good work happening in the county – but much more work is needed to build community unity especially during these times.

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## 3. Telecommunications

**Visiting Team:** Nick Kramer (Facilitator), Eric Recchia (Scribe), Jeremy Hansen, Adam Lougee, Rob Fish, Erica Campbell

**View recording [here](#).**

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### What are the current conditions on the ground in this arena? What challenges does the county face?

- It's important for online students to access online learning, and students are struggling to access what they need.
- Addison County CUD started in July; so far, we have 12 members as part of the organizational team, and the Town of Cornwall just voted to join. The Town of Goshen also joined the Otter Creek CUD. 14 of the 21 towns in the Addison region are now part of a CUD. VCUDA has been very helpful with getting things together; we received a \$60,000 grant from the State to do a study and create a business plan. Once organized, we will have access to another \$100,000-plus from the Dept. of Public Service, using CARES Act funding, to help with planning. We also got another \$10,000 from the Vermont Community Foundation.

- Our town select board in Weybridge meets once a month and has been so far unresponsive on this issue.
- I see a connection between broadband access and addressing climate change, if people can work remotely instead of commuting to work.
- I see that there's a lack of broadband for many of the clients that we serve; students that are having trouble getting help with schoolwork and elders in our community that don't know what to do to get online. One end of the road I live on has broadband, while the other doesn't, and so I'm in one of those no service places.
- In our part of Weybridge, we're part of the legacy New England Telephone system, so we are stuck with DSL. Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom is a ¼ mile away, much of which has fiberoptic. Except what passes for urban centers in Vermont, the State is very thinly settled, and the distance between houses is a challenge. We're all in GMP territory, but different telephone companies operate in different regions.
- It doesn't make a real difference as to who owns the lines, as they are required to provide space, though some companies may respond faster than others.
- Washington Electric Co-op may build fiber for their own use and lease some to us, they can get lower rates on loans than we can hope for.
- The ideal connection speed for Consolidated Communications in our area of Addison County is 7 Mbps (down).
- There are different types of fiber just like there are different types of roads. The type of fiber that is going past your house is middle mile fiber that goes from big networking equipment to big networking equipment, then goes to smaller devices then to your cable box in your house. We're talking about building fiber-to-the-premise, so that we can pull an individual strand of fiber to your house, to give you gigabit internet speeds if you choose.
- I heard a rumor that Consolidated Communications limits how many people they serve. I feel like there's a drag on the internet from having too many users.
- 25/3 is a middle mark for internet speed, which means 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload, whereas 100 symmetrical, which means 100 Mbps upload and download, is what we are shooting for, and that's the fiber standard.
- If you access to cable TV, you have access to a 25/3 connection, at least that speed if not better. DSL should be at least 10 Mbps, while fiber is 100/100, and wireless connection speeds vary.
- I'm noticing living in New Haven that the other day our school and library were even having problems connecting. Which is why I'm on the phone not the internet for this call, as I knew better than sitting in the parking lot of the library. The library said don't even bother. Little towns are really where there's a problem, I know that we have Consolidated too, and maybe that's the problem, that there's already too many people on it.
- Does cable have an upper limit on service?
- It depends on how it was designed in the first place and how those that designed it determined what capacity was needed. DSL is individual bundles of copper wires, and there's a limit to how many wires you can have on a pole. One of the ways that Consolidated gets higher speeds is to run multiple wires, what they call tethered, to get up to 8 Mbps. If they give me two of the pairs, and then someone down the road needs it, there aren't enough wires to get to them since they've already given it to me. I know someone that had a tenant that couldn't get DSL service at all, even though the previous tenant had had it.
- Copper (DSL) gets you only so far, cable is better, fiber is the best. If you design it for gigabit speeds, you can give it to everybody. In the older systems, there's not always the room to add more capacity to the system.
- We recently discovered iPhone hotspots and we are on such a hotspot right now, but it doesn't always work. Does this depend on your cell phone reception, and what effect does this have on speed?
- There are two flavors of wireless, fixed wireless – around here we have Cloud Alliance and VTel – and then there's mobile wireless, like that provided by Verizon or Sprint. Wireless reliability can depend on topography, if there are leaves on the tree, line of sight, and, since airwaves are shared, how many people are on at the time. Our position as a CU District is that physical and mobile wireless are stopgaps on the way to getting real internet that doesn't slow down with how many people are using it. Even satellite internet would be really good only for the first 100 people in Vermont, but what happens when you add another 100?

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### **What is holding us back from achieving this?**

- Nobody left behind; that is my dream for internet connection in Addison county. We have an incredibly wealthy and privileged group of people here, and then many people that are living on the margins and are invisible.
- The people that need it but can't afford it, the people at the food shelf that can't pay for food today because their broadband or satellite or dish bill just came in. Affordability is important, I've seen some horrendous bills.
- We haven't talked much about cell phone coverage yet; there are parts of Weybridge that have no coverage so a telephone hotspot won't work for internet, and our coverage here isn't very strong, so unless we get fiber, which is the ideal scenario, we'll need better cell coverage as well.
- In the feasibility study that we are doing, we hired ValleyNet, which is the operating company of ECFiber, one of the oldest fiber companies in the state. They have a 100/100 model and fiber-to-the-home in most places, and the business plan helps us figure out how to do it affordably.
- Why are we doing this region by region? We are such a tiny state, why aren't we doing it as a state, did regions get tired of waiting?
- Can someone give an overview of some of the challenges we've faced in the last decade – the challenges with accessing federal money and federal programs, due to how they are setup?
- I think so many things are best organized at the grassroots level, but for something that's going to take hundreds of millions of dollars or more, a massive federal and state investment, then obviously a coordinated effort is needed. At the same time, the CUDs are playing an incredibly important role.
- A little history is helpful. For a good historical reference for the dream of building broadband to every house in the country, look at rural electrification. In 1996, the federal government

deregulated telecommunications, but the cable companies that are public or investor owned companies that need to make a large profit only built out to the densest areas. If you look at a federal map of broadband coverage, if one house in a census block has coverage, that block is prevented from accessing funds. There was a program to bring broadband to the whole state, but the definition was 768 Kbps at that point. A challenge with wireless is topography, we have mountains, and you need line of sight. We also have a lot of leaves on trees.

- ValleyNet, which is a nonprofit, doesn't have the requirement to please investors.
- The State is preempted by the federal government from regulating ISPs, and we have ones that overpromise and underdeliver. Because they weren't held to any standard for federal funds, they squeaked providing the minimum coverage and service that they could out of it.
- The competitive market cannot and will not serve rural Vermont without extensive federal or state subsidies of some sort.
- We are a municipal entity that had to spin this up because no one else would do it. There has been an unwillingness to do it. EC Fiber has shown that with seed money, the business model works. We can keep going under our own steam, like rural phone service providers, without excessive federal subsidies. The broadband connection at the federal level is 25/3, which is fine if you're streaming things on the internet, but if you're doing anything that requires you to be a constant content producer, you need to have that upload speed. Once you get a critical mass of customers the business model becomes sustainable.
- Our business model relies on us going to the least dense places first. If the take rate, the rate at which people subscribe, is

about 40%, which is what we expect, then we can make this work if we get at least 6 subscribers per mile. At that rate, we can get cash flow positive in 3 years, and then get municipal revenue bonds and pay our own way from there.

- How much does it cost for each homeowner? It depends on how many people sign up, the more people that take service the cheaper it is for everybody, as well as what subsidies we get. We've earmarked the lowest connection rate, similar to cable, at \$70/month. If we didn't have capital cost or loans, the cost could be really small. The capital cost is the challenge; it's between 20 and 30 thousand dollars per mile for fiber, and it takes a lot to get started in the first place.
- What happens eventually is that we'll go to places that are a bit denser, but as long as it averages out, we'll get about 6 subscribers per mile. There's a software program that looks at all the roads with DSL, and draws out the lines, and figures out what's the cheapest way that we can get everyone in that pilot area serviced. Eventually the Addison County CUD will also be doing that, that's part of the business plan that's in the pipeline right now.
- We do have a feasibility study going currently, it was funded by the Department of Public Service. We're looking at all of Addison County, and doing a lot of what we've been talking about, how can we make this work at a price people can afford, so that people will use it. Addison County is challenged in that we have the Route 7 corridor that's served pretty well with cable, but if you get to either side of the county service gets progressively worse, depending on the carrier, some are better than others. It's interesting to see how we get over that hump and connect both sides of the county, or not, and when it works to work with the legacy carriers.

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### **Are there promising practices, strategies, or programs emerging today in your town or region in this arena?**

- I would recommend starting with the most outlying areas. Served areas aren't places that we are going to get to anytime soon, we're looking at far out areas where there is the most demand. It doesn't have to be contiguous; you can always hop from one place to another using things like backhaul. VELCO has plenty of space on the fiber that goes to their substations and they are happy to rent you space to get you to the next fiber substation. A good place to look at on the maps is for the fiber stations and start there. Also, survey folks to see where there is the most demand.
- May be able to do a public-private partnership – you have Telcom and OTELCO that both have a little bit of fiber. It could be purely public, a provider, or a district that facilitates this.
- Various CUDs are meeting with the providers, the only CUD that is right now providing a lot of service is ECFiber. Others are close, but they are all still in the feasibility stage.
- There was a ready district that was trying to get a public-private partnership off the ground, but that didn't work out and now they are working with ECFiber.
- I believe that Isle La Motte and Alburgh are working with Matrix to try to do something similar.
- One of the biggest challenges right now is that you don't want to hurt your long-term business case to get people the level service of they want, but there's an immediate need with the pandemic. There's a program right now that would help fund the extension to get cable from down the street to your house, but once that's funded, you'll be stuck with cable for a long time instead of wireless. What CVFiber is looking at is using wireless for the interim instead.
- With CARES Act funding, we'll put up short-range wireless transmitters for people to use in their house, and once we get fiber to those areas, we would hopefully transfer them over to the faster connection. They wireless transmitters are fairly short range, until you get some of the higher-end dedicated spectrum that some of the big providers have.
- There's a company called RTO that's using blimps to provide wireless coverage over a wider area. It hasn't been done in Vermont before, there's a lot of NIMBYism, it could be explored as a public-private partnership.
- CCV is using the CARES Act to provide students money for a laptop or to pay for internet access. We can give them all the money they need but if there isn't good service there it doesn't matter.

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### **What are your ideas for additional action still needed locally, regionally, or at the state level to address these challenges and/or to work toward equitable economic recovery and renewal?**

- How important is educating the public about broadband to getting this done, to pull in the entire community and educate them about what choices exist?
- Digital literacy is key to this, as well as having allies. Libraries are key allies, as are schools, healthcare professionals, and hospitals. We need address how we can use and leverage fiber technology for economic development and public health, as demand is the key to building service.
- Because there is going to be a lot of construction of fiber networks in Vermont in the next several years, as well as a need for people that are trained to manage and maintain the networks, if CCV could put together a training certificate to help folks learn to install and repair fiber, there's going to be an imminent demand in the next 6-18 months. The Vermont Dept. of Labor is interested in this kind of workforce development, and there's also an outstanding letter to the Northern Border Regional Commission for funding.
- Are there ongoing things community members can do to help propel the effort forward, after a municipality has joined a district?
- It's going to take time to get paid staffers. The way the statute is written, is that CUDs can build infrastructure into neighboring towns, and you can join the CUD by petition as well. There can also be folks in the community raising funds, as the money required when you go to VEDA (the Vermont Economic Development Authority) or a bank, they require a match. If folks want to invest, CUDs will offer favorable interest rates. Donations are tax deductible.
- If you have expertise in a particular area, you can volunteer that as well. CVFiber also has the benefit of having the Vermont GIS guy on our Board, David Healy. Any sort of skill that people can bring into the CUD is going to be used and valuable.
- CARES Act funding has to be used by the end of the year, which is a big limitation, so we are not able to use it for the most impactful projects. We're investing in an idea that came out of Middlebury, which is Community Development Block Grants. CUDs are prohibited from using tax derived revenue, a town can't pass a bond and use it to fund a CUD.
- Does each town have to have its own board, or is the board for all the towns that have joined together? All the towns join together, like a regional planning commission that has delegates from each town. A CUD is its own municipal entity. We've partnered with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC). Your town sends a delegate and an alternate, and it's run like a select board, all of the meetings are run the same, with Robert's Rules and open meeting rules.
- There are always committees or other work that needs to be done, community outreach, writing copy for press releases, managing consultants, etc. We're looking to create a program to get people up to speed.
- How do we find out if our town is in? Do we call a town clerk? If you go to the Dept. of Public Service website, it shows all of the towns that are in a CUD, and what their contact info is.
- I live less than 1-mile away from the Shoreham village, which has high-speed internet. I live on a road that has over 20 houses per mile, and there's no expectation that we'll have high-speed internet anytime soon. How much of an initial investment is needed to get started? If I had enough money to give, say to TelCo, would it be possible?
- It depends on what the feasibility study and business plan say. For us, our pilot project envisions 150 miles of fiber for a total cost of \$4.5 million, for the first 3 years – we're looking at \$4 million in loans and 4 or 5 hundred thousand dollars in matching funds from the legislature. Once the CUD starts building and you have revenue from subscribers, then you can plow that back into building more fiber. Even if they decide you're first, it's a year or two out.

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### **Recovery Team shares resources and strategies available to help communities and the region move forward**

- CVFiber is a Communications Union District (CUD) made up of 20 towns in Washington, Orange, and Lamoille counties, started in 2018 on Town Meeting day. We are on the cusp of building fiber-to-the-premises infrastructure here in Vermont. We've gotten lots of great feedback and support from our communities.
- Before we had the pandemic, it was a teacher that motivated me, as a Berlin Select Board member, to pursue this effort, inspired by our neighbors to the south, ECFiber. We have a big board, and a lot of different interests and skills on the board. Our mission statement is to serve 100% of our town with fiber, nobody left behind.
- With funding from USDA Rural Development, CARES act money, and additional funds from the state, we have completed a business plan, and we are now at the starting gate and ready to go, pending some capital money for construction.
- We recently hired a project manager to do the day-to-day work that was previously done by volunteers. Putting in 20 hours a week as a volunteer to start an ISP (Internet Service Provider) is challenging, and once you get off the ground, you really need someone to own it as a 40-hour a week job.
- We are partnering actively with Washington Electric Co-op because they own poles and are also a nonprofit. We recently formed VCUDA, Vermont Communications Union District Association. Use it to compare notes and share resources, make sure that everyone is on the same page.
- Statewide, we have gone from having only 2 CUDs to 9 CUDs in the last year or so.
- If the federal government wakes up and decides broadband internet is an essential service, and they provide block grants to towns, that would change the time frame. Even extending the CARES Act, it would provide more flexibility for providers.
- Senator Sanders is hugely supportive of broadband and wants to work it into the Green New Deal.
- There is not a lot of movement right now on a relief bill, negotiations aren't going well. There wasn't money for broadband in the GOP's "skinny" bill, but there was money for broadband in the HEROES Act. We also have to pass a budget, which is a priority, and then there's an election. I don't think many people know what's going on with an infrastructure bill. The Highway bill is up at the end of the year, which is a possibility, but given the political climate, in the House there was \$183 million allocated for broadband in the bill. We'd love



to see CUDs get this money and would also love to see block grants.

- There's this convergence of a sense of urgency and people really stepping up to the plate.

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## 4. Family & Individual Needs (Food, Housing, Heat, Healthcare, Child Care)

**Visiting Team:** Jenna Koloski (Facilitator), Jacob Hemmerick (Scribe), Paul Dragon, Helena Van Voorst

View recording [here](#).

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### What do we want for our community in this arena?

- At the very beginning no one had information about what was going on. I worked to provide information to my constituents and be a legislator. It felt more like being a social work than being a legislator. I was on the phone all the time, and it made me appreciate the amazing work front-line service providers offer. Things have changed quite a bit. Information is much, much more available. People are getting better at communicating.
- We have some of the most well-coordinated care services working as a team in the county.
- I have seen incredible resilience among people. People are really working together to combat this in ways few other

states have been able to do. Gratitude to those who are on the front line.

- Fabulous communication and coordination in Addison County. The challenge was that everything kept changing. This new program. That new program? Who runs it? What are the guidelines? People meeting on a weekly basis helped people work through things.
- We got all this CARES money pouring into Vermont through December, but are we investing for the long term, so we don't snap back to the prior horrible situations. Is there a way to make something good with the federal money coming in.

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### What is holding us back from achieving this?

- Lots of people are isolated.
- It's a traumatizing time for children.
- People in need don't know where to look, how to ask, or ways to connect to sources that can help them.
- Childcare system and school system do a great job pushing information out, but it was a struggle when things were close. People in need don't know where to look, how to ask, or ways to connect to sources that can help them.
- When childcare was completely closed from the middle of March to June, we checked on families a lot to see that they had what they needed. For some, they would have struggled to connect to those resources.
- We heard from some folks that could not reach out for help when their partner was around all the time. It was a challenge to find new ways to communicate with the people.
- Challenges of people losing their job has meant that people have not been able to get into providers of mental health. Finding people who can take in patients has been a challenge.
- One thing that seems to cut across about everyone is the lack of predictability and the ways things have changed from day to day.
- This is especially true for people depending on childcare or the most vulnerable.

- Just operating and feeling like you are doing the best you can for the kids and families you are serving when things are changing is a challenge.
- Our organization's COVID health guidance is now in its fourth iteration; changing the way we work comes at a cost, such as buying more supplies.
- It has put a lot of stress on families. Now if you have a runny nose, you must stay home and call the doctor. If you don't have health insurance, that's more stress.
- The network of providers was understaffed and overworked before the crisis; the crisis has really pushed it to the breaking point.
- Not only did service providers have to meet organizational needs, but you also had to meet your personal needs as a human being running a program.
- Challenge in my congregation was isolation, especially people who live alone like single mom's. I encouraged my congregants to check up on neighbors and make phone calls.
- Migrants are here, but they're not here. We were able to fundraise and help a lot of people, but things keep happening that underscore just how much they're here but they're not here. For them, the isolation has become even more, particularly because they don't access to open door clinics and rides. Where do they fit in to the Addison County community?

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### Are the promising practices, strategies, or programs emerging today in your town or region in this arena?

- Collaboration seems to be an element that is working.
- When VCRD needed to bring together a committee to organize a community visit in Addison County that coordinating infrastructure was already in place.

- One practice that worked was the immediate emergence of mutual aid groups. March 13th things shut down and the next day people are on Front Porch Forum helping. Then the schools covered meals for students.



- Childcare providers began meeting once a week, which became a peer support group.
- We've had a huge mask-making effort and United Way has been a player in that. It has been amazing to "We need a masks for 30 teachers," and have them delivered.
- The Makery at Hannaford is making close to 2,000 masks for pre-schoolers and toddlers in childcare settings. The Vermont Teddy Bear Co. has donated a lot of materials, and many people have been donating materials.
- The housing providers in Addison County are especially amazing and dedicated folks. Whether emergency housing, long-term housing, or affordable housing, the housing folks just really stepped up in unique ways, like going to hotels to de-escalate situations among housing insecure. This was especially awesome since we are in a county that has underfunded affordable housing.
- Because many of our migrant worker volunteers are senior citizens who provide rides, they are afraid to get in cars with other people; we've been able to get farmworker ride sharing program so people can get to medical appointments. We now know that we can tap into the farmworkers, too, to connect to their community.
- People always answer the ads I put on Front Porch Forum looking for stuff.
- One thing I really appreciate from non-profit partners is that when this pot of funds became available, there was so much creative thinking. They intuitively knew which organizations would have needs at different times throughout the pandemic.
- Creativity and collaboration among people without enough time or money cannot be overcelebrated.
- Businesses really worked to keep people employed, re-engaging employees to meet this need. Recognition that we are all in this together.
- Meals on the bus is another great example of people who weren't required to have to think outside the box, but did so to keep drivers employed, and food service going, etc.
- Library is now doing curb-side delivery of books and borrowing out laptops.
- We got so many people doing small jobs for everyone's neighbors, including hiring farmworkers to keep them employed until they got another job.
- Another thing that was really important is the undercurrent of malaise in the world, but in the County, you felt like you could get reliable updates from trustworthy people. Helps eliminate the hyper anxiety you can feel when you watch the news or hear about things happening elsewhere in the country.

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### **What are your ideas for additional action still needed local, regionally, or at the state level to address these challenges and/or to work toward equitable economic recovery and renewal?**

- A lot more housing.
- We have got to use this crisis to make childcare, universal and accessible.
- Everyone deserves a home.
- Food security, especially for summer meals, we need to find ways to keep that going under the normal rules.
- I want to echo childcare and note that many of us providers don't have health insurance. We are putting ourselves at high risk without access to affordable healthcare.
- The more we have safe and stable housing for individuals, the more we can start to see a healthier community.
- We need universal childcare! Yes!
- We should find a way to keep some of the wonderful innovations that have emerged as we work to get back to normal.
- "Get back to better!" not "Get back to normal."
- As we look to emerge in 2021, what do we envision it to look like? What is the new normal thinking to get back to better as we weather this storm?
- We also tried to have these conversations at the legislative level to invest in meeting short-term needs in ways that have long-term term benefits. Time will tell about the long-term.
- If you're in service fields there is still funding that needs to be spent before December.
- In the area of housing, we are trying to invest for the long-term.
- Broadband hasn't been mentioned yet: an entire neighborhood banded together to get a corona-virus relief fund to bring internet access to the neighborhood.
- Technology and internet are the new "last miles".
- Universal meals needs to continue, even though next year's budget will be incredibly tough.
- Opioid crisis: deaths have spiked in 2020 after things being down last two years. Isolation has been a factor in that. Continue to double-down to get to where we need to be.
- More people have died from opioid overdoses during the pandemic than COVID.

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### **Recovery Team shares strategies and resources available to help communities in the region move forward.**

#### **Paul Dragon**

- It's important to bring in racial equity voice, too. CVEOE is happy to come down to support racial equity voice.
- No one mentioned 211. If that's not working to the extent it should, we need to update that.
- I encourage you to take advantage of housing funds as much as you can.
- Universal childcare has really emerged as being vitally important.
- AC is so well organized.

- VDH has been strong in Addison.

- We have to normalize the food delivery system and experience so it's less stigmatizing: not long lines of cars.

#### **Helena Van Voorst**

- United Way invests in local non-profits that have great outcomes for people in Addison County. We do that by mobilizing the generosity of people in the county.

- UW doesn't just pass along money, we walk together with grantees to ensure success. When non-profits are successful and happy, so are the people they serve.
- The pandemic's reality really set in, in March 16th, and UW began to listen to partners. At that point, it felt like things were changing by the hour as people figured out how to pivot and meet people's needs remotely.
- UW began the COVID Emergency Relief Fund: in just 105 days, we raised \$220,000 that UW was able to push out as emergency grants to the non-profits present this evening and to help people they can serve.
- UW also made some of the first donations directly to individuals with United at Work: for job loss, car repairs, etc. Transportation needs have stood out as something that snowballs to affect employment and other needs.
- UW has since moved those funds to the housing solutions group to supplement other state and federal funding.
- If someone does not meet a specific criterion under the standing programs, this has helped fill the gap.
- Needs have changed throughout the past five months.
- Early on we were seeing home healthcare PPE needs.
- Then, we began to see more housing insecure people in the county. John Graham and Charter House were seeing many

more people than typical, so UW made an investment in the shelters.

- Money was directed to food needs for seniors.
- Some beautiful systems have been built and ways of working that are smart. Our funds have continued to be pushed out but in different areas.
- When schools began to re-open and they needed PPE, we moved funds there.
- We have also seen a lot of needs in technology for treatment and recovery, senior services.
- Food continues to be very important.
- There was a time when we weren't even sure if we could have food shelves open, and we've navigated that and continue to see requests come up.
- "Stuff the bus" has been a recent initiative to support kids that need school supplies: 550 packs this year. Soon, we anticipate the need for winter clothing and equipment will come.
- Needs are really broad, and complex, but no surprise that its food, shelter and transportation, and utilities.
- Bang and clang parades lifted community spirit, so much that a boy drew one when asked what the pandemic meant to him.

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## Additional Input from Online Survey

### What are the challenges are you seeing in your community related to the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Isolation, how to provide needed services to migrant farm workers at this time.
- Balancing the needs of staff and the needs of clients. Before COVID the scale tips more in favor of the clients. Since COVID it has tipped a bit more in favor of staff. So how do we continue to support staff without taking away from client services
- Childcare and back to school schedules
- Issues around children being unable to return full-time to school, childcare challenges, and parents being able to return to work full-time, cracks in the healthcare system.

The school Pods potentially taking childcare providers into the Pod system, leaving the childcare providers short staffed. The school system is able to offer better levels of pay, potentially impacting the retention of ECE staff.

- Major business in town threatened by sudden drop in demand. People isolated so they can't communicate as freely as before. Selectboard paralyzed because they can't meet in person. General loosening of community ties.
- Stress of uncertainty, and loneliness compounding other behavioral health conditions
- Hybrid schooling

### Are there promising practices, strategies, or programs emerging today in your towns or region to support community and economic recovery?

- Many people seem willing to pitch in. People are supportive of local restaurants, etc.
- Outdoor classrooms and inventive thinking and commitment abound. Staffing and financial supports are in short supply
- Early childcare educators and providers worked through very difficult and challenging circumstances despite being vulnerable to the uncertainties of Covid 19-these selfless professionals often work without healthcare or benefits, and work for less than the minimum wage. This under-valued workforce has done a sterling effort under very difficult

circumstances, and deserve recognition as the professionals they are. Working towards more public/private partnerships between businesses and public funding would be a very valuable start to successful recovery.

- Neighborhood groups springing up, good use of video conferencing, mutual aid organization.
- "5 Town Partnership in Bristol and surrounding towns
- multiple organizations sharing resources with community. Includes learning space, emotional/spiritual care, youth substance abuse prevention"

### What are your ideas for local or state action to address these challenges and/or to work towards equitable economic recovery and renewal?

- I was fortunate to attend the forum last night. Very well done! I had the opportunity to share my thoughts, but one that didn't quite make it out relates to capacity building. There are businesses, nonprofits, and organizations in our area that are providing direct support to individuals, families, and even other businesses/organizations in light of the pandemic, but are not receiving additional funding to make this happen. A couple of examples come to mind. The Counseling Service of Addison County, for one, recently received flat funding from the state. This is deeply troubling because mental health issues are skyrocketing during this time; CSAC is being asked to do more, but the funding is not there to support this important work. Chambers, Downtown Partnership, and Economic Development Corporations also come to mind. They are providing additional support to area businesses to help them navigate state programs, for example, but are not financial support. Similarly, the state has been asking these organizations to implement new programs to support businesses, but has been unwilling to provide capacity building funding.
- Tax the rich, feed the poor. (and, leave the middle alone) Find a way to bypass federal law that oppresses migrant farm workers.
- Business/employer investment and collaboration w childcare efforts. We have high quality programs in our county that are perennially on a financial cliff and teachers and providers bear the brunt of this through low wage no benefit employment. The pandemic has further exacerbated the issue. Our commitment to elevating this essential profession to one that is respected and worthy of our commitment is so important.
- Shorter working week/more ongoing flexibility for parents, more family leave, more public/private/state support with childcare, free health care for all, a livable wage for all, and benefits for all
- Make sure economic response makes allowances for those most affected, most vulnerable, and especially for those not covered by federal programs.
- realize there is no way to fund all the losses people have experienced. There is a cost to living beyond our means. Disasters happen, crisis emerge, however people cannot expect to have every loss recovered. In fact, there are opportunities for healthier living emerging including with finances.
- Mandated in-person schooling

## Addison County Recovery Visit – Visiting Team Members

**Richard Amore**, VT Department of Housing & Community Development, [richard.amore@vermont.gov](mailto:richard.amore@vermont.gov), 585-0061

**Stephanie Bonin**, Brattleboro Downtown Alliance, [stephanie@brattleboro.com](mailto:stephanie@brattleboro.com), 802-257-4886

**Erica Campbell**, Office of Senator Bernie Sanders, [Erica\\_Campbell@Sanders.Senate.Gov](mailto:Erica_Campbell@Sanders.Senate.Gov), 802-862-0697

**Paul Dragon**, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, [pdragon@cvoeo.org](mailto:pdragon@cvoeo.org), 802-862-2771 x740

**Rob Fish**, VT Department of Public Service, [robert.fish@vermont.gov](mailto:robert.fish@vermont.gov), 802-522-2617

**Jeremy Hansen**, Central Vermont Fiber, [central.vermont.internet@gmail.com](mailto:central.vermont.internet@gmail.com), 802-279-6054

**Jacob Hemmerick**, VT Department of Housing & Community Development, [jacob.hemmerick@vermont.gov](mailto:jacob.hemmerick@vermont.gov), 828-5249

**Fred Kenney**, Addison County Economic Development Corp, [fkenny@addisoncountyedc.org](mailto:fkenny@addisoncountyedc.org), 802-388-7953

**Adam Lougee**, Addison County Regional Planning Commission, [alougee@acrpc.org](mailto:alougee@acrpc.org), 802-388-3141

**Chris Saunders**, Office of Senator Patrick Leahy, [Chris\\_Saunders@leahy.senate.gov](mailto:Chris_Saunders@leahy.senate.gov), 802-229-0569

**Helena Van Voorst**, United Way of Addison County, [helena@unitedwayaddisoncounty.org](mailto:helena@unitedwayaddisoncounty.org)

**Kevin Wiberg**, Vermont Community Foundation, [kwiberg@vermontcf.org](mailto:kwiberg@vermontcf.org), 802-388-3355 x284

**Mike Winslow**, Addison County Regional Planning Commission, [mwinslow@acrpc.org](mailto:mwinslow@acrpc.org), 802-388-3141

### Vermont Council on Rural Development Staff:

**Jon Copans**, *Model Communities Program Director*, [jon@vtrural.org](mailto:jon@vtrural.org), 225-6393

**Paul Costello**, *Executive Director*, [pcostello@vtrural.org](mailto:pcostello@vtrural.org), 223-5763

**Jenna Koloski**, *Community and Policy Manager*, [jenna@vtrural.org](mailto:jenna@vtrural.org), 225-6091

**Nick Kramer**, *Community and Policy Associate*, [nick@vtrural.org](mailto:nick@vtrural.org), 225-6091

**Margaret McCoy**, *Operations and Communications*, [margaret@vtrural.org](mailto:margaret@vtrural.org), 223-6091

### Video Recordings (Courtesy of MCTV) of all sessions available online at:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLW4RhWtYfset8gmo7RDiFnh-wPpVwv3Gu>