

Southern Vermont Economy Project

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PROJECT PRIORITIZATION REPORT: *Windham Meeting House* **PREPARED FOR THE TOWN OF WINDHAM**

June 16, 2023



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Introduction to the Southern VT Economy Project & the Community Assessment and Priority Project (CAPP) Process

The Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation's Southern Vermont Economy Project (SVEP) is a program that provides training and technical assistance to increase local capacity, skills, and resources in order to advance local projects in Southern Vermont. The program recognizes that local projects are critical to the ability of Southern Vermont to achieve its community, economic, and workforce development goals. SVEP is funded in part through the USDA Rural Community Development Initiative.

As part of SVEP, the CAPP process is designed to help communities define goals and projects that they would like to move forward, and to give them resources and tools that will help them advance those projects.

The goal of the program is also:

- To help identify shared priorities and potential areas for community/regional collaboration across Southern Vermont.
- Facilitate connections to funders, cultivate community-funder relationships, and match projects with regional, state, and/or federal funding sources.
- Create situational awareness among funders and regional planning partners of each community's priorities and future plans.
- Develop alignment and linkage between community plans and priorities and the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).
- Introduce BDCC as a resource to help advance community and regional projects.
- And, most importantly, support and accelerate the implementation of community projects that benefit the local economy and the Southern Vermont economy.

The Windham Meeting House CAPP Process

Members of the Windham ARPA Committee and Energy Committee made contact with Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC)'s Southern Vermont Economy Project (SVEP) manager, Meg Staloff, at a Vermont American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Resources meeting co-hosted by BDCC, with various state agencies, on February 6, 2023.

Windham attendees to the meeting (including Cathy Fayles, Mary McCoy, and Bill Dunkel) expressed an interest in obtaining some guidance in prioritizing projects that their committee had evolved through a public survey. Most relevant seemed the desire of the community to have the Town support renovations, including energy upgrades, in the Windham Meeting House.

Along with Mike McConnell, Senior Planner from Windham Regional Commission, the SVEP manager attended a community meeting and building tour at the Meeting House on April 1, 2023. The meeting included multiple stakeholders in the Meeting House Project (Selectboard, Town Committee on the Meeting House, Friends of the Meeting House, Energy Committee, Planning Commission, Library, Windham Community Organization, and Emergency Management), and gave attendees an opportunity to look over the building and get a shared understanding of several needed and possible projects.

Following that meeting, the SVEP manager met over zoom with members of the Select Board, Meeting House Committee, Energy Committee, and Friends of the Meeting House on May 18, 2023 (link to meeting recording is available [HERE](#)). At this time, it was decided that the group would seek some community input into ideas for projects and uses for the Meeting House at the upcoming Town Meeting, and meet again to review projects and set goals in person with the SVEP manager on June 12, 2023.

The following report includes a list of potential projects collected by the Town Meeting House Committee from all the groups, which was shared at the June 12 meeting. That list helped inform a set of goals to guide present and future projects moving forward. At that meeting, several priority projects were also derived from the list. From notes gathered at the meeting, the SVEP manager created Project Overview Worksheets, which are included in this report.

Finally, the report contains some Action Step Matrices prepared by the SEVP manager for the priority projects. These can serve as a guide for local project leaders as they take the first steps towards implementation of priority projects.

It should be noted that the Action Steps included in this report are intended merely as a starting point, with the understanding that these are living documents. Project leaders should feel free to edit the steps, add elements, and refine and update action steps as they progress. The action steps also indicate partnerships and resources that can be helpful at specific steps along the way for the designated projects.

Please note that this priority project list does not preclude other projects from starting and moving forward, both around the Meeting House and in Windham in general. All projects contribute to the vitality of this already vital community, and all project leads are encouraged to use the Project Overview worksheet and Action Matrix as a planning template for projects. Blank copies are included at the end of the report that can be reproduced for community use.

Top 5 Goals for the Windham Meeting House

1. Preserve and maintain the historic character of the Windham Meeting House.
2. The cost of ongoing maintenance by the Town of Windham, and its taxpayers, should be considered in undertaking any renovations in the Meeting House.
 - a. *Updates that will reduce costs, or allow the Town to raise additional revenue (such as through increased rental opportunities) should be prioritized.*
3. Reduce the impact that maintaining the building places on the environment.
4. Update the Meeting House to allow the continuation of current community uses, through upgrades that comply with current fire safety and ADA standards.
5. Provide resources that will allow for new or expanded use of the Meeting House, anticipating that this building will continue to be a resource for the community for the next 200+ years.

Meeting House Project List Provided at 6/12/23 Meeting

1. Generator
2. Kitchen upgrade
 - a. Dishwasher
 - b. Fire suppression hood for stoves
 - c. Refrigerator
 - d. Stainless steel island
 - e. Sink
 - f. Reconfigure layout if necessary
3. Tankless water heater
4. Motion activated lights for safety and security on exterior doors
(Modified to read: just need back doors)
 - a. Security cameras
5. Push bars on doors as needed
6. Rehang inside door from main room to foyer to swing outward
7. Storm windows ~~Upstairs~~ (Window Dressers 2022) and downstairs
8. Refinish floors in main room downstairs
9. Enlarge parking lot
10. Update heating system to separate zones
11. ~~Paint and refresh foyer, stairs (add non-skid treads)~~ done June '23
12. Repair ceiling in sanctuary (possible lead paint)
13. Paint main room
14. Clean out under stairs and office; get rid of excess furniture
15. Remove wood stove from foyer
16. Hire cleaning service, plowing, shoveling w/job descriptions
17. Check thermostats (Upgraded meeting room thermostat 2022)
18. Check fire exit signs
19. Sign by road needs to be repainted and updated
20. Floor under stairs in front needs repair
21. Improve outdoor lighting
22. Paint building (discuss w/Friends of the Meeting House)
23. New exterior doors, ramp and porch (discuss w/Friends of the meeting house)
24. Treat water or get a water cooler
25. Address mouse problem
26. Purchase artificial tree for holidays
27. Vacuum cleaner
28. Sheetrock storage area under front stairs (Important)
29. Pavilion (for rear lawn)

Priority Projects for Windham Meeting House

The following list of priority projects is based on the above brainstorming list in conjunction with the Top 5 Community Goals for the Meeting House (see p. 5).

1. Project #1: Fire Safety and ADA Upgrades
2. Project #2: Energy Upgrades
3. Project #3: Kitchen Upgrade
4. Project #4: Painting
5. Project #5: Community Programming*

On the following pages, you will find more information and detail about the proposed projects, including project leads where they are known; resources and potential barriers; and an action matrix with first steps and additional information for the first 4 projects.

As previously mentioned, these documents are intended to serve as a starting point for the project leads. As the projects continue, it is anticipated that additional steps and information will be added. Please treat these as living documents!

**added by SVEP manager as a suggestion for ongoing work*

Project Sheet: *Fire Safety and ADA Upgrades (Windham Meeting House)*

Community Goal(s) it helps to accomplish:

4. Update the Meeting House to allow the continuation of current community uses, through upgrades that comply with current fire safety and ADA standards.

1. Preserve and maintain the historic character of the Windham Meeting House.

Local Project Lead: Friends of the Meeting House, working with the Select Board

Description of project:

Items from 'wish list' on p. 6:

- #23 New exterior doors, ramp, and porch (front entrance)
- #5 Push-bars on doors as needed
- #6 Rehang inside door from main room to foyer to swing outward

POSSIBLE TO ALSO INCLUDE: #28 Sheetrock storage area under front stairs (if this is also necessary for fire safety codes); #2 Fire suppression hood for stoves in kitchen; #9 enlarge parking lot (with reference to improved handicapped parking access)

Local Project Partners: As Town is the owner of the building, ultimately Town will need to be the applicant on grants.

Timeline: Summer 2023: Determine full scope of project and funding sources (potentially including ARPA funds, and how grant funding might come into play).

By Fall 2023, complete grant applications OR issue RFP

Work complete by end of 2024

Barriers: Need to obtain 3 quotes via RFP; have already applied but not received Paul Bruhn Grant; balancing historic preservation with the fire safety codes. VT State Division of Fire Safety will need to sign off on plans and final work.

Because the Town is the owner of the property and the building is not an income producing building, it is not eligible for tax credits (even if Windham pursues village center designation).

Because many grants for historic preservation projects have strict requirements, carefully consider all requirements and eligibility before undertaking any applications. For example, if the porch is not a historic feature, it is unlikely that the Historic Preservation Grant would fund it; likewise, the Historic Preservation Grant does not cover work that is undertaken simply in order to comply with code. [From Historic Preservation Grant FAQ's:](#) "Ineligible work includes ... code improvements."

Additional Resources:

VT Department of Historic Preservation (VDHP) see their [funding resource list](#)

[Preservation Trust of VT](#) is always a good partner for this work. Consult with them directly for a list of appropriate grant programs, based on the specific work to be undertaken and the reason behind that work (preservation AND critical code updates).

[Caitlin Corkins](#), Vermont Tax Credits & Grants Coordinator 802-828-3047 – consult with Caitlin about potential funding sources, including eligibility for a [State Historic Preservation Grant](#). (See above; it is worth asking but also be aware of differentiating work being done for code compliance vs repair or restoration of deteriorated historic features).

[1772 Foundation](#) grant may be helpful with a small grant to partially defray costs of the total project (if other elements like painting are included, so that the full funding sources available locally are expended by the entire project). Again, consult with PTV

Funding:

Estimated project cost was around \$50k-\$65k (Source: Friends of the Meeting House, based on funding requested through the Paul Bruhn Grant)

Friends of the Meeting House have \$100,000 (some will be needed for painting)

ARPA: up to \$43,000 could be requested from Town

Town annual funding: check with Town MHC on balance available; there might be \$5,000 available while still leaving adequate funds for other maintenance items.

Conclusion:

Creating a full spreadsheet of items with estimated costs (for this project as well as painting and kitchen upgrades), then inviting Caitlin Corkins, PTV, & DHCD for a funders meeting is recommended as a next step (see contacts in Action Steps).

Present them with a full list of priority projects (including ALL of the priorities), rough cost estimates, and available funding sources (see above).

If after checking in with PTV and State Historic Preservation, this portion of work does not seem likely to be eligible for grant funding, the town could consider putting out an RFP and paying for the work via existing funding. In that case, it might be possible to carry out the work by June of 2024.

Starting Action Step Matrix: *Fire Safety and ADA Upgrades (Windham Meeting House)*

Action step	Funding needed?	Resources/Partners + Details	Timeline
Contact Preservation Trust of VT, Caitlin Corkins, VT Office of Historic Preservation, and potentially Cindy Blondin (DHCD: CDBG accessibility modification grants) for a funders meeting to discuss the best path forward for covering each or all of the priority needs.	n	Present entire project to funders and determine if this portion is grant eligible (vs and including other desired projects in the conversation). Preservation Trust: jenna@ptvermont.org VT Historic Preservation: Caitlin Corkins DHCD: Cindy Blondin	ASAP/Summer 2023
Build spreadsheet with budget line items for all fire safety/accessibility items, and include items from projects 3 and 4 (kitchen and painting) as well as other potential ADA modifications to provide a full picture of total funding needed over the next 4 years. (Estimates based on best information available short of issuing an official RFP)	n	FMH and Town MHC partner to build a budget with costs estimated for items, so there is a full picture of costs; group them by project but include a total for all.	ASAP/Summer 2023
Whether or not fire safety/ADA upgrades are grant eligible, request ARPA funding from Town for this portion of the Meeting House project; either as adjunct to FMH/Town budget funding or as matching funds.	n	Present estimate (based on Paul Bruhn application), notes from funders meeting (step one above), and make funding request to SB	Late Summer/Fall 2023
Historic preservation grants application or 1772 Grant	n	If it seems like project is grant eligible, applications are due in fall of 2023 Check in about 1772 Foundation grants as well (Spring 2024)	Fall 2023 or Spring

RFP: issue RFP with specs for work established by FMH and in consultation with Division of Fire Safety		The exact timing depends on whether or not grant funding is involved	Late fall/early winter 2023
Commence/complete construction work	Y; tbd based on quotes/RFP		Spring 2024
If grant funding is utilized, submit grant close out report to funders and request funds.			Summer 2024
Additional steps and notes can be added as needed			

Project Sheet: **Energy Upgrades (Windham Meeting House)**

Community Goal(s) it helps to accomplish:

2. The cost of ongoing maintenance by the Town of Windham, and its taxpayers, should be considered in undertaking any renovations in the Meeting House.

Updates that will reduce costs, or allow the Town to raise additional revenue (such as through increased rental opportunity) should be prioritized.

3. Reduce the impact that maintaining the building places on the environment.

4. Update the Meeting House to allow the continuation of current community uses, through upgrades that comply with current fire safety and ADA standards.

5. Provide resources that will allow for new or expanded use of the Meeting House, anticipating that this building will continue to be a resource for the community for the next 200+ years.

Local Project Lead: Energy Committee

Description of project: Address weatherization (especially on the lower level) and upgrade heating systems and hot water system. Included items from list on p. 6: #3, 7, 10, 17, 21 (outdoor lighting), and potentially #1 (generator).

Local Project Partners: Friends of the Meeting House, Select Board (for application signoff)

Timeline:

- Application for Level 1 or 2 Assessment: Summer 2023
- Assessment carried out: Fall/Winter 2023
- Application for funding: Spring/Summer 2024

Barriers:

Windham is not on the list of severely energy burdened communities. From the [MERP program page](#): "MERP targets communities in need of energy resilience investments, often having excessive energy burden (the portion of income spent on heating, electricity, and transportation). Visit Efficiency Vermont's [webpage](#) and view their [2019 report](#) on Vermont's energy burden to learn more."

Uncertainty of timeline for application, assessment, and level of funding available to Windham

Resources:

Windham Regional Commission (specifically for [MERP](#) program); Efficiency Vermont

Starting Action Step Matrix: *Energy Upgrades (Windham Meeting House)*

Action step	Funding needed	Resources/Partners + Details	Timeline
Determine whether MERP Level 1 or Level 2 assessment is more appropriate	N	Windham Regional, Mike McConnell MERP program Comparison of Level 1/Level 2 The Level 2 assessment requires more information but would be necessary in order to seek a loan as part of the funding mix. It is not necessary for grant applications; however, consult with WRC to check if it might be advisable to do Level 2 given the possible scope of work.	ASAP/Immediately
If Level 2 assessment is needed, detailed architectural drawings should be sought ASAP, potentially using funds from the MERP Mini-grant	TBD	If this step is not needed, the mini-grant can be used to do community outreach around the project and energy resources available to homeowners as well as potential additional MH work.	Summer 2023/ASAP if required
Apply for MERP Energy Assessment	N	Work with Windham Regional: This step is necessary to obtain an assessment, which will develop the scope of work for a funding application. It is required despite previous energy assessments.	Summer 2023
Receive assessment and evaluate recommendations	N	Following the Assessment, the Energy Committee should review the recommendations and decide which items to undertake	TBD (Winter 2023/Spring 2024?)

Apply for MERP funding to carry out projects	N	Windham Regional is available for any application and technical assistance needs throughout the program	TBD – Spring/Summer 2024?
<i>Add additional steps as progress is made</i>			

Project Sheet: Kitchen Upgrades (Windham Meeting House)

Community Goal(s) it helps to accomplish:

2a. Updates that will reduce costs, or allow the Town to raise additional revenue (such as through increased rental opportunity) should be prioritized.

4. Provide resources that will allow for new or expanded use of the Meeting House, anticipating that this building will continue to be a resource for the community for the next 200+ years.

Local Project Lead: Town Meeting House Committee

Description of project: Undertake renovations to the kitchen in the Meeting House as per item #2 on the list found on p. 6. Priority item would be the fire suppression hood system for the stoves (for community use) with other items necessary if it is deemed worthwhile to make the facility meet commercial kitchen standards, or possible to update/acquire in stages if renovation is seen as being for community use only. Having more usable kitchens would potentially increase the value of the building for rental opportunities (private events, or events which might generate revenue for the building)

Local Project Partners: TBD as project develops

Timeline: This project, while a high priority, is not as critical to the current use of the building as fire safety upgrades. It should be pursued in tandem with or following the Fire Safety Upgrades. In the latter case, the time could also be used to build community support for the project, including fundraising.

Potential: *begin community process in 2024; raise funds through 2025 with an eye on completion in time for the 225th anniversary in 2027.*

Barriers:

- Cost
- Need to obtain community support
- Lower priority than other items that may be costly
- 501c3 status of Friends of Meeting house may affect fundraising ability

Resources: This project should be presented along with other renovation and repair projects in conversation with PTV and State Historic Preservation.

Consult with other projects that have recently installed kitchens in historic spaces. Two potential projects to compare with are [Broad Brook Community Center](#) (Guilford) and [Next Stage](#) (Putney).

Starting Action Step Matrix: *Kitchen Upgrades (Windham Meeting House)*

Action step	Funding needed	Resources/Partners + Details	Timeline
See Fire Safety Project: create full budget with line items for all non-energy related items: fire safety upgrades, kitchen, and painting (in phases)	n	FMH and Town MHC partner to build a budget with costs estimated for items so there is a full picture of costs.	ASAP/Summer 2023
Include kitchen upgrade in funders meeting with ACCD Historic Preservation/Preservation Trust of VT funders meeting so it is part of a full picture.	n	See Fire Safety project for contacts for funders who should be included in this conversation around funding.	ASAP/Summer 2023
Reach out to other local communities with recently completed kitchen projects – possibly tour them and find out more.	n	See project sheet: Guilford and Putney could be good resources: what equipment has paid off for them? Also ask about contractors they worked with; information around how kitchen upgrades have increased revenue for rentals (or not), etc.	ASAP
Communications to the community about the possibilities and benefits of completing this project!	Minor costs for flyers/other materials	Building community support for kitchen upgrades can help with fundraising efforts and possibly bring forward champions who will help push the project forward!	Winter 2023/Town Meeting 2024
Undertake fundraising for the project	Mailings and other materials may be needed	Possibly combine efforts for grant applications along with a fundraising appeal that includes mention of the upcoming anniversary	Spring/Summer 2024
<i>Add steps below as a more concrete timeline develops</i>			

Project Sheet: *Exterior Painting (Windham Meeting House)*

Community Goal it helps to accomplish:

1. Preserve and maintain the historic character of the Windham Meeting House.

Local Project Lead: Friends of the Meeting House (with Town for RFP purposes)

Description of project:

Repaint the exterior of the Windham Meeting House

This can be undertaken in phases, with painting for the later addition possible to undertake as a separate job from the historic portions; if necessary, the historic portion may be done in phases (this depends on the availability of contractors to do the work in this manner).

Project Partners: Town MHC, Select Board (for approvals); Windham Community Organization (potentially as fiscal sponsor if needed for fundraising appeal)

Timeline: Finish all phases of painting by 2027 Anniversary

Barriers:

- Cost of the entire project in the context of other priority projects
- 501c3 status of Friends of the Meeting House may affect fundraising ability (this should be addressed ASAP, or find a fiscal sponsor)

Resources:

Consult w/Preservation Trust of VT: [1772 Grants](#) can potentially be used for exterior painting

VT Department of Historic Preservation (VDHP) see their [funding resource list](#)

[Caitlin Corkins](#), Vermont Tax Credits & Grants Coordinator 802-828-3047 (note that regular maintenance costs, such as painting, are typically difficult to fund)

Starting Action Step Matrix: *Exterior Painting (Windham Meeting House)*

Action step	Funding needed	Resources/Partners + Details	Timeline
See Fire Safety Project: create full budget with line items for all non-energy related items – fire safety upgrades, kitchen, and painting (in phases)	n	FMH and Town MHC partner to build a budget with costs estimated for items, so there is a full picture of costs	ASAP/Summer 2023
Include painting in funders meeting with ACCD Historic Preservation/Preservation Trust of VT funders meeting so it is part of a full picture.	n	See Fire Safety project for contacts for funders who should be included in this conversation around funding	ASAP/Summer 2023
FMH discuss with painters (Momaney and potentially Norm Holden) the possibility of doing the Main MH painting in two phases	n	Explore whether doing the project in two or more phases would end up increasing costs or is feasible for finding a contractor to complete the work	Summer 2023
Create timeline for painting (phases and funding sources/budget)	n	Full timeline can be created based on contractor conversations re: phases, other project timelines, and full funding picture	Winter 2023/4
Addition painting	Y, TBD	This can likely be undertaking using ongoing Town maintenance funds and a local contractor	Summer 2024
Community Fundraising for Main Meeting House painting	Y: funds for mailing	Based on decisions around funding for other projects (kitchen, etc.) community fundraising could take place for one or more phases of the painting project; this could include grant applications as well: see 1772 Foundation grants through PTV	Spring 2024, or Spring 2025, depending on other project timelines
RFP issued for painters	Y; town funds to publicize	Will need to issue an RFP as this is a Town owned building	TBD

<i>Add additional steps as needed</i>			

Project Sheet: *Community Programming/Planning for Future Uses*

Community Goal it helps to accomplish:

4. Provide resources that will allow for new or expanded use of the Meeting House, anticipating that this building will continue to be a resource for the community for the next 200+ years.

Local Project Lead: Town MHC committee, or an ad hoc committee could be formed in conjunction with exploration of Village Center designation

Description of project: FMC and Town MHC are largely charged with maintaining the physical building. Planning for programming as well as the physical maintenance of the building is a lot for one group to accomplish. The idea of this project is to spin off programming so that the current groups are not overburdened.

The MHC could potentially form an offshoot committee, or publicize the opportunity for community groups to take on programming, in order to explore expanded uses and find community 'cheerleaders' for various expanded uses of the MH. Ideas: baby/young children play groups; monthly community potlucks; outdoor pavilion in rear of building; musical performances, etc.

Project Partners: Windham Community Organization, school, other community groups

Timeline: Open-ended, but with the conclusion of the pandemic and other work and projects underway to improve the physical building, there is an opportunity to cultivate the desire for more community gathering, with this historic and useful building as a centerpiece.

Barriers: Hard to bring in new people; community has relied on a small number of volunteers to maintain this resource; need to develop new habits of community following pandemic and people's resulting tendency towards isolation.

Resources:

Consult VCRD [Community Leadership Guide](#) for ideas on community engagement.

Village Center designation may bring expanded opportunities for funding programs and help renew interest in activating village center locations including Meeting House.

Working on other projects (like the kitchen, or even communication around the restoration projects in general) can help develop interest. Be sure to communicate to the community about ANY and ALL work that is happening to make the building more useful and welcoming.

Wardsboro is holding a 'Mixer with a Mission' June 23, 2023, to help build community support and community project cheerleaders for a variety of projects in Wardsboro. We can connect you with them to talk about how that went and what came out of it!

Starting Action Step Matrix: *Community Programming/Planning for Future Uses*

Action step	Funding needed	Resources/Partners + Details	Timeline
Discuss the idea of collaborating or creating a programming sub-committee to move this work forward	n	Windham Community Org w/ Town MHC	TBD
Recruit people to serve on that committee, or find opportunities to engage people at community events (both at MH and at other venues)	n	Regular newsletter, community gatherings	
Explore Village Center designation as a way to activate conversation and get access to additional funding sources and resources (with MH as part of a designation)	Y: public hearing would be required	Select Board, Planning Commission, Community input	2023?
If Village Center designation is granted, this provides an opportunity for a larger community gathering and process to discuss opportunities	TBD: money for publicizing meeting, meeting refreshments, etc.	WCO, Town	TBD

Project Sheet: *Blank sheet for future projects*

Community Goal it helps to accomplish:

Local Project Lead:

Description of project:

Project Partners:

Timeline:

Barriers:

Resources:

Starting Action Step Matrix: *Blank for future projects*

Action step	Funding needed	Resources/Partners + Details	Timeline

For any questions, or for more information, contact:

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About the Southern Vermont Economy Project: *The Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation's Southern Vermont Economy Project (SVEP) is a program that provides training and technical assistance to increase local capacity, skills, and resources in order to advance local projects in Southern Vermont. The program recognizes that local projects are critical to the ability of Southern Vermont to achieve its community, economic, and workforce development goals. SVEP is funded in part through the USDA Rural Community Development Initiative.*

