

**The New Haven PLACE Program Community Forum  
Combined Results  
June 30, 2015  
Compiled and Submitted to the Town of New Haven  
By The Conservation Fund and the New Haven Conservation Commission**

**Overview**

**Purpose:**

The purpose of the New Haven Community Forum was to hear the community's thoughts and feelings about their town in advance of its participation in the *Place-Based Landscape Analysis and Community Engagement* (PLACE) program. PLACE is a community education program for Vermont towns that is conducted as a collaboration between the town, the University of Vermont, and Shelburne Farms. Its mission is to promote a sustainable relationship between people and their local landscapes by engaging community residents in exploring, understanding, honoring and celebrating the natural and cultural features that contribute to their town's character.

**Hosting Organization:**

The Conservation Commission of New Haven

**Facilitator:**

This meeting was facilitated by Nancy Bell of The Conservation Fund. The responses were compiled by Leah Mital-Skiff.

**Notice:**

All New Haven residents were invited via postings on front porch forum and flyers that were posted in public locations in town and in surrounding towns.

**Venue:**

The meeting was held on Tuesday, June 30th from 6-9pm at the New Haven Congregational Church in New Haven, VT. A light meal and beverages were served midway through the evening. Approximately 20 people attended.

**Meeting Structure:**

Participants broke into working groups at tables. There were 4 tables of 4-6 residents each. Each table answered 6 questions and marked areas or information of note on maps of the town. Scribes were directed to write what participants said, using their exact words. Every effort was made to copy details of what was said word for word from the meeting flip charts into this document. This document summarizes the textual responses to 6 questions.

**Overview of process of summarizing results:**

The compilation of responses has been grouped into general themes. The numbers in parentheses by an item in the results, such as *Open Public Access (3)*, represent the number of tables at which the specific item or topic was mentioned. Individual comments and additional details are noted to

preserve the actual individual statements made. The following pages are the compiled responses of New Haven residents to six questions as follows:

**Question 1: What do you love about where you live/this place we call New Haven?**

**Character of the town, specific places and features**

- Visible history (2)
  - Native American – 2 indigenous camps at river confluence – 5000 yrs old
  - Manufacturing
  - Floods
  - New Haven-Bristol Railroad
  - North-South Highway
  - Mills – remnants if you know where to find them
  - An old quarry by Beldon Falls, near the dam
  - Brooksville – old settlement and axe factory
  - The town doctor's grave in the town hill cemetery with a bell so that he couldn't be buried alive
  - New people coming in have used older buildings for business – i.e Olivia's Croutons using old bank, cabinet making in old barns – buildings look better now than when in agriculture
- Our public spaces (2) – beautiful, inviting
  - The library (2)– many towns in VT have given up their library and we are strengthening ours
  - The park
  - Public offices
  - Beeman Elementary School (2)– an asset
  - Our cemeteries – they hold our past and room enough to hold our future
- The downtown village, a real village
- Train station at New Haven junction – in private hands but well taken care of
- State police barracks in town – we are fortunate to have it, feels secure, they are coming and going all the time
- Volunteer fire department
- New Haven Mills – Old Schoolhouse
- Plan Road Area – along the New Haven, agricultural treasure
- Covered bridge
- Solar panels – positive and negative
- 2 hydro plants on Otter Creek – one is not visible, great way to generate power
- Centrally located – best location of anywhere, 40 minutes to skiing, close to Middlebury College
- Almost no traffic

**Community-oriented, events**

- The people (4) –
  - economic and professional diversity – plumbers, lawyers, etc,

- the people are nice
- Knowing your neighbors – small population, someone from across town feels like a neighbor, neighbors helping neighbors – anyone within a few miles helps, great sense of community, appreciation and respect for neighbors – positive interactions even if we don't see them a lot
- People still stop for runaway animals and try to help
- Living in a place where the people are collectively engaged in the landscape
- Great group of volunteers – for library, park
- Great elected officials
- The way America was 100 years ago – a full spectrum of working society living in one place
- Feels like Charlotte was when I was a kid – you can still afford to buy a house and raise a family here as a local
- 1 of 3 states in union where 1 person can have an impact and know your representatives
- Family
- Town Management keeps things affordable – i.e. snowplows don't put in overtime, they wait and start in morning to save \$\$, town does great job running budgets
- New Haven Town Meeting –
  - most items by Australian Ballot
  - don't have to show i.d., everyone knows you
  - it's okay to disagree and still be friends
- Addison County Field Days – largest agricultural fair in state
- Town-wide activities for all generations

### **Character/features of the land**

- The wide open vistas and space (4) – views of the Greens and wide open fields, bucolic, animals in the fields, views from 2<sup>nd</sup> floor at Beeman – mountains, sunsets
- The working landscape (4) – making a living off the land – using the natural resource rather than just looking at it – logging, farming – diversity of agriculture and other farm types, to watch the corn grow
- Swimming holes (3) – The New Haven Quarries, Dog Team, the entire New Haven River
- Watershed Center – shared with Bristol, beautiful area, trails, programs, geology, birds, wildflowers
- Ecological diversity and the ability to see wildlife in their natural habitat (3)
  - Swamps, open, wooded
  - Diversity of wildlife – mammal, birds (2), mink, bobcat, turkey etc. (unique for me, coming from Boston area)
- The gorge
- Rainbows
- I find the swamps mysterious
- Lack of biting insects compared to rest of state
- Water in the landscape - The New Haven River and Otter Creek
- Amphibian road crossing corridor

### **Recreation**

- Access to our natural landscapes
- Fishing, hunting
- Birding
- TAM trail, especially the gorge

## Question #2: What is your vision for its future?

### Infrastructure, Economic

- School related (4)
  - Maintain an elementary school in the location of Beeman – it helps to define the village in the village
  - A better school or send kids somewhere else – low test scores, school is not a source of civic pride, parents are withdrawing kids and leaving
  - Attract families by working on education, work with state, (2)
  - Have a critical mass to support French, Chemistry, etc
  - Put kids and their education first
- Affordability (4)
  - Better pay to get young people to stay here (2)
  - Home businesses (2)- An expansion of home businesses where 2-3 people work without creating sprawl, keep people here
  - Affordable for all – families, young people, elders
- Housing related (3)
  - Housing within the town for elderly residents (2)
  - Maintain affordability and accessibility of housing and living (2)
  - More housing in the village and therefore some commerce
- Better Internet speed (2), better fiber optics and communications
- Multi-modal transportation
- Repurpose of agricultural buildings – salvage barns and small farms so they preserve identity of town and don't fall into disrepair
- Retain a village center *in* the village center
- Continue to have a vibrant library
- A little bit more business as well as infrastructure that is kept up with
- More employment without turning into an industrial zone
- Surrounding towns to allow for jobs, arts, restaurants – ensure the relationship with these towns for access to the diverse needs of the community, not every town can have everything
- Better use of the railroad – maybe could be industrial at the junction
- Possible passenger station for the train
- Good road infrastructure

### Community-oriented, Events

- To have a vibrant town meeting
- For residents to be involved and more connected in town government, competing for Select board seats

- More involvement by town residents
- Elder care
- Maintain population base
- Have an objective to bring bright young people to town to work and start families
- To maintain or increase socio-economic and cultural diversity and not have “exclusive” towns
- Education and raising awareness of town identity/cultural resources
- More town/community events to bring people together - like Field Days
- “Old timers” who can explain the history and why things are the way they are

### **Land Use (other than recreation) - Development, Management**

- To continue to have farms and an agricultural working landscape (4)
  - Healthy and functioning small farms
  - Better distribution while maintaining customer relationships
  - Farmland not going to waste of being underutilized
  - Diversified agriculture
- More support from town and residents for agriculture (3)
  - Beeman to buy locally
  - A place for residents to buy locally
  - Laws and regulations that allow people to start a 5 or 10 acre farm
  - Conservation/agriculture fund
  - Town to assist in agricultural land transitions between generations
  - Continued support for changing dairy industry
- To continue to keep industrial/commercial development down
- Growth would be in respect to the land, balanced with open space, agriculture, forestry
- No future commercial development on Route 7 – “if we lose Route 7 to commercial development, we lose our town.”
- Not to be an energy corridor
- Homes and structures not to be built in dangerous locations – floodplains, wildlife corridors
- Underground power lines – viewshed
- Good planning - maintain all areas – whole town should be conscious, not set aside some areas and neglect others, balance good habitat with working landscape

### **Conservation, Ecology-oriented**

- Maintain views, viewsheds (3) – maintain open area of town, maintain designated viewsheds that are already in place
- Healthy waterways (3) – New Haven River, Muddy Brook, in terms of run-off, retention ponds, town-wide septic?, clean-up of waterways
- New Haven to take initiative on invasive plants (2) - especially poison parsnip (2), Japanese knotweed
- Connected wildlife habitat (2)
  - More bald eagles in New Haven
- Conserve land along Route 7
- Maintain swampland
- Plant more trees on my land

- Tax on sale of every house to support a conservation fund

### **General**

- Nothing to change, preserve what we have (2)
- Keep New Haven small and affordable and send people to Middlebury to work

### **Question #3: What do you see as threats to that vision?**

#### **Infrastructure, Economic, Governmental**

- Loss of local control (3) – increasing state control
  - State or Federal regulations that are averse to what we want – poorly sited solar, New Haven becoming a cookie cutter, loss of local control
  - Super-majority single-party state government – doesn't provide balance, becomes too theoretical and less real
  - Small town self-governance w.r.t. tax, education, landscape protection, utilities
- Traffic (2) - Increased population in surrounding areas, more lanes on Rte 7
- Poor school system (2)
- Too few students for adequate class size (2)
- School consolidation (and resulting loss of Beeman)
- Loss of agricultural economy (2) – inability to work the land and make a living, runoff and stormwater control bills making farming unaffordable, GMO labeling and limits, political correctness
- Changes to Current Use program
- Loss of control of regional farming economy – i.e. price of milk, or sheep 100 years ago
- The “need” for economic opportunity within New Haven
- Economic decay – at national and state level
- Lack of affordability and good paying jobs
- Becoming a bedroom community
- Maintaining tax base - Not creating good jobs to attract people – aging population would not be able to sustain tax burden
- Taxation – carbon taxes, income taxes – thin tax base already carrying a huge load, spending based on demographics
- Healthcare costs
- If church were to close
- Ability to maintain town infrastructure
- Closing of village store
- Large-scale, low-price businesses that threaten small local business

#### **Community-oriented, events**

- Inability to change
- Inability of town residents to pull together on a single vision, inability to compromise
- Inability to communicate via computers about these kinds of issues
- Apathy
- Falling population – fewer school-age kids

- Industry and technology threatening respect and etiquette

### **Land Use, Development, Management**

- Use of New Haven for wind energy or energy corridor (4) –
  - solar panels threaten open land and New Haven seems to be epicenter of it in Champlain Valley
  - it can be done well – rooftops; too often disregards surroundings
  - “muddies landscape from tourist perspective who are looking for pastures, animals”
- Commercial and industrial zoning and development (2)
- Out of states from cities moving in (2) - - they want stop signs, street lights, a country metropolitan feel
- Development in general
- Dairy farming – on an industrial scale – traffic, manure pits, farming exemptions
- Lack of understanding by non-agricultural sector of what it takes to keep land open and in agricultural use

### **Conservation-oriented, Ecological**

- Invasive species (2) – poison parsnip
- MBTE leak from Irving Station on Rte. 7
- Unmanaged runoff
- Reduction in the availability of potable water

### **Question #4: What do you see as solutions to those threats?**

### **Infrastructure, Economic, Governmental, Industry**

- Economic development to bring jobs and education (2)
- Support legislation that does not conflict with what we want
- More local control – i.e. on rules on solar taxation and taxation of gas pipeline, Act 60
- If Beeman Elementary did close, keep the building in education –
  - UVM satellite learning to reduce commuter traffic
  - Apprenticeship opportunities
  - Alternatives to 4-year college or traditional schooling
- Consolidation of school district - improve education quality in the process
- Better use of community resources
  - Train station at New Haven Jct
  - Church at New Haven Mills hasn't had a congregation in 60 years
  - At least 3 unused mills at New Haven Mills
- Keep costs under control
- Emphasis on Vermont products and Vermont brand which carries a 20% premium – copyright, patent, and defend
- Emphasize ski industry
- NY slogan – bring your business here and we'll give you lower taxes
- Commercial marijuana farming
- Craft distilleries

### **Community-oriented, events**

- More community engagement/involvement (3)
  - connect them to their town and community – this builds respect and willingness to act
  - more programs that focus on family values and involvement
  - more events that bring people together – seminars, concerts, grade school level events
  - have a majority of residents and their voices heard
  - recognize that lack of involvement is a universal problem, but don't give up
  - push for what you think is important, the opportunity is there in a small town and state
  - next generation needs to get involved in town – planning commission, fire department
  - “being on the PTA is not enough”, if you are not part of the solution you are part of the problem
- Engage the schools (3)
  - in developing and teaching stewardship
  - extra credit for students to attend town meeting?
  - more involvement in the school by parents and community – tie cultural history into schooling, engage retired population
  - teach the value and etiquette of technology in the education system
- Town meeting (2) –
  - figure out how to be more effective
  - conduct financial decisions on the floor
  - ask how to maintain slow growth, how we want to grow, what do we want to preserve
- PLACE program
- Communication – have better forums - front porch forum, side of street, coffee shop, read town newsletter, town website, overcome difficulty of getting the word out
- Cultural interpretive center – at Beeman or New Haven Jct Train Station – New Haven has a rich history
- Guided tours/bicycle tour of interpretive sites

### **Land Use, Development, Management**

- Sensible zoning
- Identification of agricultural lands to remain in agriculture

### **Conservation-oriented, Ecological**

- Identification of wetlands, vernal pools, wildlife habitat for protection

### **Question #5: Who do you need to BE to fulfill the vision?**

#### **Personal**

- Active volunteer/participant who is less burnt-out – go door to door, tireless (3)
- Empathetic (3)
- More open (2), Listen (2), Able to see all options



- Leader (2) and role model, Beat the drum
- Visionary (2) , innovative, driven, forward-thinking
- Well-connected, respected, and respectful (2)
- Passionate (2), invested
- Community minded
- Reaching out
- Embody a commitment to the vision
- Desire change, able to accept change
- Happy
- Work with more students
- Knowledgeable
- Resilient
- Flexible
- Patient
- Humble
- Honest
- Realistic
- Team player – share credit
- Charismatic, sweet-talking, articulate
- Organized and willing to organize people
- Able to make decisions
- Smart, educated
- Youthful and wise
- To have more time – work less at paid job

### **Professional**

- Educators
- An environmental economist
- Steve Jobs
- Bill Gates – innovative, entrepreneurial
- Bloomberg

**Question #6: What are some actions you can take now to fulfill the vision? (Note: Number in parenthesis corresponds to the number of residents who repeated a certain answer rather than the number of tables)**

### **Serve on a board or committee, research, organize**

- Recruiting
- Put up posters if someone runs a campaign
- Go to more meetings, find out what's going on in town
- Make food for another community forum – Donna Smith 877-2712
- Commit to making New Haven a better place to live (2)

**Recreation, Education, events**

- Commit to spreading the word and support PLACE program
- Over the next 2-3 years, I will commit energy and info to the school – Mark Krawczyk 999-2768 (with volunteers Susan, Mark, Ammy)
- Work with others on cultural heritage projects – Susan Smiley 388-6601, Mark K.
- Do a cultural educational program on the North-South highway - Doug Tolles 545-2020
- Agricultural education, farm visits – Harvey Smith 877-2712
- Go to more chicken bbq's
- Teach a dance class – Ammy Martinez 201-293-2334
- Promote and attend a birding event

**Stewardship, inventory**

- Commit to doing what I can to protect wildlife habitat
- Be on Audubon bird count – Lauren LaBerge-Taddeo [letaddeo@gmail.com](mailto:letaddeo@gmail.com)

**Other**

- I'm doing what I want to be doing – on selectboard (2)