



## **Notes from Piscataquis County Community Conversation February 15, 2017**

### **Vision**

- Bring all the Piscataquis County communities together to work together
- County is known for sustainable agriculture
- People of all ages are respected, valued, and encouraged to thrive
- County shines in the areas of art, music, and theatre
- County becomes known for its natural resources (lakes, forests), quality of life, access, and promotes economic development and vitality
- County is a place young families choose to live due to high quality educational systems
- Make the county's own perception of itself as being a Vibrant place
- The county becomes known for its non-motorized trails: It is known for hiking, skiing, biking, etc.
- County continues to be known for motorized outdoor activities and trails
- It is a place where vulnerable citizens feel safe, supported, and have access to services they need
- It is known as a tourist destination with appealing quaint villages and high-end culinary experiences, housing, and lakes
- It is a center of entrepreneurial activities that are well supported. Entrepreneurs create their own jobs and opportunities for others and for the county
- It hosts a Center for Technology and Innovation built around high-speed broad band internet connection

### **Strengths**

- Committed citizens who know each other and have ongoing relationships and networks
- Natural resources (lakes, mountains, forests)
- Strong sense of community
- Positive work ethic
- Strong sense of self-reliance
- Safe
- Remoteness
- Sustainable organic agriculture movement among young families
- Older very engaged and engage able people in the community
- Strong sense of connection to place through work, and family
- Strong local health care system
- Self awareness of assets, what can offer, and unity around the county

- Still a strong manufacturing economic base (Hardwood, True, Pleasant River, JSI, Milo)
- Collaborate well with others

### **Challenges**

- Oldest county in state
- Poverty
- Finding qualified job applicants
- Transportation—there are a lot of roads to maintain and little/no public transportation, especially for the older adults
- Lack of high school students' aspirations (first time college attendance, etc.)
- Economic disparities (especially in Greenville with the summer guests compared to year-round residents)
- Declining, aging population
- High rate of chronic diseases
- Within the last 10 years, the county has had a 34% decline in student population; 43% loss of students in northern part of county; challenge—how to provide quality education services when student population is declining
- Low birth rate
- Local leadership is aging
- Volunteers are aging and we're not developing younger people to volunteer
- Lack of high speed internet access
- Housing inventory is old and less heat efficient
- Loss of manufacturing
- Difficult to recruit health care providers
- Regulatory and legislative programs or statutes that do not consider or foster rural living
- Need for entrepreneurs
- Schools are so focused on college preparation that they don't focus on entrepreneurship
- Fear of looking forward/opening minds
- Collective self-esteem issue (do not feel they deserve it)
- Easier to look outside for solutions than from within
- Substance abuse epidemic and underlying hopelessness (young people are dying)
- Lack of services
- Generational poverty/self esteem
- Leadership—need local leaders to emerge from among younger people
- Need high-speed internet
- Lack of cell service
- There is some strong industry, but mills are closing

### **Ideas: Building on Strengths to Address Challenges**

- Expand broad band to attract and retain people
- Make the trails into a destination place vs. pass through
- Expand tourism resources (improve the mechanized options and build more nonmechanized options)

- Create opportunities for youth to explore the world around them (expose them to real world situations in the local economy so they see opportunities) and build their leadership and basic work skills
- Use current organizations and institutions to build self-esteem and provide with them with more funds to do so (YMCA, Central Theater, gyms, etc.)
- Increase broadband internet access to attract entrepreneurial youth, self-employed, businesses
- Continue to support, welcome and encourage young farmers' movement
- Build on existing collaborations for regionalization of services such as law enforcement and health care. This is easier here due to the county's population size
- Address resistance to change
  - Increase self esteem
  - Welcome immigrants
  - Help understand diversity
  - Be a welcoming environment for newcomers
  - Work more with current Foxcroft Academy boarding program to build awareness
- Address poverty and food insecurity ("Hunger is not acceptable in our region"); poverty workshop
  - Teach people to "fish"
  - Education on growing own food and how to prepare/eat natural foods
  - Refocus energy to take more risks
  - Need for peer support
- Talk with our youth to build awareness and engage
  - Organize community opportunities for students for them to plug into (connecting students with seniors, for example)
- Increase people's self reliance, helping them to be resourceful on getting the resources and help they need
- Community high school to address all the trades including technology
- Post secondary grade education opportunities (How much are teachers talking with students about the questions we are exploring in today's meeting?); teach entrepreneurship
- Coordinate and fund activities
- Better coordinate opportunities in the community so teachers can get youth out into the community for real-life experiences
- Explore models of comprehensive high schools with technology training onsite (technical college) Need a post-secondary education presence in the county
- Use existing resources such as FA liberal arts program and Guilford four-year tech program
- Encourage lodging and restaurants
- Revitalize downtowns
- Piscataquis County Corp—like Vista or Americorp to engage youth to provide training and encourage pride (retrofit older housing and downtown buildings)
- Be aware of setting positive examples for youth—strong people become mentors for youth and be cognizant of need to "communicate" and not just text (have wireless zones)
- Find a way to celebrate successes—tell the positive stories so that becomes expected as the norm
- Prioritize funding among nonprofit organizations
- Publicize more the businesses who support local activities and nonprofits

- Share with regard to tourists and advertize opportunities (Chamber coordinates)
- Address the challenge of needing to encourage youth to lead—have a Jr. Chamber
- Need more youth
  - Create an environment young families are looking for
  - Expand broadband, social life
- Tourism—develop more opportunities, advertise the county more, incentivize more quality restaurants and motels; municipal outdoor centers; county-run golf courses
- Invest in downtowns (appearance, etc.)
- Bring Farmer’s Market to large employers and educate about Farmer’s Markets
- Build on collaborations for more regional approach to education, law enforcement, health care