

Town of Hardwick
Community Development Plan

Long-Term Community Development Needs:

In October of 1991 the Town of Hardwick received a project development grant from the Department of Housing & Community Affairs to evaluate a range of opportunities and means to address several important community development needs in the Town. The grant application, prepared by the Chairman of the Planning Commission and the President of the Hardwick Area Chamber of Commerce following many meetings of community residents in 1990 and 1991, identified underemployment and inadequate incomes for Hardwick residents as the single, most important need that should be met. At that time, the Town identified a range of activities to be undertaken that have the long-term potential to raise incomes in Hardwick and alleviate economic distress.

The objectives to be met resulting from these activities can be summarized as:

1) The development of a local strategy to utilize the existing Hardwick Industrial Park land and buildings to create additional, well paying employment.

2) To make infrastructure improvements to adequately address community and business needs, including water and wastewater disposal, downtown parking development, road and sidewalk improvements and bringing public buildings into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

3) Create a "home grown" economic development plan that can be supported by the community, including the improvement of low income housing and the possibility of a special loan fund to assist entrepreneurs with business start-ups and expansion.

4) As part of the economic development plan, also establish learning programs and centers for all age groups such as adult basic education and REAL (Rural Enterprise through Action Learning) as a means for individuals to improve their income earning skills.

5) To the extent that it's feasible and affordable, create a convenient, downtown community center that can house services to the elderly, teenagers and other groups with special needs.

6) Improve and maintain historic buildings such as the Old Depot and Town House as attractive municipal assets that provide service and can potentially lure organizations and activities to the Community.

All of these are seen within the community as important long-term goals. Since the award of the grant, the Town has made considerable progress on all fronts, especially in the

establishment of the Hardwick Area Learning Center (HALC) and the REAL program to provide life long learning opportunities. Also, Hardwick residents met through the Take Charge Program to further identify economic development needs and solutions. Foremost, was the need to redevelop the lots destroyed by the January 1991 fire on Main Street.

Short-term Community Development Needs:

In January of 1992, a tragic fire destroyed two Main Street properties in the Hardwick Village Historic District and fire damaged a third (See photos - Appendix B). The losses are estimated to total a million dollars and resulted in the loss of nine apartments, four storefronts and one restaurant on Main Street. All of the units, except one storefront, were tenanted and occupied at the time of the fire. The physical destruction is apparent and an exaggerated description of the hole that this fire leaves on the street is not necessary. What is less apparent, but equally important, is the economic and financial devastation that results from the absence of nine families and thirteen jobs from Main Street. Although some of the families and businesses may remain in the Hardwick area, the loss of employment and housing in the center of the Historic District is seen in the community as an intolerable development and serious impediment to achieving the long-term objectives described above.

Statistics about the loss of jobs, need to replace housing (described in Problem Analysis) and loss of tax revenue does not fully explain why filling the gap caused by the fire is such a pressing community development need.

During the past twelve years the Town of Hardwick has come a long way in overcoming a reputation, deserved or not, as a tough, poor town in a state of social and economic decline. The Town's resurgence is primarily a result of the overall improvement in economic conditions in Vermont, an increase in moderate to upper income households in the community and the determination of Hardwick area residents to continue improving the Town. In the Historic District, however, a large part of its economic viability for housing and storefronts results from public and private investments totaling almost two million dollars between 1982 and 1985. This infusion of funds for capital improvements to buildings and infrastructure significantly improved the appearance and reputation of the Town. Ironically, of the ten buildings on the south side of Main Street, all but three were rehabilitated including the two that burned to the ground. This investment now needs to be protected and maintained.

The redevelopment of Main Street "slums and blight", in the parlance of community development officials, is, not surprisingly, consistent with the long term goals described earlier. The maintenance of the Historic District is an important element of tourist development. The reconstruction of storefronts will create jobs, some or most of which will not be a relocation of existing

employment, but new jobs resulting from increased economic activity. The replacement of housing of a different bedroom mix will provide better housing opportunities for low and moderate income households.

Hardwick is also identified by the Northeastern Vermont Development Association, the regional planning commission for the Northeast Kingdom as one of three "sub-regional service centers" that are strategically located to serve smaller, rural, surrounding towns. Hardwick is the service center for Greensboro, Craftsbury and Walden and can probably be considered as the service center for Wolcott and Woodbury as well. In addition to the base population in Hardwick of 2,964, the Town serves as an economic center for an additional population of 4,409 for the five other towns and also serves an additional seasonal population occupying an estimated 967 units. For the Town to orient some its short and long-term economic development strategy towards serving the seasonal population is both realistic and sensible.

Approved this 1st day of October, 1992 at Hardwick, VT.

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