

LIVE THE NEW FOREST FUTURE

Northern Forest Center

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Community Case Study: **Newport, Vermont**

Newport is a small city of 4,500 people located on the southern shore of Lake Memphremagog in northern Vermont. Rich with outdoor recreation activities on the lake and in the woods, Newport prides itself on an active downtown, a vibrant waterfront performance space, and a strong community of people who care about the place and its future.



Downtown Newport, Vermont.

Newport participated in the Center’s Rural Tourism Academy in 2020-2021, and later became a focal community for implementing priorities identified during the academy. Newport was a natural fit for the program, as the city’s unique recreation features hold incredible potential for deeper, long-lasting benefits for the local community and economy. Local leaders had been working to realize this potential for years and had many building blocks in place, but capacity – specifically, time and resources – to engage the community, raise funds, and execute next steps was limited.

With the Center’s support, the community secured additional funding and moved key projects forward. This caught the attention of the new director of Newport City Downtown Development (NCDD), Rick Ufford-Chase, who saw the Center as a potentially catalytic partner to help his organization grow into a proactive driver of Newport’s economic development.

At Rick’s request, the Center agreed to work with NCDD to design and co-host a series of four “Downtown Innovation Gatherings” intended to generate conversation and build relationships that might lead to creative partnerships with the capacity to help Newport’s downtown come to life.



Newport Waterfront Recreation Path along the shores of Lake Memphremagog.

Center staff supported all elements of these gatherings, from designing and facilitating the discussions to distilling outcomes and determining next steps. As co-host, the Center lent credibility to the process at a time when the NCDD was in transition. The Center also broadened NCDD's resource network by bringing in guest speakers from other Northern Forest communities to share their stories and connections.

Together, the Center's guidance, network connections, time, additional voices and ears, and understanding of rural community dynamics helped NCDD spark a series of action steps and catalyze its role as an active player in local economic development.

Today, seven months since the last gathering, outcomes are impressive. A "next gen investors group" grew out of the gatherings and is exploring several viable and highly visible projects for investment. NCDD entered a partnership with the North Country Career Center to purchase a house that local technical school students will renovate into much needed year-round housing. A Design and Community Welcome Committee also grew out of the gatherings and is meeting regularly and developing several projects, one of which - an urban forestry initiative - just received a \$360,000 grant from the US Forest Service for the design and implementation of a treescape in Newport's downtown.

"The Center team is incredible. Every one of them makes it clear that they want to be a part of making Newport come alive in a way that will be sustainable for the long haul. A great deal of what we have accomplished in 2022 would not have happened without the Center."

Rick Ufford-Chase, Director, Newport City Downtown Development

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Downtown Newport, Vermont.

For more information on our programming in Newport, Vermont, contact Amy Scott, Program Manager, ascott@northernforest.org.