

Southern Vermont Economy Project

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PROJECT PRIORITIZATION REPORT

PREPARED FOR THE TOWN OF HALIFAX

Initial report: April 13, 2023



Photo: John Phelan



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Introduction to the Southern VT Economy Project & the Community Assessment and Priority Project (CAPP) Process

The Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation's Southern Vermont Economy Project (SVEP) is a program that provides training and technical assistance to increase local capacity, skills, and resources in order to advance local projects in Southern Vermont. The program recognizes that local projects are critical to the ability of Southern Vermont to achieve its community, economic, and workforce development goals. SVEP is funded in part through the USDA Rural Community Development Initiative.

As part of SVEP, the CAPP process is designed to help communities define goals and projects that they would like to move forward, and to give them resources and tools that will help them advance those projects.

The goal of the program is also:

- To help identify shared priorities and potential areas for community/regional collaboration across Southern Vermont.
- Facilitate connections to funders, cultivate community-funder relationships, and match projects with regional, state, and/or federal funding sources.
- Create situational awareness among funders and planning partners in our region of each community's priorities and future plans.
- Develop alignment and linkage between community plans and priorities and the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).
- Introduce BDCC as a resource to help advance community and regional projects.
- And, most importantly, support and accelerate the implementation of community projects that benefit the local economy and the southern Vermont economy.

The Halifax CAPP Process

Background: A Needed Planning Process for Town ARPA Money

The Halifax Community Assessment and Project Prioritization (CAPP) visit arose from current conditions in which there is an unprecedented amount of funding (state and federal) that has been made available to Vermont's communities thanks to funding from several sources, including COVID-19 relief funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Rural communities across Vermont have also received their ARPA funding allocations directly, and are now sitting on sums of money that are paradoxically larger than what they usually have at their disposal, while also being inadequate for truly transformative projects unless they are combined with other sources of funding.

At the same time, there is a growing recognition that smaller, rural communities are at a disadvantage in deploying their ARPA funds and seeking additional funding due to a lack of staff capacity for grant research, application preparation, and project management. To remedy this situation, work is being done on a state level to [raise awareness of what funding programs](#) are available for communities, [and ultimately to channel additional funding for technical assistance into communities](#) like Halifax so that they can better access these programs.

However, rural communities — which have traditionally lacked the capacity to access grant funds — have also not been engaged in the kind of community planning process that is a necessary first step when undertaking transformative community projects. Before accessing technical assistance for help with obtaining grant funding, it's necessary to have a project proposal begun (if not already in hand). The project should be one that demonstrates a broad base of community support and fills a need that the community has determined for itself.

The CAPP process is a way to help communities, including Halifax, take this valuable first step: engaging community residents and stakeholders to identify shared community goals and start developing projects that can help the community meet those goals.

Since launching CAPP in September 2022, BDCC's SVEP program has worked to identify communities across the Southern VT Zone that can benefit from going through a CAPP process.

Halifax Select Board Discussion

The Halifax Select Board expressed interest in getting assistance through CAPP when the SVEP manager, Meg Staloff, attended a Select Board meeting on [September 6, 2022](#). BDCC staff routinely attend one or more Select Board meetings a year in every town in the Windham region. The purpose of these visits is twofold: first, to deliver an annual request for funding that supports our affiliate organization (Southeastern VT Economic Development Strategies, or SeVEDS), but secondly, and more importantly, to review the economic development services that our organization provides and help answer community needs.

Following that meeting, a proposal to engage with the CAPP process, dated November 2, 2022, was sent to the Select Board for consideration at an upcoming meeting. The Board followed up with Staloff, who then attended a meeting on [December 20, 2022](#). At that meeting, it was determined that a community meeting should be held on March 25, 2023 — following the Town Meeting and giving time to create a flier and postcard to be sent to residents. Staloff also attended a meeting on [March 21, 2023](#) to review the agenda for the meeting.

Community Engagement

Thirty-three Halifax residents attended the Community Meeting on 3/25 and engaged in conversations to develop some community goals. After an introduction to the goals and desired outcomes, the meeting used a 'rotating flip chart' method, breaking attendees into four groups. Each group was tasked with coming up with a list of goals. Groups then rotated and provided comments on the other groups' goals in order to develop a unified vision. As they worked, the groups also took notes on ideas for possible actions of projects that informed their goals list — all those ideas were collected, along with the goals.

What You'll Find in This Report

This initial report is a collection of all the conversations that took place ahead of, and as part of, the community meeting. First, find a compilation of all the goals collected by all four groups, along with community members' comments (in pink) (see page 7). From those, BDCC has worked to state four more concise community goals (see page 8).

Following that, on page 9, there is a list of the ideas generated from the March 25, 2023, meeting. They have been lightly edited for clarity and grouped into categories by the SVEP staff.

Finally, on pages 10-12, find a spreadsheet of brainstormed project ideas that come from several sources:

- A Halifax Select Board meeting on May 24, 2022, in which the community was invited to submit recommendations and ideas for ways to use ARPA funding.
- In addition to those community suggestions, the SVEP manager spoke to Select Board member Patrick McAllistair on December 16, 2022, to get a better understanding of additional requirements, some of which include developing more streamlined municipal practices.
- Community members were invited to add to the list ahead of the March 25, 2023, meeting.

Using This Report

At the end of this report are some initial 'project sheets' for projects that were discussed on March 25. These can serve as examples for a follow-up community meeting where additional projects will be identified.

In addition to these projects and others that may be identified, it is also anticipated that groups may derive a series of standalone implementation projects once the main project planning phase is complete. For example, the community hall project may result in one group spinning off to consider energy efficiency targets and another group to gather interest around programming, and so on.

It is our hope that having engaged in this multi-step community project planning process, project leaders for these 'sub-projects' will continue to use the worksheet and action plan

templates as a model to follow as they move from the planning to the implementation stage of projects.

In addition, this priority project list does not preclude other local groups from continuing to carry out their impactful work on existing projects! All projects contribute to the vitality of this already vital community, and all project leads are encouraged to use the Project Overview worksheets and Action Matrix as a planning template for their projects. Blank copies are included at the end of the report for community use.

Next Steps in the CAPP Process

Upon Select Board review of this report, it is our hope that a follow-up community gathering may be planned to continue refining Halifax residents' priorities and to begin outlining action steps for the projects identified as strong possibilities. An additional gathering will also help engage more residents and identify those who may be interested in committing to taking action to move these projects forward.

Such community engagement itself will have enormous benefits for Halifax, by strengthening residents' connections to the town and each other, and by energizing the population around shared goals. These pre-development conversations are also vital to ensure projects will meet the needs of the community and have buy-in from residents. Considering the planning processes that must follow such conversations, and the fact that ARPA funds must be obligated by December 2024 and spent by December 2026, we recommend scheduling a follow-up CAPP gathering no later than May 31, 2023.

List of Community Goals Collected 3/25/2023

Similar items have been combined into one bullet point, with sub-goals in some cases added under a larger one. In cases where items were more of a smaller scale 'idea' or project than a goal, they have been moved to the Ideas sheet. Community members' comments are listed in pink.

- Routine community connection; Actively used indoor/Outdoor community gathering spaces with multi-generational activities, classes, services.
 - pavilion, trails, square dancing, gardens
 - Seniors: more networking and communication and social events: Senior Center
 - *Note: we have Sr. Meals but not a Sr. Center*
 - School/community Connection: create multigenerational links
 - *Note: what does this mean?*
- Communication hub for activities, events, emergency info phone trees, internet for improved emergency resilience;
 - Include FD
 - Better communication/marketing of town;
 - improve town website, facebook
 - Community engagement via improved Broadband/Cell Service
 - Promoting participation in town governance
 - *This had a red x but no comments*
- Transit – bus or volunteer drivers to Wilmington, Brattleboro, Jacksonville – *This maybe should move to the 'ideas' sheet or could be restated under a larger Goal*
 - *Note: this seems like a sub-goal*
 - *Note: Yes but elaborate as to who/how? Carbon footprint*
 - *Moover: what is role here esp for non-seniors: add route to Halifax*
- Balance Maintaining and Improving Quality of Life for residents with respect to the environment, Town Center, and those who work for home *<BDCC note: I think I captured this but there are a lot of concepts here >*
- Environmental Preservation, Environmental Sustainability
 - *Note: Tell me more/yes, but we need to understand what we mean*
- Greater role/presence in Windham County
 - *Note: Tell me more*
- Long term sustainability of Town and inhabitants
 - *Had a question mark and note: Although more info is needed*

Top Community Goals for Halifax

1. Preserve and enhance a sense of community through increased opportunities for routine community connection in Halifax.
This includes actively used indoor and outdoor community spaces with programming for multiple generations.
2. Support routine community connection and emergency management through improved communications systems that are accessible to all residents.
Subgoal for Town Government: Develop more efficient Municipal practices (including digitizing land records, improved financial policies, an ongoing municipal vehicle funding strategy, etc).
3. *Draft:* Promote energy efficiency and climate change resilience in Halifax, for residents and municipal buildings.
Need clarification on if this is what people mean by 'environment'
4. *Draft:* Reduce the sense of isolation: form better connections between Halifax and surrounding towns.
This is a suggestion based on some of the proposed ideas from Select Board and citizens, and working from the experiences of other towns in our region

Examples: increase shared transit options for residents; improve communication between Halifax and neighboring municipal governments; better connections to regional/state supports; explore sharing resources with neighboring towns (for seniors, recreation, childcare, etc.)

Community Project Ideas Brainstorm from 3/25, grouped by category

OUTDOOR RECREATION/CONNECTION

- Nature trail
- updating the Bill Ackeman memorial nature trail at the school.
- Pavilion – square dances
- Community garden?
- Disk golf trail
- Accessibility to playground
- Health course/parkour
- Rec center
- Community Skating rink
- Accessible trails in 4 or more areas of town:
Trail along river (similar to West River in Bratt) maybe starting with just an out-and-back mile, but flat and easy to walk for many ages – strollers, seniors, runners

EDUCATION/SCHOOLS

- More communication between the town and school
- Greater investment in school- by community members
 - Adult ed classes (& especially seniors)
 - Outdoor learning locations
- Homeschool coop/group
- Computer skills class
- Childcare/pre-k in town
 - Cultural experiences for early childhood
- Wildlife classes

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/GATHERING

- Establish community cooperative
- More for everyone to do in town
 - Recreation, fitness, crafts
- Monthly reuse repair sessions; makerspace
- Community space available at low cost/easy
- Social opportunities, a place to get together- routine community connections
- Services for seniors, place to gather
- StoryCorps – local recorded history
- Community center
 - bring people together - what opportunities can be offered

INFRASTRUCTURE & ENVIRONMENT

- Affordable housing, variety of economic levels
 - Senior housing
- Accessibility of internet/broadband, cell service
- Environment enhancements/improvements
 - Climate resiliency
 - Solar
 - Wildlife Corridor
 - Charging stations
 - Public rides
 - Greenways
- Disaster preparedness
- transportation accessibility for all roads/maintenance
- Barrel recycling for families

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Local farm business sustainability
- Promoting current business within town
 - Service Place
 - Gun Shop
- Events attracting visitors
 - Craft fair, snack shack
 - Weekly farmers market
- Pub/coffee gathering place
- General Store
- Population
 - Keeping young adults within town, opportunities etc..
 - Encouraging new folks
 - Attract people/tourism

COMMUNICATION

- Townwide communication/info
 - What's available to sign up for?
- How do we understand the community needs that might exist
- Greater role or presence in Windham county
- How can new people be invited into the process

Community Project Ideas Mapped to Goals

The following list of priority projects is based on the above brainstorming list in conjunction with the Top Community Goals for the Village Center.

PROJECT IDEA	COMMUNITY GOAL	LOCAL PROJECT LEAD	PARTNERS	RESOURCES	FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES
Outdoor Learning Resources (Programs and after school)	Town Plan: Goal 6: Access to quality educational opportunities for the Town's citizens	School Board/Arpa Committee	Southern VT MNH (Mike Clough), Four Winds Nature Programs, Wings Community Programs	https://vermontafterschool.org/grant-opportunities/ https://fwni.org/for-schools/	ARPA Funds, local fundraising, Education grants; School budget, Wings
Digitize Land Records	More Efficient Municipal Practices (communication)	Town Clerk		Contact Readsboro Town Clerk Amber Holland; https://www.vlct.org/sites/default/files/Mo dernize%20Your%20Land%20Records.pdf Tanya Marshall, State Archivist & Chief Records Officer tanya.marshall@vermont.gov 802-828-0405 https://info.recordsforce.com/case-study-vermont-land-records https://i2d.uslandrecords.com/VT/ https://cottsystems.com/land-records-management/ Local case study	ARPA Funds, line item in Town Budget (ongoing)
Energy Efficiency Upgrades for Town Offices	Energy Efficiency and Climate Change resiliency	Planning Commission (ideally, form Energy Committee)	Efficiency VT; WRC if Act 172 funding can extend to Town facilities in buildings owned by School	Window Dressers Program (also for town residents)	Energy Efficiency funding Programs

			District		
Solar Panels for Town Garage	Energy Efficiency and Climate Change resiliency	Planning Commission (ideally, form Energy Committee)	WRC: Accessing BGS funding for Municipal Energy Upgrades (Act 172)	TBD through WRC	Act 172 Municipal Energy Upgrades Program
Pavillion on Old Town Garage Site	Preserving and enhancing sense of community	TBD committee, Select Board	Halifax Community Club?	To be updated	
Generator for Community Hall/Warming Shelter	Preserving and enhancing sense of community	Emergency Management (w/Halifax Community Club)	Efficiency VT, others TBD (Preservation Trust?)	BDCC CFTAP can help prepare application	USDA Community Facilities program
Halifax Historical Society Building Upgrades	Preserving and enhancing sense of community	Halifax Historical Society	Preservation Trust of Vermont	PTV grants (The Robert Sincerbeaux Fund (RSF) grants) : can fund an assessment	https://ptvermont.org/help/grants/
Municipal Vehicle Funding Strategy	More Efficient Municipal Practices (communication)	Highway Dept	VTRANS VT Local Roads TA	Potential to request one on one TA; round table discussion with other local road foremen/Town Managers to look at their practices	
Improved Financial Policies for Town Government	More Efficient Municipal Practices (communication)	Select Board/Town Treasurer	VLCT https://www.vlct.org/municipal-assistance/municipal-topics/finance	Training available to Town at low cost (if VLCT members)	Fund with ARPA funding or line item in budget
Flood Resilience Plan	Climate Change Resiliency	Planning Commission/Conservation Board	WRC and ANR		
Ash Tree Maintenance/Removal	Climate Change Resiliency	Tree Warden Sue Kelly, Conservation Board?	ANR		

Cemetery Strategic Plan	Preserving and enhancing sense of community	Cemetery Commission	To be updated	Connect with other local Cemetery commissions, Vermont Old Cemetery Association, Preservation Trust	https://voca58.org/Grants.html , ARPA, line item town Budget, TBD
Digital notice board for town	More Efficient Municipal Practices (Communication)	Emergency Management	TBD		
Permanent Post Office Location	Maintaining local services	TBD			
Solar Panels & Batteries for Community Hall	Multiple: Preserving and enhancing sense of Community; Energy Efficiency and Climate Change Resiliency	Community Club			
New Well for Community Hall	Preserving and enhancing sense of community	Community Club			
Various Roads Need Beaver Deceivers		Highway Dept; Conservation Committee			
Pub	Preserving and enhancing sense of community				
Service Place/General Store	Preserving and enhancing sense of community				
Gun Shop	Preserving and enhancing sense of community				

Priority Projects for Halifax

The following list of priority projects is based on the above brainstorming list in conjunction with the Top Community Goals.

1. Improvements to Halifax Community Hall to Support more community programming
2. Pavilion in Halifax for outdoor community events
3. TBD
4. TBD

The first two projects arose from the initial community discussion on March 25. Based on that conversation and other town materials reviewed for ideas, it seems likely that a few other priority projects may need to be identified, such as town energy resilience, town communications, and updating the town’s hazard mitigation plan. Further community discussion is needed to discern and build consensus around these projects.

On the following pages, you will find more information and detail about the proposed projects, including project leads where they are known, resources and potential barriers. A sample action matrix is included for each project as well, to be filled in through additional community conversation and follow up by the SVEP staff.

As previously mentioned, these documents are intended to serve as a starting point for project leads. As the projects continue, it is anticipated that additional steps and information will be added. Please treat these as living documents!

Project Sheet: Improvements to Halifax Community Hall to Support more Community Programming

Community Goal it helps to accomplish:

Preserve and enhance a sense of community through increased opportunities for routine community connection in Halifax.

Local Project Lead: Community Club (owner of Hall) + TBD (see below) It might be worthwhile to form a project task force, including several groups to help spread the work.

Description of Project: Evaluate feasibility of renovations to the Community Hall so it can be utilized for more community needs – childcare, more regular senior events, other community events (such as ‘window-dressers,’ craft circles, regular dances, etc.) are all suggestions, drawn from community ideas. Foreseen capital needs are: new well; weatherization; installation of solar panels/heat pump system, possibly ADA upgrades (TBD). Other costs could include part-time staff to manage increased usage and maintenance; funding for ongoing maintenance TBD (possibly through user fees or ongoing municipal funds.)

Project Partners: Childcare: Beaver Brook/Winston Prouty; Senior activities: Senior Solutions, SASH; Building: Historic Preservation/Historical Society.

Also local groups like FD for programming events; partnerships with libraries in neighboring towns, other grassroots activity groups TBD (home school groups, parent/child play groups, etc).

Timeline:

Feasibility and planning: 1 year

Project refinement, staging and funding: 1 year

Construction can be staged out from 2-3 years or more, depending on interest and funding.

Barriers: Cost; Cooperation of multiple partners; multiple funding sources

Resources:

Preservation Trust of VT is a terrific resource for information, training, and grants for preserving buildings in Vermont. <https://ptvermont.org/>

ACCD/Historic preservation: <https://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation>

AARP Grant programs including [Community Challenge](#) for multi-generational facilities.

[USDA Community Facilities TA program \(via BDCC\): evaluations and design – funding needs to be spent prior to September 2023 TBD](#)

[USDA Community Facilities Grant](#) program: This is a complex application, but with the proper pre-development work in place can fund up to 35% of total project cost, with a cap of \$50,000

For Childcare facilities in particular, there are additional resources available, should that be a use that is determined

[Community Development Block Grants](#): Again, these are complex, but the municipality can apply for this funding on behalf of the organization to support. Contacting program staff directly to discuss this as an option once you have a project scope in hand is advised.

Starting Action Step Matrix: *Improvements to Halifax Community Hall*

To be filled in at a future community meeting

Action step	Funding needed?	Resources/Partners + Details	Timeline

Project Sheet: *Pavilion in Halifax for outdoor community events*

Community Goal it helps to accomplish:

Preserve and enhance a sense of community through increased opportunities for routine community connection in Halifax.

Local Project Lead: Fire Department (TBD), possibly in conjunction with Town/other groups

Description of Project: Determine location for an Outdoor pavilion to be used for community events, including Fire Dept annual Clambake and others TBD. Build budget for project, seek funding.

Project Partners: Other Town groups (Celebration Committee, Old Home Week committee (?), possibly landowner depending on location

Timeline: TBD

Barriers: Finding land/location, Easement use of land/location if not purchasing, Cost of land if purchase. Also: getting involvement from multiple community groups, finding funding (this may be the easiest part!).

Resources: *To be added as project ownership and dimensions take shape*

Starting Action Step Matrix: *Pavilion*

To be filled in at a future community meeting

Action step	Funding needed	Resources/Partners + Details	Timeline

Sample Project Sheet: *Project Name*

Community Goal it helps to accomplish:

Local Project Lead:

Description of Project:

Project Partners:

Timeline:

Barriers:

Resources:

Sample Action Step Matrix: *Project Name*

Action step	Funding needed	Resources/Partners + Details	Timeline

For any questions, or for more information, contact:

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About the Southern Vermont Economy Project: *The Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation's Southern Vermont Economy Project (SVEP) is a program that provides training and technical assistance to increase local capacity, skills, and resources in order to advance local projects in Southern Vermont. The program recognizes that local projects are critical to the ability of Southern Vermont to achieve its community, economic, and workforce development goals. SVEP is funded in part through the USDA Rural Community Development Initiative.*

