

# **Executive Summary**

## **Opportunity**

### **Problem**

There is currently no place in the designated Village Center of Rupert where people can gather for social, community or businesses purposes. With the post office only open four hours a day, and the transfer station gone, we've lost opportunities to meet our neighbors casually. The Rupert Town Green (a Town project in progress) will be an excellent gathering spot when the weather cooperates, and the Sheldon Store Café would be a natural extension of the Town Green, as it is directly adjacent to the Green.

Many visitors come to Rupert for recreation (Merck Forest, the D&H Rail Trail, are two examples), and more who drive through on a regular basis. Yet there is no place for them to stop and have a meal, and thereby generate economic activity. At the same time, many Rupert residents go to surrounding towns - Salem, Dorset, Granville, even Manchester - for sociability around a cup of coffee, a meal, a meeting, or other types of gatherings. This situation represents significant potential for economic activity, currently untapped, that could help this community thrive.

Rupert has numerous assets (recreational, as noted above, historical, geological, cultural, and social) and there is no community hub that can foster cross pollination.

### **Solution**

A café and community center right in the center the village will serve as a hub of community activity. The community center will offer a space where Rupert residents can come together for activities based on shared interest. The cafe is a place that will foster conversations and social gatherings. It also becomes a destination for visitors already coming to Rupert, generating economic and social activity in the village

The main floor will accommodate the café, furnished with tables, chairs and lounge areas. It will include a space for children, furnished with toys, books, art supplies, and games. Newspapers, magazines, and board games will be available for our customers' use. The upstairs features a large hall-like setting that will be used for

community activities, meetings, parties, music, movie night, yoga classes, and other educational and community activities.

We see the café and community center as a place where the Town of Rupert can forge stronger connections among its residents and continue to build connections with surrounding towns.

## **Target Market**

The community of Rupert and neighboring towns are the main target market. The cafe will be the community gathering place in our community. We are eager to make sure it is a place that will be welcoming to the entire community. Some Rupert residents currently drive to Salem or Dorset, or even Manchester, to have a little sociability around a cup of coffee or meet neighbors for a meal or a meeting.

As the Rupert Town Green develops, more people from Rupert and surrounding towns will come to the village center for walks and other recreation. The Town Green Committee has planned walking paths, a parking lot, picnic tables, shade trees, as well as a horse shoe pitch and a corn hole game. Eventually the Town Green will have playground equipment as well, attracting families and other groups. A café and community center will increase usage of the Town Green as much as the Town Green will increase the number of people patronizing the café. Though the two projects are separate, we believe they will enhance each other.

Though the main focus of this project is the community of Rupert, we will also be targeting visitors to the area in order to reach a sustainable level of economic activity. The economic activity generated by visitors benefits Rupert residents by supporting this community center and café.

Merck Forest and Farmland Center attracts an estimated 10,000 visitors per year through its educational programming as well as recreational opportunities. Many, perhaps most, of them ask where they can find a place to eat, and they are routinely sent to Dorset or Manchester rather than into the village of Rupert. In addition, many people come to Rupert to walk, bike, or ride (horses) on the D&H Rail Trail, and bicycle groups pedal through Rupert because of the challenging hill on Route 315. An estimated 300 people per year rent guest housing (Airbnb) in Rupert and West Pawlet. Visitors to the area represent a significant potential market, helping sustain the economic vitality that the café will generate.

The Rupert Village Trust will offer programming in the upstairs of the Sheldon Store building and make it available for other groups (such as Green Mountain Academy for Life Long Learning, or Merck Forest) to rent for their established programming. All of this will bring people to the Sheldon Store - Rupert residents as well as visitors - on a regular basis, many of whom will patronize the café.

## **Competition**

There are currently no restaurants or cafés in the Town of Rupert. The closest cafés are in Dorset (eight miles from the Village Center of Rupert) and Salem (six miles from the Village Center of West Rupert). Sherman's General Store in West Rupert offers some food to go - sandwiches and pastries - but does not have adequate seating for a café.

## **Marketing and Promotion**

To promote the café and events at the Sheldon Store, the Rupert Village Trust will establish a web site, send out regular (monthly) e-mails, occasional mailings, and create frequent Facebook and Instagram posts. In addition, we will issue press releases to local media - Vermont News Guide, Manchester Journal, Rutland Herald, and Hill Country Observer, Bennington Banner - for our events. The café operator will be expected to purchase regular ads in the News Guide, and we will coordinate our online marketing campaigns. Since the Town of Rupert is currently building a website, we will be listed there as well, with our events on the Calendar and News pages. We will print and post flyers for select events as well.

## **Organizational Structure**

The Rupert Village Trust is in process of forming a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. While that application is pending, Preservation Trust of Vermont is acting as our fiscal sponsor. The Rupert Village Trust will lease space to a café operator (for which we will send out an RFP - request for proposals - which will likely be a for-profit entity. After Phase 4 of the project, the renovation of the house next door to the Sheldon Store (on the same property), we will be able to lease several spaces to small businesses as well. Ultimately the lease payments and rent from the spaces in the house will come close to covering our operating costs. Will likely do annual fundraising to make further improvements to the property and offer great programming.

This model has been successfully used by the Peacham Café in Peacham, Vermont. They have created community by installing a café and meeting space in the center of the village, and they've been generous in sharing their information and offering guidance.

## **Why Us? Our Key Board Members**

We formed the Rupert Village Trust to promote historic preservation and community development in the Designated Village Center of Rupert. The Sheldon's Store building is our inspiration to begin this work.

**Jane Davies** is an artist and small business owner in Rupert. She has been active as the co-chair of the Rupert Town Green Committee, and is very familiar with that project, which, we believe, goes hand-in-hand with the Sheldon Store project.

**John La Vecchia** is Rupert's zoning administrator, and thus very familiar with the Town's administration, its land use regulations, and our Town Plan. He is also, by profession, a building designer, and can help us navigate code requirements and permitting, as well as help with design plans and building materials.

**Deb Fuller** has worked for many non-profits, including Merck Forest and Farmland Center. Her background includes teaching, scheduling and coordinating public programs and special events as well as administrative work.

**Rob Terry** is executive director of Merck Forest and Farmland Center and has a strong commitment to making both Merck Forest and Rupert grow and thrive together.

**Casey Czahor** has experience in project management and administrating grants. She has a passion for details and spreadsheets.

**Ryan Davenport** is a septic engineer and excavator, and he has facilitated a thorough exploration of water and wastewater issues that our project entails. He will ultimately design our systems to match the needs of the café and community center.

We are all residents of Rupert and care deeply about this community. Ryan, Casey, and Rob all have young children, and want them to grow up in a vibrant community.