



## Whitingham Selectboard

# STRATEGIC PLAN

Adopted November 6, 2019

*At several meetings in October of 2019 the Whitingham Selectboard discussed and determined the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Town of Whitingham. The following summarizes the actions that the Selectboard would like to complete to address each item.*

## STRENGTHS

Highway Crew / Operation of Transfer Station / Town Employees / Fire & EMS  
(tied with 5 votes)

To keep the employees happy the Selectboard would like to provide opportunities for employees to meet informally with the board so they can express any concerns they might have to the board. Usually if there is an issue it comes from lack of communication. Perhaps provide a questionnaire, keep it general. Create a process to have department heads do performance reviews on a regular basis. Create a conduit for communication. Show gratitude to employees. We want to be the preferred employer.

### To Do:

- Start on Friday November 1<sup>st</sup> at noon. Employee luncheon, serve hamburgers, steak, salads from store, soda and water.
- Gig google employee surveys. Discuss survey questions and delivery at the November 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- Discuss how to implement regularly scheduled employee reviews.

Community spirit / Great place to live / Community that cares / Recreational opportunities (tied with 5 votes)

The Selectboard feels community spirit is growing as evidenced by attendance at a recent ice cream social and the number of volunteers attending fire calls. Whitingham is a great place to live because of its convenient location, scenery, freedom and air quality. Whitingham is a community that cares as evidenced by the number of people who offer support in tragic situations and the number of volunteers willing to serve. Whitingham has great recreational opportunities including the Harriman Reservoir, hunting, snowmobiling/access to VAST trails, hiking, & fishing.

The Selectboard would like to create a town get-together similar to Rutland's monthly "Project Vision". This would not be a political event, but an opportunity to hear from our

residents and business owners. It could be a monthly ice cream social type of event with a topic for each event such as broadband, where is Whitingham going, how can we improve the Municipal Center, etc.

**To Do:**

- Schedule the first event, decide on a topic. (Put on November 20<sup>th</sup> agenda)
- Review pros and cons after first event to make future events better.

Municipal Center building / Town Hill (tied with 5 votes)

The Whitingham Municipal Center and Town Hill Common are great assets. We need to continue to maintain these assets. Does the Municipal Center need fans, lighting, sound system, projector, tables, chairs? Create a Municipal Center Committee to make this asset more valuable. Update rules for Town Hill and get a new sign.

**To Do:**

- Seek volunteers for a Municipal Center Committee. Publish info in January 2020 newsletter, in 2019 Town Report.
- Continue to support and communicate with Town Hill Committee.

## **WEAKNESSES**

Sewer plant needs/condition (tied with 4 votes)

Although sewer services are technically an asset, the condition of the sewer plants is a current weakness. We need to continue working with engineers and the state to move this important project forward. Seek out grants to help reduce cost of upgrades to the sewer users.

**To Do:**

- Discuss with engineers if they will seek grants or if it is a town responsibility. Perhaps hire a grant writer. This would coincide with the next step of the sewer project.
- Meet with sewer plant operator on a bi-monthly basis to hear of any concerns, repairs, etc. (meet with him again in December).

School system – staff turnover, school board, administration (tied with 4 votes)

There are weaknesses in the school system including staff turnover, the school board and the administration. We should meet with the school board to determine if the Selectboard can help in any way. We need to create a contract to say the Town will

continue to plow the school property in exchange for holding Town Meeting at the school.

**To Do:**

- Schedule a meeting with the school board
- Prepare contract. The lawsuit attorneys have responded that they are OK with a contract for plowing, they suggested that Bob Fisher should prepare the contract. (On November 6<sup>th</sup> agenda to discuss)

Junk – ability to get it cleaned up (tied with 4 votes)

There are several private properties in town with large accumulations of junk visible from the roadway. In the past it has been found that cleaning up these properties is difficult and can be very costly to the town. Can junk fines be tied into property taxes somehow?

**To Do:**

- Research successful junk ordinances in other towns.
- Seminar “Ordinance Enforcement” is being offered by VLCT on December 4, 2019

Parking – Village (3 votes)

The yellow lines that the state painted seem to make parking even more difficult in Jacksonville Village. If a vehicle is parked in front of the store the car passing must cross the yellow line. New signs have been ordered to indicate the new parking rules of 2-hour parking between 7am and 8pm, and parking lot lines will be painted before winter.

**To Do:**

- Find out about parking at corner of Route 100 and Gates Pond Road, what is the state right of way? (asked Stan on 10.23.19)
- Make sure parking area is empty when the line painting is scheduled (11/2/19)
- Install new signs when the lines are painted.
- Write letter to VTrans to complain about new yellow lines (Stan said he will talk to the state)

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

Networking with other towns (law enforcement, services, EDG) (tied with 5 votes)

The Selectboard would like to form some sort of coalition with surrounding towns to work together to address common issues.

**To Do:**

- Meet with surrounding towns to discuss commonalities. (Wilmington and Readsboro will attend November 6<sup>th</sup> Selectboard meeting. Halifax has been invited.)
- Follow up as needed based on meeting results.

**Enhance Connectivity – population, jobs, schools** (tied with 5 votes)

Connectivity, cellular and internet, is vital to allow our citizens to work from home, to use e-medical services, to complete school work, etc.

**To Do:**

- The second VTel cell tower is currently being built and should be online by years end. Continue to inform the public of this opportunity.
- EDG hosted Matrix Fiber Optics to learn about their proposal to the town. Discuss fiber optics with neighboring towns on November 6 and follow up as the results of that meeting require.
- Continue to pursue opportunities that enhance connectivity services for our residents.

**Grants/funding** (4 votes)

Grant funding is vital to enable the town to complete expensive projects.

**To Do:**

- Pursue grant opportunities as they become available.
- Look into hiring a grant writer. Who is Readsboro using?

**Public Engagement (meetings, Town Report, Committees, Reports)** (4 votes)

Engaging the public in important decisions is vital to running the town smoothly. How do we get people to read the annual Town Report and newsletters, to attend meetings, to work on committees, etc.?

**To Do:**

- As discussed above, host town get-togethers on a regular basis.

## THREATS

### State of Vermont – Highways, education, state support to Town of Whitingham/funding (5 votes)

In discussions one of the greatest threats to the wellbeing of the Town of Whitingham was mentioned to be the State of Vermont. They push unfunded mandates, do not maintain the state roads (reactive instead of proactive), force school consolidation, force high education tax, make Act 250 difficult for small business owners to navigate, etc.

#### **To Do:**

- Continue to support the towns education funding lawsuit
- Discuss state highways with other towns (scheduled for November 6)
- Follow through after November 6 meeting

### Lack of industry/jobs Losing existing businesses (4 votes)

A lack of available jobs in the area is a threat to the population of Whitingham. The broadband initiative might help. Recent store committee was a good example of how to support a business.

#### **To Do:**

- Encourage the EDG to continue to support our local businesses.
- Continue to review broadband opportunities as they become available.
- Open dialog with businesses that may be considering moving out of town

### Losing the school (3 votes)

Losing the school, the largest employer in town, would be detrimental. Not only for the employees but also for the students who would then be forced to travel far. It is possible that many families with school age children would move out of town. Property values would decrease.

#### **To Do:**

- Continue to support the education funding lawsuit.
- Meet with the School Board to work together (to be scheduled)
- Meet with Wilmington Selectboard to discuss this (scheduled for November 6)
- Follow through with what is learned at meetings.

**OVERALL TO DO:**

- Follow through
- Update this plan on a regular basis
- Annually update of this plan