



BENNINGTON, VT

Where Vermont Begins

1:15	Arrive at State Welcome Center - Bennington	2:10	Introduction
1:35	Driving tour to Bennington Fire House (Welcome by Joe Krawczyk, Select Board Chair)	2:25	Panel 1: Bennington Economic Development Partners
1:55	Arrive at Fire House	2:40	Panel 2: Workforce and Education
2:05	Begin Committee Meeting (Welcome by Stuart Hurd, Town Manager)	2:55	Panel 3: Recruitment and Retention
		3:10	Panel 4: Transportation
		3:20	Wrap-up
		3:30	Driving tour of Northside Dr. (Presented by Dan Monks, Assistant Town Manager)

VT Commerce and Transportation House Committee Visit
January 28, 2014

Introduction

Bennington is on the move! With the adoptions of the Bennington Economic Strategic Plan and a number of other initiatives, the past year has proven to be very fruitful for Bennington and is seen as a pivotal point in the direction of the community. Differentiating itself from other communities, Bennington has been able to bridge the gap between a number of different stakeholders and has advanced in its collaborative effort to be a regional economic development center.

Our hope is that today you will, **1) gain a clear understanding of Bennington's unique regional development efforts and assets, and 2) consider ways that you may assist us with a handful of critical projects that will propel economic development in the region.**

Community Assets

The following items have been identified as unique characteristics for Bennington, and signify areas where we can compete the most effectively:

- Proximity to large population centers and transportation hubs (i.e. Albany, NY; NYC, NY;; Boston, MA; Malta, NY) equaling 1.5 million people
- Strong partnerships and frequent collaboration between economic development leaders and organizations
- Eligible for New Market Tax Credits
- Advanced telecommunication options
- Pre-permitted land (shovel-ready)
- Access to rail
- Access to abundant natural resources (i.e. timber, water, land)
- Post secondary education cluster (i.e. Community College of VT, Bennington College, Southern Vermont College, Vermont Technical College, New England Baptist College)
- Advanced Manufacturing Sector (i.e. Carbon Composites, Information Technology, Innovative and applied sciences)
- National Signature Events (i.e. Bennington Car Show and Southern Vermont Garlic and Herb Festival)
- Designated Downtown and National Main Street Accreditation
- Regional hub of Southwestern Vermont
- Regional medical center

6 Reasons for Bennington

1. Proximity to major markets including Albany, NY, New York, NY, Boston, MA and Keene, NH.
2. Local incentives, which include municipal tax stabilization, Foreign Trade Zone and low interest loan programs
3. Workforce development which capitalizes on 5 colleges, a career development center, and a high school that is focused on the practical application of skills learned, Bennington has identified workforce development as one of its top priorities.
4. Shovel ready sites are available and include land in the Morse Industrial Park, the Maneely Industrial Park, space in three significant shopping centers, and our historic downtown. The majority of these sites are shovel ready if not ready for immediate occupancy and a number are pre-permitted for easy construction.
5. Lifestyle and recreation in Bennington begin with the community recreation center, bike trails and significant byways program, that highlight historic sites across the region. Bennington is also the home of the Bennington Battle Monument, commemorating a pivotal battle in the revolutionary war, and is located in the Green Mountain National Forest which encompasses more than 400,000 acres.
6. Arts and Entertainment has a place in Bennington's Designated Downtown and includes the Bennington Museum, the Bennington Center for the Arts, the Vermont Arts Exchange and Oldcastle Theatre Company. Bennington is home to a number of local artist galleries and the Bennington Arts Guild.

Community Challenges

The following items have been identified as unique challenges for Bennington, and signify areas that may hinder forward movement:

- Complex School System Governance Structure with seven school boards
- External perception of the local school system regarding quality of education
- Local Demographics (i.e. aging population, stagnant incomes, low education attainment, low-income families, high teen pregnancy rate, significant drug use and elevated poverty rate)
- High rental population
- Limited access to specialized medical services
- Limited access to advanced transportation and shipping options
- Quality and availability of housing for professionals (rent or own)
- Limited retail, restaurant and entertainment options
- Lack of significant population density needed for development
- Vacant properties
- Lack of available employment opportunities for lateral or vertical professional movement
- Limited interest by investors and developers

Emerging Opportunities

The following items have been identified as areas where Bennington could grow given the appropriate resources and attention:

- Comprehensive and impactful marketing of community assets and attributes
- Growth of business sector that provides ancillary support to our primary manufacturers
- Attraction of entrepreneurs and small businesses, with Bennington being seen as an 'entrepreneur friendly community'
- Capitalizing on the secondary education opportunities in the community
- Widespread commitment by the community to think innovatively about economic development
- Potential for an arts district in the downtown based on the significant number of art-based organizations
- Availability and accessibility of Foreign Trade Zone
- Accessibility of state airport facility

Bennington Economic Development Partners

Presented by: Michael Harrington and John Shannahan

Recent Successes:

- Reduction of silos among economic professionals to improve information sharing and planning
- Continuous involvement by more than 20 participants representing over 23 organizations, including a member of the State Senate and House
- Economic strategic plan that is reviewed and updated monthly

Current Challenges:

- Competing at a regional and national level for business recruitment (ie. marketing, advertising, incentives)
- Accurately understanding the workforce demographic
- Key recruitment strategies and identification of target markets

Needed Support: Available resources for time-sensitive projects. Improving the agility and flexibility of the state and individual townships. This includes resources for small business development, infrastructure upgrades, educational funding support and other key economic drivers.

Workforce and Education

Presented by: Jeannie Jenkins, Peter Odierna, Donna Leap and Wendy Morse

Recent Successes

- Collaboration among key partners from K-12, college, local employer and economic development communities to identify and develop comprehensive solutions to workforce needs.
- Development of an education and career exploration continuum K through Adult that builds on existing infrastructure and programming.
- Refocusing of the Jobs versus Education narrative to a more relevant Careers and Education discussion in the Bennington community.

Current Challenges and Opportunities

- Develop strategic collaborations with Windham and Rutland counties to identify employer needs and to strengthen workforce opportunities.
- Develop Bennington County's education and career exploration continuum as a laboratory for experimentation and analysis of the effectiveness of programs in increasing workforce readiness and availability.
- Identification of career pathways that would enhance capabilities of key employers in Bennington County including Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Early Education.

Needed Support

- Opportunities to access statewide economic development expertise and to compete for funding to develop rigorous protocols for workforce initiatives.

Recruitment and Retention

Presented by: Michael Keane, Michael Harrington and Dan Monks

Recent Successes:

- Good understanding of issues facing our employers, such as skills/talents of workforce, availability of suitable housing aligned with workers' compensation, ratio of contract-temp vs permanent employment, attracting/retaining young talent

Current Challenges:

- Identifying industries likely to grow exponentially ten years from now
- Determining which of those industries we will target and what are the companies/"skunk works" among them that we'd like to focus on
- Building a pipeline of prospective companies and businesses
- Providing accurate, up to date info on employment opportunities for "trailing spouses" of potential employees

Needed Support:

- Funding for the research and marketing outreach Bennington should be making to businesses
- Understanding what industries /firms contact the state of Vermont so that we can eventually also follow up and showcase the Bennington region

Transportation

Presented by: Jim Sullivan, Mark Anders and Dan Monks

Recent Successes:

- Region awarded six state Bicycle/Pedestrian grants
- Local bike path project has made significant progress through volunteered resources
- Kocher Drive/US 7 Scoping report for bike/ped improvements nearly complete. Good opportunity for state/town/regional coordination.
- Major Walmart development plan also includes roadway improvements (i.e. roundabout at intersection)

Current Challenges:

- 7A/67A corridor in Bennington – highest traffic volume roadway in the county requires significant upgrades to address traffic congestion, safety, and pedestrian needs.
- Improvements to north-south traffic flow through the center of Bennington.
- Lack of good access to major regional transportation hubs (including rail service).

Needed Support:

- Funding for improvements leading to implementation of planned improvements along the 7A/67A corridor.
- Acquisition of land for improvement to 7A/67A intersection.
- Direct transit connection to Rensselaer rail station.
- A vision for a 21st century transportation system for the state by more targeted funding and support for projects that address specific problems, and improving the problem of long project completion time for small, federally funded projects

How You Can Assist

The following items have been identified by the Bennington Economic Development Partners (BEDP) as those areas where the legislature can provide the most support.

- Develop a **state-wide business recruitment** system that allows community to compete on location when a business is considering Vermont.
- Develop a state-wide business **recruitment communication plan** that not only informs the RDCs about business development opportunities, but includes the municipalities and other economic development partners.
- With VT Training Funds in mind, developing a **workforce training** program that assists with funding for training outfits so that training can be provided to those who are not currently employed or that encourage the training outfits to provide training to all businesses and individuals (i.e. public seminars and classes or periodic company-wide trainings).
- Reform the funding process for enhancement projects by **reducing the amount of bureaucracy associated with project implementation**. Most projects take a minimum of four years to implement due to heavy oversight and procedural expectations.
- Investment in **infrastructure projects** (i.e. roadways, water and wastewater), and including telecommunications (i.e. fiber cluster).
- Increase focus on **workforce development** both with the employer and individual employees.
- Finally, your willingness to **continue the conversation** between your committee and the Town of Bennington.

Thinking Big!

... If Money Was No Object

1. Redevelop Northside Dr. and turn ownership over to the Town.
2. Purchase all vacant commercial properties in town and develop turn key locations ready for sale.
3. Develop a tax-free zone for tech start-ups
4. Implement a regional advertising initiative, promoting the assets of Bennington
5. Develop a natural gas system to lower energy costs
6. Refocus resources to promote the National Forest and Long Trail and establish it as a National Park, positioning Bennington as the gateway community to the park. Much like Bar Harbor, ME is to Acadia

Contact Sheet

Stuart Hurd, Town Manager, Town of Bennington

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Michael Harrington, Economic and Community Development Director, Town of Bennington

Jim Sullivan, Director, Bennington County Regional Commission (RPC)

Bill Colvin, Community Development Coordinator, Bennington County Regional Commission (RPC)

Mark Anders, Transportation Coordinator, Bennington County Regional Commission

Peter Odierna, Director, Bennington County Industrial Corporation (RDC)

John Shannahan, Director, Better Bennington Corporation (downtown organization)

Joann Erenhouse, Director, Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce

Wendy Morse, District Supervisor, Department of Labor

Chris Herriman, Economic Development Specialist, US Small Business Administration

Catherine McClure, Superintendent of Schools, Southwestern Vermont Supervisory Union

Jim Trimarchi, Director of Planning, Southwest Vermont Health Care / Southwest Vermont Medical Center

Michael Keane, Chair, Recruitment and Retention Committee (BEDP)

Jeannie Jenkins, Chair, Workforce and Education Committee (BEDP)

Brenda Jones, Chair, Housing Committee (BEDP)

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Notes