

**Waitsfield Selectboard
Community Business Forum Notes
Big Picture Theater
October 27, 2008**

S.W.O.T. Summary

STRENGTHS

- Waitsfield is an incredible place to live
- Brand of Valley is marketable
- We've attracted a number of talented high-tech businesses
- Valley has a lot to offer
- Still has integrity of a rural town
- One-to-one connections with people
- Ability to work together to get things done

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of cohesiveness
- Poor transportation facilities
 - Lack of sidewalks
 - Not easily walkable
- Plowing does not take pedestrians into account
- Lack of a park
- Lack of pro-business attitude
- Lack of clear branding of the Valley
- We're not living up to who we are
- Many of the buildings are decrepit
- Lack of cohesive effort to pull together identity → events, promotion
- Lack of "how can I help you?"
- Arrogance on boards
- Parking problem on Old County Road near health center has not been addressed (widen shoulder)
- Very difficult to get a permit in Waitsfield
 - Intimidating
 - Uncertain
- Lack of more participation of business owners in forums like this
- Waitsfield has reputation for not being business-friendly (via CVEDC)
- Some businesses feel disenfranchised from the Chamber—no other networking opportunity
- Circumstances related to Virginia Houston created negative feelings, distrust
- Lack of infrastructure to support tourism

OPPORTUNITIES

- We need more recreational facilities to attract more visitors & improve quality of life
 - Community Center
 - Other meeting/gathering spaces
- Bike lanes on Route 100
- Improve parking areas at Bridge Street
- We should promote the industrial park
 - Tax incentives
- Encourage businesses that support tourism
- We need better branding for who we are
- Welcoming host at events → ambassador
- Bring all activities, events, etc., together in one resource
 - Calendar (a true community calendar)
 - Needs to be promoted
- Tax stabilization for renewable energy investments
- Enterprise Zone: allow businesses to expand in current locations
- Town could be more helpful to businesses trying to get state and local permits
- Create more opportunities where people feel they are heard
- Chamber is in process of changing its structure
- Be more welcoming & proactive to support businesses
- Designate Town person to be responsible for lobbying for business at State level & for recruitment
- Inventory our assets & nurture what we have
- Buy local campaign → support each other

THREATS

- It's easy to start a business but difficult to grow them
- Ability to keep & attract employees
- Distribution of tax burden unfair to historic village properties
- Need to address shifting demographics
- Bosch is vacating building at the industrial park
- Excessive use of executive and deliberative sessions undermines confidence & trust in government → distrust
- Decisions appear to be based on personality rather than merits
- Appears to be willingness to fight too often rather than find resolution/mediation
- Negative energy
- Community is divided
- Lack of trust
- Some Town decisions make people feel threatened → divisive
- There are a number of existing businesses that are struggling
- Need to find a way to KEEP visitors in the Valley
- How can we brand our town if we don't know who we are?
 - Lack of unified vision

Synthesis of Major Themes

Supporting Business – Existing and New

- Chamber Web site
- Business listings on Town Web site
- Free wireless hot spots → entire MRV?
- Create Valley-wide brand “OPEN” flag?
- Increased collaboration with Chamber to communication that Waitsfield is open for business
- Provide a space for business support & technical assistance

Communication

- Monthly/weekly calendar in Valley Reporter that lists events, meetings, etc.
- Community outreach about Town Plan
- MRVTV coverage → many media tools
- More communication between Chamber and the Selectboard
- Risk of over-information → distill information: salient points, prioritize
- Town newsletter: use as vehicle to disseminate distilled elements of Town Plan
- Need to go back to the question of the vision/who are we? → distill the vision.
- Need to have more of these forums
- Restructure Town Meeting day to meet informally with the boards

Identity

- Waitsfield’s identity is closely tied to the Mad River Valley
- What’s Waitsfield’s role/responsibility as the commercial center for the Mad River Valley
- Have presentation/discussion of vision in Town Plan → How to take that to voters for agreement?
- Geographic distinctions confusing → Town sign?
- Ambivalence about being a tourist/resort community
- Important not to lose integrity of place
- Need to identify gateways/entrances
- Revisit/discuss boundaries, e.g., Moretown, Duxbury, Middlesex
- What does “Don’t want to be another Stowe” mean?

Infrastructure

- Path to physically connect Village & Irasville, including crosswalks, sidewalks.
- Town Pond & green is under-used. → Town green? Town center?
- Free wireless hotspots
- Form volunteer work groups to help property owners spruce up/maintain properties → Build on Green Up Day model
- Get the basic infrastructure in: sidewalks, paved road, etc.