



# SOUTHERN VERMONT

## CEDS SUPPLEMENT

Draft findings and recommendations  
From Southern Vermont CEDS Supplement Working Group  
Convened May – June 2020

## Southern Vermont CEDS SUPPLEMENT – COVID-19 WORKING GROUP

***This Group's Charge:*** *The Southern Vermont COVID Workgroup would review CEDS goals, objectives and strategies to identify any new objectives or strategies that should be considered for further development in order to address known and projected challenges or opportunities to the economy due to the pandemic. Workgroup recommendations will be forwarded to the SoVT CEDS committee for use in developing a CEDS Supplement.*

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### **Overarching Concepts:**

- **We are striving to understand this crisis, but it is still evolving.**
  - *COVID recovery conversation is probably premature - global financial recession may be ahead of us at levels not experienced for years*
  - *But – “we need to put some force behind this and it will get worse if we don’t get serious.”*
  - *Confusion is its own problem. In order to be able to stand up events we need clear directives or confusion gets to a “fatiguing level”. If we articulate the new normal, we create a sense of safety for the public.*
  - *We will have to keep looking at how the priorities or timing or mode shift due to COVID and keep asking ourselves “what is changing, and does that mean next”? For instance, if people lose cars as UI falls away, does that mean new transportation needs? If properties are bought up by newcomers, what does that mean for housing?*
  
- **We face a worsening of existing problems.**
  - *Wage inequality, unequal access to mutual aid, division by income, residency.*
  - *We need to call out what we don’t want to see as a net result of this crisis, and related events such as migration of second-homeowners causing growth of income inequality or occurring at the expense of in-migration of professionals, working people, diverse people.*
  - *We need to affirm that a real priority is taking care of people who are here.*
  - *A heightened concern for youth graduating high school and college into recession.*
  
- **To make change, we have address our resistance to it.**
  - *Our big challenge now is to break patterns but we still have this incredible unresolved tension of ‘we want to change and we don’t want to change*
  
- **Implementing change requires resources.**
  - *Tourism is one of the biggest revenue generators in the region. We need to leverage it to accomplish these tasks...*
  - *But also to find new models, for example people with resources come to visit or stay - leverage that to put money back into our communities.*
  - *Non-profits and other community organizations need resources too, with events canceled and revenue in flux. Help figure out how to bring in revenue right now and pivot long term.*
  
- **We must overcome fear COVID has brought.**
  - *Recognize that fear, name it, understanding that re-entering community will be difficult complicated. Take it on as a challenge to overcome fear as part of COVID recovery.*
  
- **We need to tell our story (to ourselves as much as to others).**
  - *Promote a safe and welcoming region for new residents to live, learn, and work.*
  - *Run a campaign about how much we love our children*
  - *Vermont is small and it’s all about relationships*

- **There will be New Opportunities.**
    - *We are seeing incredible energy, creativity, breaking boundaries which creates opportunity for accelerated change, working across sectors, & future investment in food hubs etc*
    - *Abandoned business infrastructure that needs to be repurposed and pivoted to another function – real estate, factories, land*
    - *Available talent! Huge change from workforce shortage 6 months ago*
  
  - **We must be bold:**
    - *Shifting mentality as we adjust the CEDS to being “more creative and less risk averse”*
    - *This requires different thinking. Have to try new things!*
  
  - **We must be mindful of how we talk about ourselves, one another and others.**
    - *Improve CEDS language, especially with regard to describe newcomers and current residents*
    - *Also be careful with COVID-19 specific language such as “social distancing” which has negative connotations – we will use the term “physical distancing”*
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**Information we are going to need:**

- ***What will the impact on the economy look like from all sides*** – people, businesses, communities - layoffs, household income, individuals impacted and economy-level wages, spending, revenues?
  
  - ***Granular information on job losses:***
    - *How many jobs will be lost due to COVID? What sectors? Permanently?*
  
  - ***What businesses are surviving and how?*** Need to understand what’s working (business adaptations, educational adaptations etc), what can still be done to make a difference, what can’t we fix?
  
  - ***Who is moving here / staying?*** – young people and workforce or older people at risk? What are their needs and what are the opportunities? What new problems is this creating – housing crunch? How many – are the anecdotes adding up to statistical change? Is it enduring?
  
  - ***What else is needed now and later to help with recovery?***
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***“In each case the Rationale is much more compelling than the Objective Title!” – E. Marx***

## Objective 1: Increase our Population

Rationale: Attract more people to live in Southern Vermont to participate in the community, the workforce, and support the business and civic environment.

### **New / heightened conditions due to COVID-19 relating to this Objective:**

#### ***Why do we need to increase population and diversity? Intended outcomes?***

- *Must replace lost major mechanisms that boosted population, such as local colleges (Southern Vermont and Marlboro) which brought thousands of students, staff and faculty to the region*
- *Healthcare systems, employers, school systems struggle to fill skilled positions which strains the economy and quality of life*
- *Need to bolster population /workforce with retirements hastened by COVID (schools)*

#### ***Population “increase” must include people staying and thriving here***

- *Why are we trying to diversify the population when people here are not happy?*
- *To leverage influx and overcome fear challenges us to embrace, welcome and connect people.*
- *How do we retain people without college-career pathways so they can thrive here?*
  - *Loss of So VT College - local people trained for well-paid health careers.*

#### ***COVID Newcomers: People fleeing cities to come to SoVT***

- *Influx of people – renters, seasonal homeowners staying in VT plus new homebuyers - creates opportunity but also fear and even animosity*
- *Some are NYC area people with means, buying houses sight unseen - Burr & Burton is a pull*
- *Great appeal to people who bring professional skills and means*
- *Result may be income inequality worsened by COVID.*
- *Is this a temporary advantage? When there is a vaccine VT may lose its luster. **We have a unique opportunity to capitalize, and it may not last.***

***People coming back to the region*** - returners here to quarantine but considering staying now

#### ***Now more than ever it’s clear that infrastructure objectives are critical to reaching this objective:***

- *Telecommunications, Healthcare systems, College Systems – closures causing loss of career development opportunity but they were also a way that many people came to the region to work and learn.*
- *Business infrastructure – support to bring or start a company here*

## **Objective 1 changes / additions / reprioritizations:**

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### **Prioritize strategies that embrace, welcome and connect people**

- Upgrade the language we use in order to be more welcoming and inclusive
  - Raise awareness around unwelcoming or harmful language everyday language that undermines this work (“flatlanders” and xth generation Vermonter)
  - Specific change to existing CEDS C.1.: change “non-citizens” to “foreign nationals”.
- Deliberately leverage the temporary influx of people due to COVID-19 by welcoming transplants into our communities in order to increase our permanent population.
- Realize that “vision” embodied in the Southern Vermont brand (below) with initiatives to build real connections that welcome and engage diverse people in our communities by tying together efforts to welcome people, integrate people within the community, and support all of the region’s people.
- Develop and implement a strategy to leverage this influx in order to attract / retain transplants
  - Action: Market a specific southern Vermont brand that includes but is not limited to phenomenal life and work experience, being responsive and welcoming, helping people to import a job or start a business, proximity to cities in Southern VT to help people who want to straddle that connection but be here
  - Action: Direct events, outreach and promotion to second homeowners and others already here due to COVID in order to encourage them to stay.
  - Action: Outreach or marketing geared to “returners” sheltering here
  - Action: Remote job fairs or other events geared to YPs and working age people to they see the parts of this life that will make them want to stay
  - Action: Market to the remote workers across the country who can earn from afar

### **Prioritize strategies that support and sustain people**

- Maintain access to healthcare as a critical form of infrastructure to maintain population: Community health centers, doctor’s offices etc., broadband access for telehealth
- Rebuild and augment critical career pathways which are critical to people’s ability to thrive in the region, such as loss of SoVT College
- Invest in new sectors, institutions and organizations that will attract and retain people in the way that the presence of colleges once did.

### **Prioritize strategies that prioritize employment demand and employer partnerships**

- Expand employer onboarding partnerships such as Stay to Stay based on national models, as a means to welcome and retain new people, with the mindset that newcomers enrich those organizations as well as our communities.
- Leverage schools as employers hiring an enormous # of people without onboarding, by regional organizations collaborating with HR at all 8 Supervisory Unions to help make connections to the community a normal part of their introductory process (Addition to Action 1Aii Welcome Wagon)

## Objective 2: Expand our Business Infrastructure

Rationale: Create an environment that will encourage more jobs and opportunities in Southern Vermont

### **New / heightened conditions due to COVID-19 relating to this Objective:**

#### **Fear and frustration, uncertainty and shaken confidence.**

- *Shaken Consumer confidence - people acting out, undermines support for local businesses, impatience*
- *Challenge to sense of safety and community that is integral to VT*
- *Local business owners hurting. Many adapted well in the beginning (food and beverage) including robust farmers market. Now turning to fear, being upset, not knowing how to proceed.*
- *Delayed onset – some aren't feeling the economic hit yet like healthcare, but will*
- *"We can't let fear and economic insecurity undermine progress."*

#### **Businesses closed, jobs lost, changing demands and opportunities.**

- *Many things that were growing due to economy booming and labor shortage are now at risk. We need to double down on the commitment so as not to lose ground.*
- *Sector level impacts are hard to predict, for example construction: Shut down affects many people and a lot of state projects now on pause. What's next? Could be (1) slow down in a year (no new design projects now means fewer build projects later), or (2) speed up projects resume that have been on hold.*
- *Specific adaptations will evolve, but uncertainty produces some consistent responses such as organizations put hiring on hold especially if they rely on multiyear projects and contracts*
- *Towns are on the front line of helping local businesses*
- *Transplants may be working remotely, may also have resources to invest in businesses, create jobs*
- *Remote work cuts both ways - will lose AND gain businesses and people*
  - *There are companies in Bennington that realized people don't need to be here in the office. Successful remote working is going to be a problem because they are big national businesses who may permanently move people off site! (Church Insurance (Captive))*
  - *And of course there are people realizing people can work in NY but work in VT.*
- *What does this mean for real estate?*
  - *May be a positive for residential and a negative for commercial...For Manchester it may mean further gentrification.*
  - *Newfound concern people don't need office space - what will that do to commercial property*
- *With no sense of timeline, can't assess yet what changes are permanent, what are temporary*

## **Objective 2 changes / additions / reprioritizations:**

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### **Prioritize strategies to encourage and capitalize on influx of investors and entrepreneurs**

- *Leverage newcomers who have resources to invest in businesses and create jobs*
  - *Identify and work with people who want to “put money into the economy”*
  - *Create mechanisms to direct investment into local firms*
- *Leverage newcomers who are entrepreneurs and can create jobs*
  - *Identify relevant models for programs to attract and nurture new businesses*
  - *Ensure the regional brand reflects responsive and helping people who want to import their job or start a business (cross reference to obj #1)*
  - *Overcome data that says VT is the 2nd worst state to start a business– with messaging and services (cross referenced to Obj 5 ED Capacity)*
- *Invest in “Economic Base” growth to decrease reliance on local market and bring revenues to the region*

### **Prioritize strategies that support existing businesses**

- *Ensure all regional businesses understand and access COVID-related resources and relief*
- *Section C - several medium priorities 3, 5 & 6 should be given higher priority in light of COVID-19*
  - *III) Establish funding streams targeted for women, veteran, handicapped, and minority owned businesses locating establishments in downtowns, village centers, and commercial corridors. Establish guidelines for the funds that meet the goals of increasing diversity, supporting small businesses, and helping expand the business offerings. \*
  - *V) Create and operate a more robust “Available Jobs Now” listing program that is hosted on a single regional website. Use this single point to also highlight assets of the region, provide guidance related to relocation, and other supportive information.*
  - *VI) Create, maintain, and operate a centralized Business Assistance Center providing information on all assistance programs including available lenders, grant programs, basic business training opportunities, becoming a certified B-corp, workforce training opportunities, business resiliency, and individuals to contact for more detail. Expand business assistance as needs change.*
- *Help businesses pivot to survive and thrive*
  - *Action: Help companies doing more online or delivery adapt and scale new approach*
  - *Action: Fund training and education for small businesses such as hospitality to adapt and keep adapting to new conditions*
  - *Action: Identify “blueprints” for new business models because people don’t have experience, tools or time to invent from scratch*
  - *Action: Complete survey of businesses to collect their experiences directly to understand challenges, successes, adaptations and trends.*
- *Help towns support local businesses - they are on the front line*
- *Section C 2 - Succession planning doesn’t seem as important - people may not consider retirement now*

### **Prioritize strategies that support southern Vermont talent! (as entrepreneurs or employees)**

- *Improve in-region career pathways critical to keeping population (see Obj 1)*
- *Support businesses starting with the intention of creating jobs and hiring people*
- *Support remote workers (2BIII) which has become more prevalent during COVID-19*
  - *Action: improve resources for remote learning and technical*
  - *Action: cultivate knowledge networks (This could also serve to support 2BVII) through events*
  - *Action: With people missing out on usual workplace social connections, the gap is there for a solution to connect to the community. This could serve both retention and recruitment.*
- *Establish a collaborative regional system to increase training, education, and readiness of the workforce. To have a sustainable and vibrant workforce we need more learning.*
  - *Action: Services for adults, people switching careers, addressing unemployment with COVID*
  - *Action: Significant upskilling of the population to bridge the digital divide (30% of businesses said they cannot work remotely, so do they need new tools or help imagining it).*
  - *Action: Address special needs of youth who are sidelined from education and entering careers or higher education due to COVID*

## Objective 3: Improve our Physical Infrastructure

Rationale: Make the critical infrastructure improvements so that Southern Vermont is resident and business ready.

### **New / heightened conditions due to COVID-19 relating to this Objective:**

***Population changes - Vermonters staying home and people sheltering in Vermont***

#### ***Housing impacts***

- *Real Estate folks are busy - not enough inventory*
- *New Housing needs – “changing variables in how we house ourselves and our families” due to COVID i.e. some folks have brought elders back into the home for quarantine*
- *Persistent needs worsened by this flux - Seeing a family here for generations where the young people can't find a home - huge problem as we were trying to figure out workforce housing, to make it affordable for people who work to come or stay here*

#### ***Businesses and commercial centers in flux***

- *New conditions around retail and restaurants and downtowns – personal distancing, regulations*
- *With technology how do we think about how to operate new businesses differently and welcome new people to the state*

#### ***New demand on telecommunications infrastructure, old problems more acute***

- *Diverse and divergent needs and ability to adapt:*
  - *K-12 attempting virtual learning*
  - *College students at home attempting virtual learning*
  - *Vermont residents working from home, doing telehealth, shopping, engaging virtually*
  - *People running away from cities - second homeowners working from Vermont home*
- *Contrast between remote workers and Vermonters suffering digital exclusion*
- *Need for connectivity to keep digital divide from worsening, or overcome it for good*
  - *Want a COVID population spike that includes young people and is long term? Need Broadband*

***Other system changes - Real and imagined fears and strains on food or healthcare due to COVID-19***

### **Objective 3 changes / additions / reprioritizations:**

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#### ***Prioritize broadband to support learning, telehealth, remote work and engagement***

- *Physical infrastructure to support people moving here – telecommunications*

#### ***Prioritize housing***

- *Support people moving here by increasing supply of housing that is decent, affordable to a range of households and workforce.*
- *With COVID may see new models for housing such as cohousing, intergenerational housing, aligning childcare or eldercare, educating kids and working at home. May need different sorts of amenities if we are grouped together more (working in place, childcare in place, elders in place).*
- *Emphasize rehabilitating old structures over building new: “The most sustainable model is always to fix up what you have rather than wasting energy on new and it’s part of what makes VT special”*

#### ***Prioritize solutions to reboot businesses, commercial centers, and the organizations that support them***

- *Develop local adaptations to support new mode for retail / restaurants downtowns*
  - *Examples - Absent clear guidance from the state for hospitality, Manchester is going to be aggressive - close off roads and have outdoor seating. Support state policy adaptations to support new mode for retail / restaurants downtowns / events*
- *Support state policy adaptations to support new mode for retail / restaurants downtowns / events*
  - *Action: Support evolution of laws, like liquor laws.*
  - *Action: Help festivals and events work with state Govt to find flexibility and model what can be allowable in given changing COVID guidelines*

## Objective 4: Enhance our Social Infrastructure

### Rationale: Improve quality of life and stability for residents

#### **New / heightened conditions due to COVID-19 relating to this Objective:**

##### ***New Barriers to Community Engagement***

- *How to engage newcomers? To capitalize on in-migration of younger folks and those planning families, we need to engage them in communities and networks*
- *Challenge of community - real vs digital, what is lost and what is gained?*
- *Challenge to sense of safety - fear of contagion, outsiders, which will impact community and how we support one another.*

##### ***New barriers to meeting basic needs and getting things done***

- *COVID19 adds challenges to existing challenges – childcare, eldercare*
- *COVID19 stay at home and switch to virtual or personal distancing = New barriers to running communities and solving challenges outlined here (e.g. Town Meetings not finished, held up CUDs)*

##### ***Near-term harm, weaknesses exposed, and lasting effects***

- *Mental health / trauma due to COVID19*
- *COVID highlights how healthcare as a critical form of infrastructure: Community health centers, doctors offices etc. and yet this health crisis may destabilize this system.*
- *Creative economy needs people who can work and be productive. We need sustainable systems and for people to be healthier.*
- *COVID19 highlights a need to Address Social infrastructure within businesses to create resilient workplaces that can weather market and employment disruptions - People are squeezed between responsibilities - caring for elders, children.*

##### **Connections to people in power matter a lot right now.**

- *Need Southern VT connections with people who are “at the table” to ensure funds flow here*
- *It’s the kind of state where it’s so small you can have impact even from down here. Can we name this, make people aware of it and then connect them?*

## **Objective 4 changes / additions / reprioritizations:**

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### ***Prioritize helping people find and navigate social infrastructure including Prek-12 ecosystem***

- *Create one place to find services (for all people, including new people) : Day care, elder care etc.*
  - *Action: hire the YP who can create that web presence to realize this dream*
  - *Action: Market this - What if there was a marketing video geared to “we love kids” promoting the social infrastructure for families, another for “job opportunities” - package these benefits and then carefully place them where they will be found.*  
<https://livability.com/vt/brattleboro>
- *Create tools to help families choose where to live and what kind of education they want for their children - leverage that diversity of choice to attract and retain people.*

### ***Prioritize social infrastructure that supports people***

- *moving here (see obj 1)*
- *Increase resources for people returning to job market, school, entrepreneurship after tremendous period of loss and hardship*
- *Support individuals pivoting - Engage people in meaningful work to use old skills or gaining new skills doing temporary work right now (such as making masks) so when they go back on the job market they have skills, have shown initiative and flexibility.*

### ***Help local organizations overcome new barriers to regional activity posed by COVID***

- *Example: some CUDs didn't get to town meeting - fast track to join fast-growing collaboration?*
- *Support solutions that address long term issues around access and inclusion.*

### ***Promote and support workplace policies that help people to be resilient***

- *Support employers in developing policies reflecting the needs of the modern workforce and developing a workplace culture that attracts workers.*

## Objective 5: Strengthen our Economic Development Capacity

Rationale: Enhance the ability for economic development professionals and partners to play a role in implementation

### **New / heightened conditions due to COVID-19 relating to this Objective:**

***Many organizations critical the work of the CEDS have been placed in jeopardy by COVID-19, in particular undermining our ability to execute on:***

- *2C Increase support services and resources for all businesses and sectors*
- *2D Enhance business retention, expansion, and attraction efforts*
- *3B Support vital downtown and village centers*
- *Example - Chambers can't do events, losing a major source of annual revenue*

### ***New skills, tools, approaches and resources being developed and deployed:***

- *Some businesses are adapting well, some aren't, the economic development network is essential to supporting businesses and understanding trends*
- *Philanthropy is looking for ways to have an impact (VCF), including directing new resources from people fleeing to VT into relief to help the region*
- *Relief is coming, not clear who is using it or using it well, not clear yet who is being missed.*

### **Objective 5 changes / additions / reprioritizations:**

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***Prioritize support for rebuilding and increasing capacity within the network of regional partners who do the work of the CEDS in order to reboot and redouble efforts to implement strategies and projects to rebuild a thriving region.***

- *Invest in capacity-building, advocacy and partnerships that increase the health of local community and economic development organizations, local governments, and non-profits*

### ***Redouble efforts to bring more resources to the region***

- *Ensure SoVT access to the fullest extent possible COVID19 Relief from state and federal programs as well as private philanthropy*
- *Grow investment - Identify and work with people who want to "put money into the economy"*

***Leverage our regional assets – expertise, relationships, regional action and coordination – to implement a COVID19 recovery that outpaces benchmark regions.***