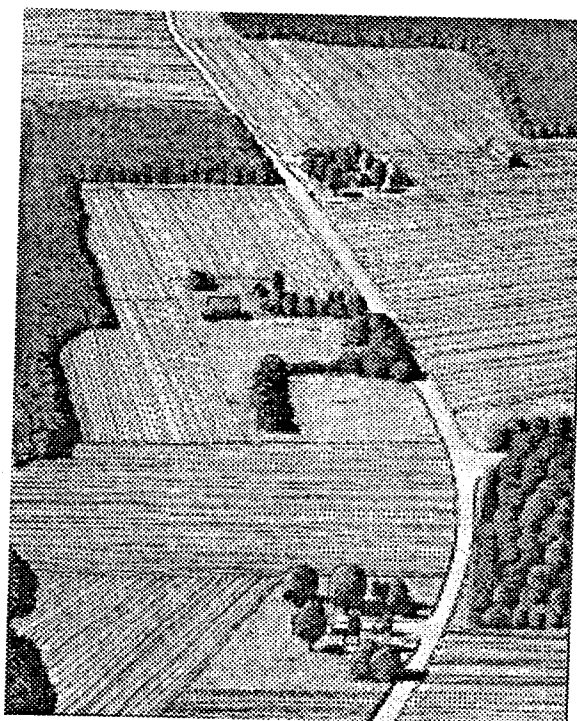


# V · A · L · L · E · Y F O R U M · S E R I E S ·

"Conventional zoning and land use regulations often foster development patterns which are damaging to a rural town's scenic landscape."

-Randall Arendt

From Forum One  
*Patterns of  
Growth in the  
Mad River Valley*



*Before Development*

This publication is a summary of the Mad River Valley Forum Series, presented in six parts during 1990. The Mad River Valley Forum series was made possible through a Special Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs. Each of the following descriptive Forum papers was widely distributed throughout the Valley prior to each Forum. Each of the papers are followed by a summary of the actual meeting and responses of the participants, and community reactions in the form of articles from the Valley Reporter are included at the end.

# V • A • L • L • E • Y F O R U M

## VALLEY FORUM SERIES

**I**n the autumn of 1990, The Mad River Valley Planning District sponsored a series of six public forums on issues affecting change in the Mad River Valley. The 1990 Valley Forum series was designed as a follow-up to a highly successful series of forums held ten years earlier. The 1980 forums, titled the Valley Perspective Series, helped define a Valley vision of how growth and development should occur. The Valley's acclaimed planning and growth management programs were based in part on the dialogue that resulted from that series.

The 1990 Valley Forum Series brought experts in various fields to the Valley to provide information and stimulate discussion on issues important to the Valley's social, environmental and economic well being. The Forum Series provided Valley residents with an opportunity to gather and discuss issues of concern, to evaluate existing policy, and to examine current local sentiment on issues ranging from land use to the health of the Mad River.

The forums were held in locations throughout the Valley. An effort was made to attract those in the Valley with a special interest in the topic of each presentation. The attendance at the forums averaged around 50 people, with a range from 15 to

100 participants on various evenings. Inclement weather was a factor in the low attendance on one evening. Discussion at the forums was generally lively, with the exception of the first forum, in which the length of the presentation did not leave time for discussion. However, the first forum stimulated extensive follow-up discussion among Valley Planning Commissions.

Issues addressed included settlement patterns and land use regulations in the Valley and elsewhere in New England; the Valley and State's economic outlook; the fiscal impact of growth and development; the health of the Mad River; housing issues in the Valley; and rural resource and open land conservation in the Valley.

The following report contains copies of the Forum Issue papers which were used to promote each forum, and as a basis for discussion regarding the respective issues. Accompanying the issue papers are short summaries which offer a synopsis of the comments made by the featured speakers, and to summarize the range of questions and concerns expressed by participants at each forum. Also included as an appendix are the articles which appeared in the Valley Reporter regarding the series.

# V · A · L · L · E · Y F O R U M

## SCHEDULE

1990-1991

**T**he Mad River Valley Planning District is sponsoring a series of public forums to discuss relevant issues affecting change in the Mad River Valley. These forums are designed to provide information and fresh perspective to many of the issues important to the Valley's social, natural and economic well being.

In addition to providing Valley residents with an opportunity to gather and discuss issues of concern, each presentation and discussion will be summarized in a format which could serve as an agenda for future action.

The full schedule of the forums are listed below, all of which are open to the public. At least a week prior to each meeting, a short paper briefly describing the topic and introducing the guests will be made available. For further information, feel free to contact Brian Shupe, Mad River Valley Planning District, at 496-7173.

All visitors and residents of the Mad River Valley are encouraged to attend.

### **I. Patterns of Growth in the Mad River Valley.**

Date: Monday, September 17, 7:00 P.M.  
Place: Founders Hall (Our Lady of the Snows) Route 100, Waitsfield.

Speakers: Randall Arendt, Associate Director of the Center for Rural Massachusetts & principle author of *"Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development."*

Jeff Squires, Planning Consultant, Humstone Squires Associates & Former Director of the Mad River Valley Planning District.

### **II. Economic Growth in The Mad River Valley: Boom Bust Boom**

Date: Thursday, October 4, 7:00 P.M.

Place: Bridges Conference Room, Sugarbush Access Road, Warren.

Speaker: August St. John, Professor of Marketing and Future Studies, Long Island University & Economic Planning Consultant for Manchester, Vermont.

### **III. The Cost of Growth: Fiscal Impacts of Development**

Date: Tuesday, October 16, 7:00 P.M.

Place: Valley Players Theatre, Waitsfield

Speaker: Deborah Brighton, Municipal Finance and Planning Consultant, Ad Hoc Advocates.

### **IV. The Future of the Mad River**

Date: Thursday, November 1, 7:00 P.M.

Place: Mad River Barn, Route. 17, Fayston.

Speakers: Jack Byrne, Executive Director of the RiverWatch Network.

Phil Huffman, National Park Service.

### **V. The Cost of Growth: Housing in the Mad River Valley**

Date: Tuesday, November 13

Place: Warren Town Hall, Warren Village

Speaker: Speaker will be consultant(s) hired by MRVPD to conduct Housing Needs Assessment of the Mad River Valley.

### **VI. Rural Resource Protection in the Mad River Valley**

Date: Thursday, November 29

Place: Mad River Barn, Route 17, Fayston

Speaker: To Be Announced

*The Mad River Valley Forum series is made possible through a Special Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.*

# V • A • L • L • E • Y F O R U M

Volume One , Number One

September, 1990

## I. PATTERNS OF GROWTH IN THE MAD RIVER VALLEY

Date: Monday, September 17, 7:00 P.M.

Place: Founders Hall (Our Lady of the  
Snows) Route 100, Waitsfield.

Speakers: Randall Arendt, Associate  
Director of the Center for Rural Massachu-  
setts & principle author of *"Dealing with  
Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A  
Design Manual for Conservation and  
Development."*

Jeff Squires, Planning Consultant,  
Humstone Squires Associates & Former  
Director of the Mad River Valley Planning  
District.

**T**he Mad River Valley is well known for its  
challenging ski terrain, great restaurants,  
charming Inn's, fantastic scenery, excellent  
schools and vibrant sense of community. This  
well deserved reputation is a source of pride  
for most of the people who visit, live and work  
in the Valley.

While the Valley's many cultural and natu-  
ral resources are often celebrated, it may  
surprise some that the Valley also has a  
reputation for having one of the most  
innovative local planning programs in the  
State of Vermont. This reputation, acquired  
over the past fifteen years, is directly attrib-  
utable to the combined effort of scores of  
dedicated citizens.

Although it would be simple to rest on these  
laurels, it is important to recognize that,  
despite past efforts, the historic settlement  
patterns of the Valley have been undergoing  
significant change.

During the 1980's, the Mad River Valley  
experienced a rate of population and hous-  
ing growth higher than the corresponding  
rate for Washington County and the State of  
Vermont. Further, much of this growth  
occurred during the past five years, at a  
time when skier visits showed a steady  
decline.

This comes as a shock to many people,  
especially those in the resort business,  
because the growth which occurred was not  
the economic growth that had been antici-  
pated. While many of our business's bot-  
tom lines continued to shrink, traditionally  
rural areas of the Valley were being subdivi-  
ded and developed at a rapid pace.

The recent influx of population is likely to  
bring diversity and opportunity to the  
Valley for years to come. However, should  
the same settlement patterns which were  
occurring during the past ten years continue  
into the future, the Valley will no longer be  
a rural area with concentrated Villages.  
Rather, the open countryside and remark-  
able scenery will take on an increasingly  
suburban appearance.

Past land use and growth management  
efforts in the Valley have done a remarkable  
job of preventing, or mitigating, the worst  
impacts of development. Combined with  
the lack of pressure for large scale develop-  
ment, the Valley towns have avoided the  
experience of less fortunate, once rural, New  
England resort towns. However, the cumu-  
lative impact of dozens of small projects,  
scattered throughout the Valley, are irre-  
versibly altering the Valley's landscape.



The purpose of the first Valley Forum, Patterns of Growth in the Mad River Valley, is to learn about the growth management mechanisms currently in place in the Valley, and how and why they were developed. In addition, it is an opportunity to discuss how these mechanisms might be improved in a manner which allows for the towns to benefit from additional growth while protecting the Valley's historic settlement patterns and stunning landscape.

Providing a historical perspective regarding the Valley's growth management and land use regulatory programs will be Jeff Squires, Director of the Mad River Valley Planning program from its inception in the early 1980's until his departure in 1988 to devote full attention to Humstone Squires Associates, the planning firm he co-founded in 1986.

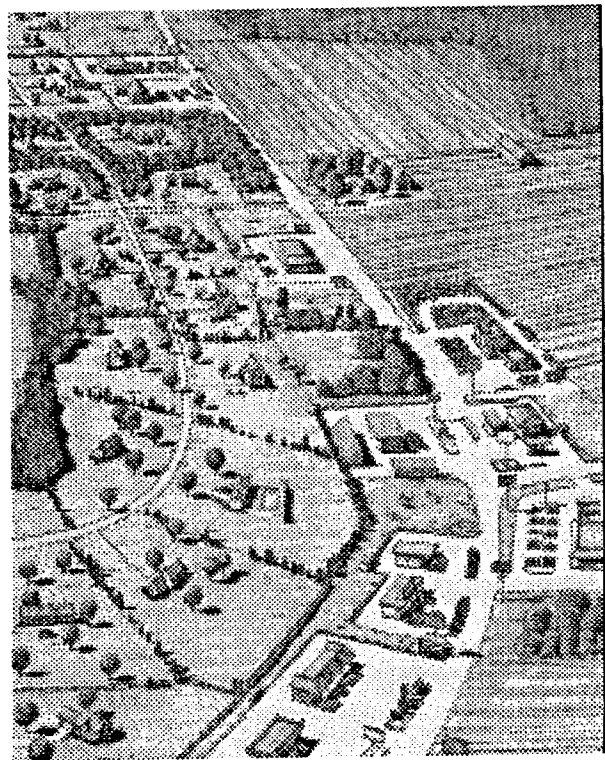
During his involvement with the Mad River Valley, Squires was instrumental in developing the Memorandum of Understanding between the Valley towns, Sugarbush, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission and the State. He was also responsible for coordinating a number of tri-town planning studies relating to transportation, sewage disposal, land use and land conservation. Since leaving the Valley, his firm has assisted such diverse Vermont towns and cities as Barre, Brattleboro, Burlington, Charlotte, Essex, Shrewsbury, and Williston to develop and enhance their respective planning programs.

In addition to Squires, Randall Arendt, Associate Director of the Center for Rural Massachusetts and principle author of the much acclaimed 1988 publication Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development, will be presenting a slide presentation promoting innovative development techniques designed to respect traditional New England development patterns.

Conventional zoning and land use regulations, according to Arendt, often foster

development patterns which are damaging to a rural town's scenic landscape. Arendt feels as though greater flexibility and attention to the unique characteristics of development sites would allow for towns to accommodate high development densities while retaining special scenic and natural resources. Arendt maintains that this not only makes sense from a conservation standpoint, but from a financial perspective as well.

One of the most striking features of Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development are the excellent graphics. Intended to graphically articulate alternative development scenarios, the series of diagrams included in the book present different examples of typical rural properties. It then provides an example of how these sites might be developed in a conventional manner, followed by an example of how they could accommodate the same development densities while preserving the scenic values and rural character of the site.

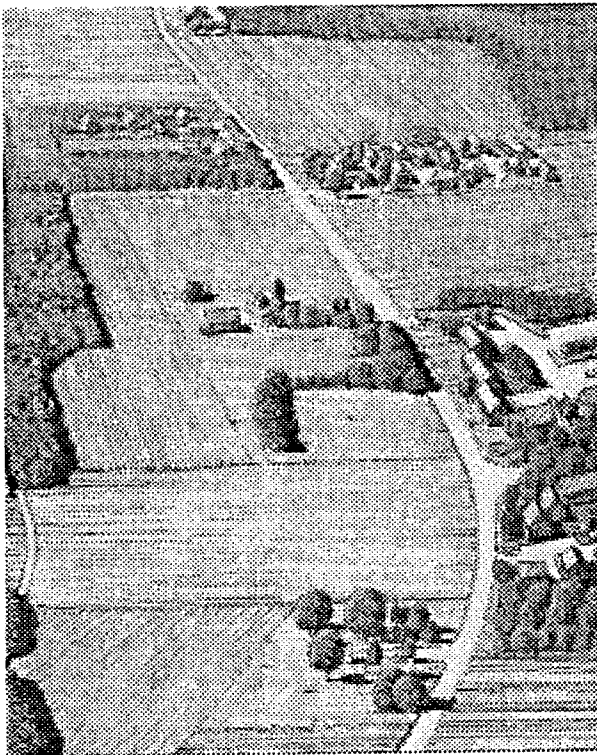


*After Conventional Development*

The example below is excerpted from the Design Manual, and presents a typical farm setting with state highway frontage. The second figure in the series depicts how the scene might be altered by a combination of conventional residential subdivision and commercial development. The third figure depicts how the site might be put to the same uses and densities while respecting traditional New England development patterns. Ideas similar to Arendt's have long been guiding principles behind the effort to manage growth and development in the Mad River Valley. These presentations will provide an opportunity to learn what has been done to regulate development in the Valley and how future growth might best be directed.

**This FORUM is the first in a series the Mad River Valley Planning District is sponsoring to discuss relevant issues affecting changes in the Valley**

These forums are designed to provide information and fresh perspective to the



*After Creative Development*

many issues relevant in the Mad River Valley. They will provide Valley residents with an opportunity to gather and discuss specific issues of concern. Presentations and discussions will then be summarized and compiled in a single document which could serve as an agenda for future action, and as a source of information to assist with future decision making.

While a list of relevant issues could go on for pages, the District has, not entirely arbitrarily, selected six topics to address. These include the cumulative impact of incremental development on the Valley's landscape; the challenges of a resort economy; conflicting demands for use of the Mad River; a lack of affordable housing for Valley residents; how growth and development affect our town's fiscal well being; and the ongoing loss of important rural resources.

All visitors and residents of the Mad River Valley are encouraged to attend.

*The Mad River Valley Forum series is made possible through a Special Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.*

Note: The cover illustration for the Valley Forum Series was included as a part of the original printing of this Forum Paper, to complete the grouping shown here which was taken from Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development.

# FORUM SUMMARY

## **I. Patterns of Growth in the Mad River Valley, Part One: History of Planning in the Mad River Valley**

**Speaker: Jeff Squires, Partner in the Consulting firm Humstone Squires Associates and former Director of the Mad River Valley Planning District.**

Planning processes in the Mad River Valley have been a model for other communities in Vermont. The characteristics of the process in the Valley, the mechanics, the approaches to dealing with change, are worthy of analysis. Some of the characteristics which have contributed to planning in the Mad River Valley are:

1. Citizens are committed to working on boards, being part of decision-making processes.
2. Selectmen are able to take a wider view. As an example, they were receptive to the growth study in 1979.
3. Willingness to tailor zoning and subdivision regulations to meet each town's needs. Innovation is built in to the planning process and makes it effective.
4. Leadership is manifested in the willingness to be creative. Planning is often equated with regulation, defining what people can and cannot do. Valley leaders have been able to imagine what the community should look like in the future, and then draw up and administer the rules. Zoning in the Valley has moved in non-regulatory directions: a willingness to find solutions for land conservation, pooling resources, finding new solutions.
5. Willingness to forge partnerships, as evidenced by the creation of the planning

district. New England towns are artificially drawn; their boundaries have no relationship to how the world works. This artificial division creates walls and limits approaches to problems. The Valley is both a natural and an economic community, and cooperation as a planning district makes sense.

6. Partnership with Sugarbush ski area: Sugarbush has been primary economic force in the Valley. The ongoing relationship with Sugarbush has been both valuable and unique. This relationship began as a constructive resolution of a dispute, as an alternative to a court fight. It has continued as an interaction between the towns and the ski area, a unique development.

7. Partnership with the Vermont Land Trust. Many communities don't see land conservation to be in their interest, a good return on investment. The Valley towns have invested time and money in non-regulatory approaches to land conservation. Conservation funds are an investment in preparing and planning for future.

This Valley Forum series is timely and important. The growth study ten years ago began by establishing a solid base of information: statistics, mapping of physical features, services, infrastructure, traffic, sewage, schools. It was an opportunity for neighbors to talk to neighbors. This insistence on establishing an information base distinguishes creative approaches to planning needs. In addition to providing information, the Forum series will help the Valley look to the future: what do we want to become; what steps do we take to achieve this?

The involvement of all Valley residents in the planning process is critical, whether in passing or an ongoing commitment.

**Speaker: Randall Arendt, associate director of the Center for Rural Massachusetts and principal author of *Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development*.**

Sooner or later, every piece of unprotected land (except wetland or floodplain) will come up for sale and will have development potential. It is possible to develop land in ways that are fair to landowners and will increase the quality of life for the people who will live there.

Development is the factor that has made Vermont charming, not the conservation of pristine wilderness, as in the Adirondack Park. The characteristics of our settlements that have drawn us here and kept us here can be described on paper; we can and should ask that our new developments reflect these characteristics.

The New England town development pattern was brought over on the Mayflower: compact development, single-family detached homes, narrow village streets, the dooryard garden, the differentiation of settlements from the surrounding countryside, town greens. The scale and proportion of these settlements made them familiar and livable.

If the past 300 years of development had proceeded with the same zoning laws that are in place in New England towns today, we would have little open space left; instead, we would have had three centuries of urban sprawl. Europe still has countryside intact, but large portions of the United States have become one vast suburb.

Rural areas make the easy mistake of adopting urban subdivision regulations. If we look for the source of the regulations, we find that they originated in undesirable places. For example, subdivision regulations in Maine are modeled on New Jersey and Long Island, and effectively recreate the same suburban development patterns. We

can learn from the experience of other municipalities in New England that have adopted conventional subdivision regulations.

We have lost the art of building towns. The traditional compact village breaks every rule in the zoning book. Pattern, scale and context are three important words that are left out of zoning ordinances. We must first study traditional towns: measure, understand, appreciate them, then go on to write appropriate guidelines and regulations. In this way, the dimensions and proportions of the town can be designed to reflect its values.

Bad zoning will destroy a town. Conventional zoning equals mandatory sprawl. To get a glimpse into the future, imagine the town built out as allowed in the existing zoning. 97% of Massachusetts is completely unprotected, i.e. zoned for sprawl. It is necessary to change zoning before zoning changes the town. Maintain scale, proportion and context in new developments. The roots of Vermont towns were nucleated settlements: clustered, detached, single family housing. In their proportions and scale, they provided a sense of place very different from the sense of undifferentiated space found in sprawl development.

When planning new developments, it is possible to maintain these values at no cost to the developer or to the selling landowner by preserving open space and requiring compact developments. The alternative, large-lot zoning, is ineffective, land-consumptive and puts landscapes at risk. A landscape is a fragile thing, it doesn't take much to ruin it. The first five percent of development can ruin fifty percent of a landscape.

Preserve open space for view, recreation, context, use. When open space is lost, wall-to-wall buildings limit recreational opportunities. Open space becomes private, and expensive (e.g. country clubs). Many developments only preserve recreational

space for frogs and twelve-year-olds, i.e. ponds and ball fields. We need to preserve views with conservation easements, permanently protected views over farm fields, etc.

Maintain livable proportions of roads, lot sizes, setbacks, and frontage through narrow country lanes, houses close to the road, larger back yards than front yards, flag lots. Design roads for people through integrated road networks, not cul-de-sacs, for buses, garbage, mail, kids.

Foot paths, bike trails are important. Narrower roads are safer, wider roads encourage higher driving speeds.

Mad River Valley development standards are probably better than average, but still do not have density standards which ensure that development is laid out to respect and reflect the relationship of development to the countryside. There should be clear standards which can be waived, if necessary. It is important to consider existing conditions before we plan: the town structure, the relationship of open areas and developed areas to each other. It is possible to plan so that developed and open areas reinforce and enhance each other. Compact development and open space conservation can offer the best of both worlds, with no cost to developer or selling landowner.

# V • A • L • L • E • Y F O R U M

Volume One , Number Two

October, 1990

## II. ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE MAD RIVER VALLEY: BOOM BUST BOOM

**Date:** Thursday, October 4; 7:00 p.m.  
**Place:** Bridges Conference Room, The Bridges, Sugarbush Access Road, Warren.  
**Speaker:** August St. John. Professor of Marketing and Future Studies, Long Island University. Economic Planning Consultant for Manchester, VT.  
**Sponsors:** Mad River Valley Planning District and the Sugarbush Chamber of Commerce

**T***his is the second in a series of six Valley Forums sponsored by the Mad River Valley Planning District to discuss relevant issues affecting change in the Mad River Valley. All Forums are free and open to the public, and are designed to provide information and fresh perspectives on the many issues challenging our future.*

Topping the list of local concerns in recent years has been the continued economic viability of the Mad River Valley. Several winters of poor weather combined with the effects of declining economies throughout New England has exposed the fragility of our tourist-based economy. In a study recently completed by the Mad River Valley Planning District, the decline of our winter tourist industry, despite growth in many other economic sectors, was well documented. While other economic growth is welcomed by most Valley residents, winter tourism remains the bread and butter for most local businesses and its decline has far reaching implications for everyone in the Valley.

The purpose of the second Valley Forum,

Economic Growth in the Mad River Valley, is to provide a starting point for discussion about the valley's economic future. The speaker will be August St. John, a Manchester, Vermont resident and professor of Marketing and Future Studies at Long Island University. St. John has lectured nationally and internationally on community change and development, and has recently returned from a year teaching marketing and tourism at Zhongshai University in Canton, China. St. John has caused a stir in recent months with his unabashed and often gloomy predictions for the state of Vermont and regions within it.

St. John first received statewide notoriety for his analysis of the cycles of economic growth in the Manchester area, which offer many lessons for the Mad River Valley. Based on a five-year study of the history of development in Manchester, St. John suggests that the town can no longer support an elite recreation and tourist-based economy because over-development has destroyed the special character that originally attracted visitors. Because business ownership had generally passed out of residents' hands, the original reasons residents welcomed visitors are gone. Tension and hostility within the community are high as battle lines are drawn between growth and anti-growth forces, and the area must resort to the "creative trucking" of busloads of less affluent tourists to replace lost revenue.

St. John predicts that in the near future, Manchester residents will see:

- an increase in mobile-home parks
- more store-front arcades and amusement facilities



- a sports arena
- an amusement park complex
- a gambling casino

The severity of Manchester's current predicament is its own fault, according to St. John. He cites two causes: more interest in the "quick dollar" than service to customers; and the lack of planning or guidance for growth. Without planning, development took on a momentum of its own. Development decisions were not controlled by the character of Manchester. Instead, development decisions have **shaped** the character of Manchester.

A series of economic predictions for other parts of Vermont have kept St. John in the headlines in the past year. St. John has been called an alarmist by some ("Dr. Doom and Gloom"); others have strongly criticized his assumptions and accused him of pushing a hidden agenda.

St. John has predicted that the Rutland area will experience an economic boom because of downtown revitalization efforts, the new high school and proposed regional mall, which combined will bring millions of dollars into the area for contractors, lawyers and real estate people. The mall has been challenged by the Vermont Natural Resources Council on environmental grounds. St. John, on the other hand, told the Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce, "If it comes down to jobs or the environment, let the environment suffer a little."

In Burlington, St. John forecasts increasing

economic overextension, the result of overly generous social services and the continuing influx of the homeless.

For the State of Vermont, St. John was an early forecaster of a budget deficit and state-wide recession. While acknowledging the effect on Vermont of the declining economies of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, St. John also blames anti-tourist attitudes within the state for the downturn.

He cites room and meals tax hikes, cuts in the bicentennial budget and cost-cutting measures closing state parks. To off-set these anti-tourist attitudes, St. John has counseled the state and individual regions to take actions to boost tourism and to foster state-wide a polite and welcoming attitude toward all tourists, not just the wealthy.

On Thursday, St. John will discuss many of his theories relating to the different development cycles common to small resort based towns, and will discuss the outlook for the ski industry in Vermont. In addition to St. John, Susan Easley, President of the Sugarbush Chamber of Commerce, and Judd Babcock, Chamber Representative to the Mad River Valley Planning District Steering Committee, will be on hand to place St. John's comments in a Valley context, and to discuss what actions might be taken locally to improve our economic outlook.

*The Mad River Valley Forum series is made possible through a Special Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.*

# FORUM

## SUMMARY

### II. Economic Growth in the Mad River Valley: Boom Bust Boom

**Speaker:** August St. John, Professor of Marketing and Future Studies at Long Island University. Professor St. John recently completed a study of the cycles of economic growth in the Manchester area.

The Manchester, Vermont area has been over-developed, and the special character of the area that first attracted tourists has been destroyed. Manchester finds that it can no longer support an economy based on "elite" recreation and tourism, and must reach out to a different type of visitor: the shoppers and day-trippers. Local residents no longer welcome the influx of visitors because ownership of tourist businesses has passed out of their hands. Tension and hostility are high as the community is divided between growth and anti-growth forces.

In the near future, the Manchester area will see an increase in mobile home parks, more store-front arcades and amusement facilities, a sports arena, an amusement park complex and a gambling casino.

Manchester might have avoided its current predicament with more careful planning, allowing the character of the area to control development, rather than permitting development to shape the character of Manchester. St. John also faults Manchester businesses for poor customer service, which will drive away business in a slow economy. Only excellent customer service will keep some businesses alive during the next few years of recession.

In 1991-1992 New England will experience an economic recession, a period in which many businesses will not survive. According to St. John, 1995 will be the first year to see growth in the region's economy.

There is an immediate need for strong pro-tourist actions, from the individual to the state level. He cited increases in the rooms and meals tax, cuts in the bicentennial budget, and state park closings as examples of an official anti-tourist attitude, which should be changed to one that is warm and welcoming to all visitors.

### Discussion and Questions

**Sugarbush Chamber of Commerce** Susan Easley, President of the Sugarbush Chamber of Commerce described the Chamber's current efforts to draw new businesses to the Valley, and plans for training programs in customer service and marketing. A newly-formed Task Force on Economic Development will be addressing growth and development issues in the Valley.

**Service** Some forum participants commented that customer-service attitudes in the Valley have been excellent. Others remarked that there is always room for improvement; additional training can be help to raise the awareness of business owners and employees, and renew a Valley-wide commitment to service.

**Planning** There was some discussion on how to develop a broadly-based tourist market to continue to attract both middle- and high-income visitors. Some suggested that the Valley cater more to students with low-cost accommodations, counting on their returning with families and higher incomes later in life. Questions were also raised about the relationship between growth and a healthy economy. Some wondered whether continued growth is even feasible. Is it possible for the Valley to have a healthy economy without growth?

**Conservation** Several participants commented that conservation has economic importance, preserving the character that draws visitors from congested urban areas.

# V • A • L • L • E • Y F O R U M

*Volume One , Number Three*

*October, 1990*

## **III. THE COST OF GROWTH**

**Date:** Tuesday, October 16, 7:00 P.M.

**Place:** Valley Players Theatre, Route 100,  
Waitsfield Village

**Speaker:** Deborah Brighton, Municipal  
Finance and Planning Consultant; Partner,  
Ad Hoc Advocates.

***This is the third in a series of six Valley Forums sponsored by the Mad River Valley Planning District to discuss relevant issues affecting change in the Mad River Valley. All forums are free and open to the public, and are designed to provide information and fresh perspectives on the many issues challenging our future.***

According to official calculations, Fayston, Waitsfield and Warren are "rich" towns — they have enough property wealth to pay for government services with tax rates which are low. Yet many residents are sensing that this wealth might be exaggerated or dissipating as property tax bills increase faster than salaries. Residents are also wondering how the Valley will fare in the future, and what they might expect from various types of growth.

A recent Mad River Planning District study confirms what many have suspected: stagnant appreciation of vacation homes and a shifting tax burden. While the Valley's population, and the number of year-round housing units increased substantially during the 1980's, the number of vacation units leveled off after 1984. School enrollments were low in the early 1980's, and vacation property was an important and increasing component of the Grand List. Recently,

school enrollments have swelled rapidly, the vacation component of the Grand List has stagnated, and the tax burden is shifting to residences.

The third in a series of forums sponsored by the Mad River Valley Planning District will address the fiscal impacts of growth: the costs of development reflected in the rising costs of municipal and school services, and the resulting rise in tax rates. The speaker will be Deborah Brighton, a municipal finance and planning consultant with Ad Hoc Advocates in Salisbury, Vermont. Ms. Brighton has examined the taxing capacities of the Valley towns, relative to each other and to the state as a whole. Some of her conclusions are summarized below.

The fiscal health of a community is commonly measured by the "effective tax rate", or the tax rate a town would have if all the property were appraised at 100 percent of fair market value. Using this measure, all three Valley towns are "rich", having tax rates well below the state average.

However, other ways of measuring tax burden are important to consider. For instance, the amount of taxes paid on the average house offers a different perspective regarding the wealth of the Valley. Also, the ability of residents to pay their taxes can be measured by comparing residential tax bills with household income within a community, again providing a different measure of Valley wealth.

Using these three measurements, the Valley towns are still better off than most Vermont towns, but not as "rich" as rumored. How-

ever, although taxes are still low, they are rising more rapidly than in the rest of the state. The most obvious explanation is that the school-age population is rising rapidly in the Valley while the Grand List is not. Fiscally, the Valley towns are becoming more and more "average".

According to Brighton, the two patterns are actually one and the same. When there is commercial growth, people will follow, and municipal services will increase. Because property taxes pay for municipal services to people — not to trees or land or wildlife — taxes will rise as the population increases. A recent analysis of taxes in Vermont showed that tax bills are larger where the population is larger.

In June, 1990, Brighton was involved in a project with the Mad River Valley Rural Resource Committee to better understand the fiscal implications of conservation on town taxes. At that time, Brighton demonstrated that the costs of development are often greater than the costs of conservation. Although houses pay more taxes than open land, they do not, as a rule, pay enough to cover their costs. In Vermont, the average-value house in the average town would need to pay nearly a century's property taxes to compensate the town for the cost of educating two children from kindergarten through high school. While open space pays

less in taxes, it does not crowd classrooms, tear up roads, create air pollution, lower the water table, produce sewage, etc. Open space, says Brighton, has been subsidizing residential property for years.

So what does this say about our future? The forum will look at some hypothetical growth scenarios and estimate the possible effect on taxes. It will address how the Valley compares with typical Vermont towns, as well as with such resort areas as Stowe and Manchester? Most importantly, it will address the types of growth which will best serve Valley towns fiscal well being.

These forums are designed to provide information and fresh perspectives on several issues of importance to the Valley. They provide Valley residents with an opportunity to gather and discuss specific issues of concern. Presentations and discussions will then be summarized and compiled in a single document which could serve as an agenda for future action, and as a source of information to assist with future decision making.

All visitors and residents of the Mad River Valley are encouraged to attend.

*The Mad River Valley Forum series is made possible through a Special Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.*

# FORUM SUMMARY

## III. The Costs of Growth: Fiscal Impacts of Development

**Speaker: Deborah Brighton, Municipal Finance and Planning Consultant with Ad Hoc Advocates.**

According to the State education aid formula, the Mad River Valley towns are "gold towns", averaging over \$400,000 of property value per student. But tax rates here are rising faster than in the state as a whole; in recent years the growth of the Grand List has slowed, while demand for services, especially schools, has grown. Consequently, from a tax and fiscal point of view, the Valley towns are becoming more average. What does this mean for planning? This forum examined some possible development strategies, both residential and commercial, and evaluated the potential impact of affordable housing, population growth and open-space preservation on tax rates.

Although the Valley towns are still rich by State standards, they are losing ground. Between 1985 and 1989, (constant dollars), each Valley town lost property value, while Vermont as a whole gained. Commercial and vacation property has fared the worst, meaning increased tax burdens on residential homes.

While the effective tax rate in the Valley in 1989 was still below that of Vermont, the tax base increase has slowed down relative to rest of state (1985-1989 equalized grand list increase: Valley-22%; Vermont-68%).

At the same time, the size of school-age population is increasing: 1985-1988, 12% average increase in the Valley, compared to 2% statewide. Why is the Valley rate so much higher? The increase reflects changing demographics in the Valley: early resort

developments attract single young people, families move in later. A larger percentage of school children in the Valley are in elementary school than in the state as a whole. This means that Valley school budgets are increasing at a time when real estate values are falling. The Valley is catching up to the rest of the state, becoming more average.

These two trends, decreasing property values and increasing school costs, have been leading to higher taxes in the Valley towns. In order to lower taxes, many people think of increasing the tax base through some type of development, residential or commercial. Different types of development will have differing effects on the tax base, land use, and growth of the town. It is important to consider the impacts of development before it is too late.

The effects of residential development on the tax-base:

**Average-priced housing** In the average Vermont town, residential developments for families with school-age children will never pay their way in property taxes. On average statewide, it would take 100 years of taxes on the average R-1 house in the state to repay the cost of K-12 education for two children, even with state educational subsidies. In the Valley towns, with lower tax rates, and no state aid, the discrepancy is even greater.

**Affordable housing** Some people are concerned that affordable (i.e. lower-value) homes would place an undue burden upon other tax payers. The truth is that only the most expensive houses (\$500,000-\$1,400,000) pay their way in school taxes. The difference between average-priced homes and affordable housing or mobile homes is negligible.

**High-value second homes** One possible tax-lowering strategy would be to increase the number of high-value second homes. Stratton is an extreme example of this type of selective development. Stratton has the lowest property taxes in the state (\$10.00 school tax per 100,000 home) because Stratton has few year-round homes, and few children. Stratton town has 49 houses and 129 people. Stratton's neighbors, however, have had to absorb the costs of Stratton's development:

Price of year-round homes	
Stratton	Wardsboro
\$200,000	\$70,000
New jobs 1980-88	
380	30
Average tax bill	
\$299	\$1200

The Mad River Valley, by contrast, works together. No one town picks up the pieces for economic development in another. The effects of commercial development on the tax-base:

**Stowe and Manchester** These towns have twice as much commercial property as the Valley. They are also considered gold towns, but the property taxes on an average house are higher than in the state as a whole. This is due to inflated housing values and bigger budgets. The police budget in Stowe is \$400,000, in Manchester: \$500,000, compared to \$40,000 in the Valley. The greater the commercial development, the more money is spent on police and other services. The towns with the least commer-

cial or industrial property have the lowest tax rates.

Tax bills also get larger as towns grow in population. It is very important to carefully consider the commercial development you want to encourage in your town.

The effects of land conservation on the tax-base:

How does land conservation affect the tax base? It costs the town less than building houses.

In summary, commercial/industrial growth does not generally lower taxes. Affordable housing/conservation efforts do not raise taxes as much as people think. Towns have options, they do not have to let planning be driven by the tax rate.

## Discussion and Questions:

**Community planning vs tax-base planning** Several forum participants asked whether the goal of planning is to build communities or reduce taxes? Ms. Brighton suggested that the goal is a balance—a good community we can pay for. Planning decisions should not be driven by the tax base, but consideration should be given to how the tax burden will affect the town. For instance, the cost of housing can drive low and moderate income people out of town, thereby changing the demographics and the social and political interactions within the town. Looking solely at the tax base can distort decision making.



# V • A • L • L • E • Y F O R U M

*Volume One , Number Four*

*November, 1990*

## **IV. THE FUTURE OF THE MAD RIVER**

**Date:** Thursday, Nov.1, 1990 , 7 P.M.

**Place:** Mad River Barn, Rte. 17, Fayston

**Speaker:** Jack Byrne, Executive Director of the River Watch Network

**T***he Mad River is an important part of our lives. Valley residents and visitors use the Mad River and its tributaries for fishing, swimming, canoeing, and a multitude of other activities. For the past six years the Mad River Watch Program has been monitoring the water quality of the river and making this information available to the public to help them gauge the suitability of the river for recreational uses.*

This forum will feature a summary of the data gathered by the Mad River Watch Program since 1985. The discussion will also cover some of the more pressing water quality issues facing Valley residents and what might be done to begin addressing them. This Forum will also include an announcement of a new organization being formed by citizens of the Mad River Valley. This organization, currently known as Friends of the Mad River, is being formed to provide a means by which a broad-minded group of citizens can work to insure the long term health.

The speaker for this forum will be Jack Byrne who is the Executive Director of the River Watch Network (RWN). River Watch Network is a national, non-profit organization which grew up in Vermont. RWN was founded in 1987 by Mr. Byrne and is modeled after a successful citizen-led effort to clean up the Ottawaquechee River which

began in 1967. RWN assists local groups who want to protect and improve the water quality of their rivers. RWN is currently working with 28 groups, in 12 states.

The Mad River Watch Program is conducted by the volunteer efforts of Valley citizens and Harwood Union High School teachers and students. It is privately funded and has relied on the generosity of Valley residents and businesses since its inception. The goals of the Mad River Watch Program are to: provide useful information about existing and potential water quality problems to landowners and to state, regional, and local officials and to work with them to improve and protect water quality; enable citizens and students to evaluate water quality and act responsibly to improve it; promote greater awareness of the importance of the Mad River to our quality of life and local action to protect it.

The presentation of the data collected by the Mad River Watch Program consists of three parts. First a summary of fecal coliform data collected at 38 sites throughout the Mad River basin between 1985 and 1990. This data is most relevant to the question of whether the Mad River is suitable for water contact recreation like swimming. Second, in 1988, trained volunteers walked 50 miles of the river and its tributaries and documented water quality or habitat impacts and any related land-use activities. They also identified areas of notable beauty and those that appeared to be good fish habitat; Third, a 1988 survey of the aquatic life from twelve sites throughout the watershed. The organisms that inhabit the streambed, such as the larvae of aquatic insects, crustaceans like snails and clams,

and others are good indicators of the overall health of the river ecosystem.

Some other water quality issues which will be discussed are failing on-site septic systems; storm-water runoff; stream sedimentation; "Non-point" sources of pollution: fertilizer, animal manure, runoff from roads and parking lots.

This forum will provide a more specific view of the health of the River than has ever been available before. All visitors and residents of the Mad River Valley are encouraged to attend.

*The Mad River Valley Forum series is made possible through a Special Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.*

# FORUM

## SUMMARY

### IV. The Future of the Mad River

**Speaker:** Jack Byrne, Executive Director, River Watch Network. The River Watch Network is a national, non-profit organization that helps local groups organize and conduct water quality protection programs for rivers. One of the goals of River Watch is to involve citizens and students in monitoring and protection. The Mad River Watch Program receives technical assistance, training, and direction from the River Watch Network. Mad River Watch has conducted water quality tests in the Mad River and its tributaries for six years thanks to a tremendous volunteer effort of citizens and students.

This forum summarized the results of three water quality studies of the Mad River performed from 1985 through 1990 by the Mad River Watch Program:

1. A 1988 survey of aquatic life from 12 sites throughout the watershed. The organisms that inhabit the streambed, such as the larvae of aquatic insects, or crustaceans like snails and clams, are good indicators of the overall health of the river ecosystem. The data collected provide a semi-quantitative look at the health of an important part of the Mad River ecosystem - one that trout and other fish species rely on for food.

2. A 1988 inventory of almost 50 miles of the river and its tributaries. Trained volunteers walked these streams and documented water quality or habitat impacts and related land-use activities. They also identified areas of notable beauty and those that appeared to be good fish or wildlife habitat. The inventory is a good starting point for initiatives to protect and improve water quality and aquatic life habitats.

3. Fecal coliform data collected at 37 sites throughout the Mad River basin between 1985 and 1990. Fecal coliform are bacteria which serve as indicators of the presence of fecal matter, such as from a failing septic system or animal manure. This data is most relevant to the question of whether the Mad River is suitable for water contact recreation like swimming.

### Study(s) Conclusions

All three studies indicate a significant, cumulative impact on the lower reaches of the Mad River, from Waitsfield to the Winooski. This is probably the result of more intensive land use, including on-site sewage disposal, agricultural use, livestock pasturing and stormwater runoff from more developed areas. This is also true of the tributaries which drain the most intensively developed lands around the Sugarbush ski area.

The inventory data shows that erosion and sedimentation, both natural and man-made, have a big impact in many places along the river. Stream-bed sedimentation can destroy the prime habitat of trout and other sensitive aquatic organisms. Erosion and countermeasures (rip-rap) can remove stream-side vegetation, raising the water temperature above the optimal temperature for these same sensitive aquatic organisms. Debris and trash was frequently noted along the river and its tributaries. This problem can be easily addressed by public education efforts and focused river cleanups.

The most extensive set of data collected by the Mad River Watch Program is from approximately 1000 fecal coliform readings taken at 38 sites along the river over six years. Fecal coliform is a bacteria found in

the intestines of mammals, and indicate the presence of human or animal feces. The standard for recreational uses like swimming, fishing or canoeing is 200 fecal coliform organisms per 100 milliliters (less than half a cup) of water.

The results of the Mad River Watch fecal coliform samples of the Mad River show that nine out of seventeen sites along the Mad River main stem (six of these are popular swimming areas) have exceeded the maximum recreational coliform concentration at least twice during the six years of sampling. The majority of these sites are located in Waitsfield village and downstream to the Winooski. Seven of the twenty tributary sampling locations showed excessive coliform levels.

Possible sources of fecal coliform contamination are failing sewage systems, runoff from barnyards, runoff from streets and gutters which contain fecal matter, or the presence of beavers, other aquatic mammals, or waterfowl. At certain sites, however, there is strong evidence indicating a single source of contamination from a failing septic system, or a concentrated source of manure. It should be possible for towns and state agencies to determine the source of pollution at these sites and act to eliminate it.

### **Discussion and Questions:**

#### **The effects of development in the watershed**

The Mad River level seems to be lower than it used to be twenty years ago. If this is true, is it due to the Moretown dam, sedimentation, gravel accumulation or some other reason? It may be that tributaries do not run as well as they used to. Developed watersheds show sharp peaks of flow, whereas forested watersheds absorb and release water more slowly and evenly.

**Have we passed a point of acceptable density as far as impact on River quality is concerned?**— The study data indicates that

we have. No town in Vermont has a zoning ordinance that deals with density in addressing pollution control issues. Some towns in Massachusetts have gone to addressing density.

**Are rivers cleaner today than they were twenty years ago?**— Algal growth is one example of a water quality problem that has certainly increased in the last 15 years. When the State of Vermont started closing down straight pipes of sewage into the river in the mid-sixties, many rivers saw major improvements. This unmasked a second tier of hidden pollution problems: sedimentation, pH, etc., which are harder to manage.

**How much of the fecal coliform contamination is attributable to animal waste?** At least one barnyard drains to the river. It is possible to do another test which would give a better indication of whether it is more human than animal. However, the data seems to indicate that certain chronic sources are straight pipes or failing septic systems.

**Are pesticides or other chemicals affecting the River?**— There is a lot of data on the toxic effects of the golf course. It is difficult and expensive to look for organic chemicals, but it is possible.

**Soil moisture content in the higher elevations?** Do not know of any studies, but in all probability, devegetation leads to lower moisture content. It is likely there will be an impact on the watershed. Sugarbush has 24-hour charts on flow in Clay and Rice brooks. These show a large daily fluctuation in flow. There is no data on moisture in the soil.

**Correlation of fecal coliform counts to the presence of real pathogens?**—Fecal coliform bacteria are considered indicators of the presence of pathogens. The presumption is that 200 organisms or greater per 100 milliliters means a higher probability that pathogens that cause dysentery, typhoid and many gastrointestinal illnesses are present.

There is a debate over whether fecal coliform or e. coli, another intestinal bacterium is the better indicator.

**The drainage of Blueberry Lake** The drainage of ponds without regard to trapping silt can cause local damage. This is also true when beaver dams break. When farm ponds are drained, they can release phosphorus into the river, and raise the water temperature.

**Friends of the Mad River:**

Kinny Connell spoke briefly concerning the formation of the Friends of the Mad River, a

non-profit who's purpose is to provide a means for a coordinated approach to protecting river resources. Friends of the Mad River hopes to help Valley towns take advantage of assistance available through the Wild and Scenic study process to prepare a local river conservation plan. FOMR also hopes to promote active local participation in protecting and improving this important resource. Good planning and increased awareness of the river may help make regulatory protection less necessary. Local control of the conservation process can help us make the river what we want it to be.

# V • A • L • L • E • Y F O R U M

*Volume One , Number Five*

*November, 1990*

## **V. HOUSING IN THE MAD RiVER VALLEY**

**Date:** Tuesday, November 13, 7:00 P.M.  
**Place:** Warren Town Hall, Warren Village

**Speakers:** Doug Kennedy, Housing  
Specialist, DJK Associates.  
Beth Humstone, Planning Consultant,  
Humstone Squires Associates.

***This is the fifth in a series of six Valley Forums sponsored by the Mad River Valley Planning District to discuss relevant issues affecting change in the Mad River Valley. All forums are free and open to the public, and are designed to provide information and fresh perspectives on the many issues challenging our future.***

In December, 1988, a group of concerned Mad River Valley residents and community leaders, troubled over the apparent housing crisis in the Valley, called a meeting to discuss housing issues. Induced by a conceptual proposal by a prominent developer to create a large number of affordable housing units off the Lincoln Gap Road, nearly one hundred people turned out to voice their concerns, frustrations and anxieties regarding the Valley's housing market.

Many words were spoken at that meeting and many subsequent meetings. However, the initial energy soon dissipated as the difficulty of quantifying the Valley's housing problems became obvious, and the lack of accomplishments became discouraging. However, those meetings did yield a num-

ber of important results.

Largely due to the attention of the Valley Reporter, these meetings provided a focus on housing issues. This focus served to convince many people that the "theys" who were in need of affordable housing were not some faceless, shiftless threat to the community, but were our neighbors, friends and co-workers.

With the assistance of many Valley residents and business's, a non-profit organization, the Mad River Valley Housing Coalition, was formed. The Coalition has continued to meet and, quietly, has been involved in a number of projects, including negotiation with the Farmers Home Administration to obtain assistance to create elderly housing in the Valley; active representation on the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission committee preparing the Regional Housing Plan; efforts to couple affordable housing with conservation efforts in the Valley; and working with the three towns comprising the Mad River Valley Planning District to secure funding from Sugarbush and the Vermont Community Development Program to conduct a Housing Needs Assessment and Housing Plan for the Valley.

The November 13 Forum will be an opportunity to discuss the Housing Needs Assessment and Housing Plan. Doug Kennedy, the consultant hired to conduct the needs assessment, will be on hand to present his preliminary findings. Kennedy has been gathering a range of data and information, and will discuss recent housing trends in the Valley, the current housing market, and



the economic and demographic makeup of the Valley and how it relates to housing affordability. Kennedy will also offer some insights into the future outlook for housing in the Valley.

Also speaking at the Nov. 13 Forum will be Beth Humstone, Partner in Humstone Squires Planning Consulting firm, who will be assisting to take the Valley's Needs Assessment and develop a program of strategies for addressing those needs. She will be presenting a range of alternative strategies and programs which might be appropriate for the Valley.

This meeting will be an important opportunity for residents of the Mad River Valley to participate in planning for the Valley's future. A range of options exist for addressing the Valley's housing needs, and each of those options has different implications for Valley residents. By providing input and

direction early in the planning process, we have an opportunity to decide on a set of policies and programs that are effective and acceptable to everyone concerned for the Valley's future.

These forums are designed to provide information and fresh perspectives on several issues of importance to the Valley. They provide Valley residents with an opportunity to gather and discuss specific issues of concern. Presentations and discussions will then be summarized and compiled in a single document which could serve as an agenda for future action, and as a source of information to assist with future decision making. All visitors and residents of the Mad River Valley are encouraged to attend.

*The Mad River Valley Forum series is made possible through a Special Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.*

# FORUM SUMMARY

## V. Housing in the Mad River Valley

**Speakers:** Doug Kennedy, planning consultant with DJK Associates; Beth Humstone, Partner, Humstone Squires Planning Consultants. This Forum presented the preliminary findings of the Mad River Valley Housing Needs Assessment Study Plan and outlined some potential strategies for meeting housing needs in the Valley. Housing Needs Assessment: Doug Kennedy

The Housing Needs Assessment is a profile of Valley populations and housing needs. It is designed to provide quantitative answers to questions about available housing stock, the demographics of the Valley towns, local and regional economies and employment, and the demand for housing among different age groups and income levels.

**Preliminary Findings:** Median family income in the Valley has risen since 1980, but average monthly housing payments have grown substantially (partly due to high interest). Consequently there is a gap between what people make and what housing costs.

**Housing stock growth:** From 1980-90, the Valley's housing stock increased by 857 units, 306 year-round units, 551 seasonal units. The rate of growth in housing units has leveled off since 1987. Property values: Average R-1 homes had real property value increase of 10% Valley-wide 1980-1990. Homes in Fayston had a 1% increase over the same period, Warren 2%, Waitsfield 24%. Warren and Fayston values increased during the first half of the decade, and decreased afterward.

**Sales prices:** From 1987-1990, 114 properties were purchased by Vermont residents, 79 by out-of-state residents. The two most

common price ranges were: \$80,000-\$100,000 and over \$160,000.

**Rents:** The average of all rents in the Valley, based on 200 recent listings of advertised units, is \$514. Single room rents averaged \$200; one-bedroom condominiums/\$500; all one-bedroom units/\$418; two bedrooms/\$534; three bedrooms/\$718; four bedrooms: \$1000.

**Demand for housing (population profile):** Between 1980 and 1990, the Valley population increased by 500 persons. The projected increase between 1990 and 1995 is 225 persons, a slight slowing in the population growth rate. The number of households in the Valley increased by 280 from 1980-1990. The rate of household increase is greater than the rate of population increase, because the average size of households is decreasing.

### Distribution of income in the Valley:

	1990	1995
\$0-14999	20%	16%
\$15-34999	35%	27%
\$35,000	45%	57%

The distribution of low-income households in the Valley is unusual. Typically, more than half of low-income households fall into the oldest age bracket. In the Valley, they are more evenly distributed among all age brackets:

	1990	1995
15-34 yrs	30.2%	29%
35-54	34.9%	37.9%
55	34.9%	33%

**Summary:** The two groups needing housing most are elderly of low and moderate income and the 20-35 age group with low and moderate income who want to buy a first home, or rent.

## **Strategies for addressing the Valley's housing needs: Beth Humstone**

The Mad River Valley Housing Coalition and the three Valley towns are working on developing a plan for affordable housing. The problems in providing affordable housing in the Valley are unique, but the planning resources and mechanisms are exceptional as well. Public input is invited, at this meeting and at public meetings scheduled with Planning Commissions and Selectmen, to help select strategies to address housing needs.

The first step in addressing affordable housing needs is to make choices and set priorities. For example, which populations are in greatest need and what strategies will be most effective and acceptable? The list of potential strategies is long, and includes different types of housing policies, funding, cost reduction, developer incentives, public-private partnerships, land conservation and development strategies. Some strategies that may be most applicable in the Valley are described below.

**Public Funds:** The Valley Housing Coalition is currently pursuing Farmer's Home Administration funding for senior citizen housing in the Valley. Public funds are relatively scarce (\$1.5 million available state-wide), and competition for them is heavy. A high degree of community involvement and support are key in obtaining public funding for housing.

**Mobile home parks:** A new state law gives park residents the first option to purchase parks that are up for sale.

**Infill housing for higher density in selected areas:** Warren Village, Irasville and Waitsfield Village may be locations where higher density housing is appropriate. Clearly, water and sewage capacity must also be addressed if higher density housing is considered.

**Conversion of large homes:** Often the

character of a community is defined by its large, historic structures. With sufficient sewer and water capacity, larger homes can be converted into smaller apartments. Fayston has an ordinance which supports such conversions.

**Shared housing:** Project Share (Vermont Council on Aging) promotes the conversion of single-family homes into housing for elderly occupants with shared kitchen facilities.

**Conversion of hotels and other tourist facilities:** Closed or under-utilized tourist housing may be converted into housing for the elderly with health care and other facilities.

**Land conservation:** When large parcels of land are set aside for conservation, small sections may be appropriate for affordable housing development.

**Public-private partnerships:** The Sugarbush Memorandum of Understanding is an example of a cooperative approach to meeting housing needs. In order to prevent ski area expansion from placing an unreasonable burden on Valley towns, the impact of each stage of expansion relative to employee housing needs is carefully assessed.

## **Discussion and Questions:**

**Housing needs assessment:** Comments and questions from the forum participants were critical of various aspects of the study and made recommendations for improvement. Some questioned what measure was used to quantify affordable housing needs so that Valley towns can know when they have satisfied the need. It was suggested that addressing only income ignores individual needs and preferences in housing. How can we truly find what people need and how large the problem is? Further, some thought it irrelevant to talk about strategies before quantifying needs. There was concern that the study was too general, that it would not provide useful information. The consultants

were urged to talk to more Valley residents. A housing needs survey was conducted in 1988; was this used in the study? It was suggested that the consultants should talk to real estate people to get a sense of affordable housing eligibility.

**Affordable Housing in the Valley:** Several members of the audience asked about the "affordability gap": housing costs in the Valley have increased at a faster rate than incomes. Is it possible that if we look at different 10-year window, or at the last 20 or 30 years, that we may see a different pattern? Some of those present argued that comparisons of income and housing costs based strictly on average house values are artificial. The average house in the Valley today is much larger, of higher quality, and

consequently more expensive than ten years ago. Furthermore, looking only at R-1 sales figures gives an incomplete picture; leaving out mobile homes, transfers within a family, building one's own house, or smaller lots.

**Strategies:** Some participants wondered whether we should focus on raising incomes in the Valley rather than making housing cheaper. It was suggested that banks should reinvest in local communities. The Housing Coalition is looking into existing programs.

**Out-migration of Valley residents:** Is there data available on out-migration, especially of low income residents? There is historical data available from Sugarbush on where employees live. The Planning District also has some surveys of other employers.

# V • A • L • L • E • Y F O R U M

*Volume One , Number Six*

*December, 1990*

## **VI. RURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION IN THE MAD RIVER VALLEY**

**Date:** Thursday, December 13, 7:00 P.M.

**Place:** Mad River Barn, Rte 17, Fayston.

**Speakers:** Virginia Farley, Central  
Vermont Director, Vermont Land Trust.  
Austin Cleaves, Chairman, East Montpelier  
Board of Selectmen.

***This is the last in a series of six Valley Forums sponsored by the Mad River Valley Planning District to discuss relevant issues affecting change in the Mad River Valley. All forums are free and open to the public, and are designed to provide information and fresh perspectives on the many issues challenging our future.***

The towns in the Mad River Valley have been fortunate in that past development, with few exceptions, has occurred in a relatively controlled, concentrated fashion. This good fortune is due in large part to thoughtful growth management decisions on the part of the towns and the lack of recent expansion activity at the major local ski area. Because of these factors, much of the Valley's rural character and aesthetic charm remains today.

Unfortunately, recent trends reflect an increasing suburbanization of the countryside. This is occurring as a result of the incremental subdivision of large tracts of undeveloped land, often times prime agricultural and scenic open lands. While local and state regulation can be an effective means of minimizing the adverse impacts of large scale development,

it is more difficult to address scattered, incremental development through regulation. Therefore, if the ongoing erosion of the Valley's rural character is to be halted, alternatives to regulatory methods of land preservation are necessary.

As a response to the growing concern over the loss of the Valley's rural character, the Mad River Valley Planning District initiated the Rural Resource Protection Program. The Resource Program will serve as the sixth, and final, topic of the Valley Forum series.

The Rural Resource Program, a cooperative effort between the Planning District and the Vermont Land Trust, was initiated with the designation of the Planning District as a Certified Local Government (CLG) in 1987. The first project undertaken as a CLG was the Rural Resource Protection Plan, which was completed by the Land Trust in September, 1988. Funded through grants from the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, the Preservation Trust of Vermont and the Claneil Foundation, the Rural Resource Protection Plan was an attempt to catalog the character defining elements of the Valley's rural landscape, and provide strategies for preserving that character.

Recent activities of the Rural Resource Protection Program have focused on the implementation of the policies set forth in the Rural Resource Plan. These efforts have included:

- A broad historic preservation program which resulted in the nomination of

Warren Village and a Rural/Agricultural Historic District in Waitsfield to the National Register of Historic Places in July, 1989, as well as the nomination of the Knoll Farm in Fayston;

- The creation of the Mad River Recreation Pathway Committee, which is pursuing a footpath along the Mad River, was first proposed in the Protection Plan;
- A publication entitled *"Archeology in Vermont's Mad River Valley from Paleo-Indian Times to the Present"* was funded through a grant from the Division for Historic Preservation;
- The establishment of a Conservation Project Development Fund, through a grant from the Fund for Vermont's Third Century, to assist with costs associated with land saving actions;
- The development of a rural resource data base and Rural Resource Partnership Program intended to initiate an ongoing dialogue with owners of important resource properties in the Valley, and to provide information and assistance to them regarding voluntary conservation and development options for their properties.
- Through the efforts of the Vermont Land Trust, and the Town of Warren's Conservation Fund, over 700 acres of Resource properties have been permanently protected in the Valley.

Integral to the success of the Rural resource Program is the ongoing participation of the

Vermont Land Trust. Virginia Farley of the Land Trust, and principle author of the Rural Resource Protection Plan, will provide an overview of the Rural Resource Program. Virginia will also discuss the Vermont Housing and Conservation Fund, as well as the Land Trust's other land protection efforts in the Valley, including their recent success in obtaining an option to purchase a critical farm property in Waitsfield.

Also speaking on Thursday will be Austin Cleaves, Chairman of the East Montpelier Board of Selectmen, who is active in that town's effort to preserve its rural character through the protection of its farmland. Mr. Cleaves will be discussing these efforts, including the Town Farmland Protection Fund launched two years ago to purchase development rights on important agricultural lands.

These forums are designed to provide information and fresh perspectives on several issues of importance to the Valley. They provide Valley residents with an opportunity to gather and discuss specific issues of concern. Presentations and discussions will then be summarized and compiled in a single document which could serve as an agenda for future action, and as a source of information to assist with future decision making.

All visitors and residents of the Mad River Valley are encouraged to attend.

*The Mad River Valley Forum series is made possible through a Special Planning Grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.*



# FORUM

## SUMMARY

### VI. Rural Resource Protection in the Mad River Valley

**Speaker: Virginia Farley, Central Vermont Director, Vermont Land Trust**

The Rural Resource Program, was begun in 1987 as a cooperative effort between the Planning District and the Vermont Land Trust. The first joint project undertaken was the Rural Resource Protection Plan, an attempt to catalog the elements of the Valley's rural landscape that define its character, and to provide strategies for preserving that character. The Rural Resource Protection Plan identified critical resource properties, including ridge lines, the Route 100 and Common Road corridors, historic sites and structures, scenic areas and river and trail resources. Two to three hundred people contributed to this effort.

Recently, the Rural Resource Protection Program has focused on the implementation of the policies set forth in the Rural Resource Protection Plan. These efforts have included:

- The creation of the Mad River Recreation Pathway Committee.
- The establishment of a Conservation Project Development Fund.
- A historic preservation program.
- An inventory of important archaeological sites in the Valley.
- The permanent protection of over 700 acres in the three towns.

The protection of other parcels in the future may be even more important. Current economic conditions have slowed development pressures, but these will increase when the economy recovers. The time to act to conserve land is when a slow economy has driven land values down.

The Vermont Land Trust currently holds a

one-year option on 436 acres of the old Maple Avenue Farm in Waitsfield. The purchase of the option allows time for a planning study, development of a conservation and development plan, identification of recreational resources and wildlife habitat. A preliminary plan calls for the conservation of more than 150 acres of prime agricultural land, which will be sold to a farmer. A portion of the purchase price will be recouped through sensitive, limited development. The remainder of the funds would come from grants from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and matching funds.

Some common sources of funding and other support for land conservation include:

**Town appropriations augmented with leveraging, creativity and work:** A few towns are leading the way in Vermont:

- Warren \$300,000 appropriated for conservation.
- Dorset \$100,000
- E. Montpelier \$50,000, considering two projects
- Norwich \$30,000. (\$10,000 of it leveraged into \$600,000 project with state, federal and other money.)

**Grants and loans from the three-year-old Vermont Housing and Conservation Board:** Funding is available for affordable housing and land conservation, paid for by a percentage of the state property transfer taxes. Local or private financing can step in temporarily to hold property until purchased through state or other funds.

**Regulatory protection, on a site-by-site basis, which result in permanent deed restrictions and conservation easements:** This is used more often in Waitsfield than in other Valley towns. Developers have been cooperative, and conservation has been found to enhance projects.

# FORUM

## APPENDICES

Community Response in the form of articles from the Valley Reporter.