

Riverhead Vision 2020



An Evaluation of Community Action

Sean T. Morris
Institute for Sustainable Development
August, 2000

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I.	Introduction	2 - 4
Part II.	Background	4 - 6
Part III.	Review of Efforts Nationwide	6 - 14
Part IV.	Problem Definition	15 - 23
Part V.	Policy Alternatives	23 - 27
Part VI.	Riverhead Vision 2020's Program	27 - 29
Part VII.	Program Evaluation	29 - 35
Part VIII.	Recommendations	35 - 41
	Appendix	42 - 45

I. Introduction

Riverhead Vision 2020 is a grassroots, community-based organization aimed at providing the citizens of Riverhead Town with a vehicle through which they can have a meaningful role in determining the future of their town. By opening up the lines of communication between and among the diverse populations of the town, Riverhead Vision 2020 has attempted to create a forum whereby those populations' interests can be represented. The primary mechanism for this exchange of ideas has been a series of "study circles" that Riverhead Vision 2020 has hosted over the past year and a half. In these study circles, residents of Riverhead have gotten together to share their thoughts on the present state and future of Riverhead Town. This is meant to be the first step towards effecting meaningful and lasting change in the physical and social landscape of Riverhead Town.

Anecdotally, Riverhead Vision 2020 seems to have been relatively successful in its efforts. Nearly 150 people have been involved in its study circles and it has gotten favorable attention for its activities from the some of the local newspapers. There remains, however, a need to determine in a more substantive way just how well they are doing. For this research project, I have tried to perform a thorough evaluation of the work Riverhead Vision 2020 has done thus far. I have tried to determine, quite simply, what they are doing well, what they are doing poorly, what they need to do less of, and what they need to do more of. In so doing, I have tried to point Riverhead Vision 2020's directors toward where they need to go in order for their organization to reach its full potential.

This paper will, in the next section, begin by providing a brief background into Riverhead Town's social, physical and economic landscape. This is in order to familiarize the reader with the context within which Riverhead Vision 2020 is doing its work. The following section will review efforts in other parts of the country that may provide models or lessons for Riverhead Town. While most of them do not provide perfect parallels, they all can provide lessons and guidelines that Riverhead Vision 2020 may find practicable. Next, in the paper's fourth section, I will attempt to define some of the specific problems Riverhead is facing. It was my hope that by defining the primary problems in a fairly strict sense, I might be able to frame the Riverhead Vision 2020's efforts in the context of how well-suited they are toward remedying those problems. The fifth section of the paper outlines some of the policy alternatives being considered in Riverhead Town at this time. I have tried to identify the factors affecting implementation of these policy options and to discuss their respective feasibility. Sixth, I will discuss in some greater detail the activities of Riverhead Vision 2020 itself and how they have gone about their business. Section seven will then be the actual evaluation of Riverhead Vision 2020 and the eighth and final section will outline my recommendations for the organization as it goes forward.

It is my hope that Riverhead Vision 2020's directors will be able to use this analysis to refocus their efforts. While many of the recommendations will involve merely directing more attention toward the sort of things they are already doing well, others will involve brand new action. Ideally, this paper should provide the beginnings of a roadmap

whereby Riverhead Vision 2020 can navigate its way towards becoming a driving force in the determination of Riverhead's future.

II. Background

The Town of Riverhead was founded in 1792 and is one of the ten towns that make up Suffolk County, New York. Riverhead Town encompasses 78 square miles on the North Fork of Long Island and is home to, by the most recent estimates, slightly fewer than 25,000 people. The largest industry in Riverhead is farming. It is one of New York State's leading agricultural areas and, in fact, more than half of Long Island's remaining farms can be found in Riverhead Town. Among the crops grown on Riverhead's 20,000 acres of farmland are potatoes, corn, tomatoes and cabbage. In the last twenty-five years, the region has also begun growing grapes on its many vineyards and its wineries have developed to great renown. Greenhouses and nurseries are also an important part of the local economy, providing many jobs to local citizens. In addition, the amount of money generated from the sale of greenhouse flowers is second only to that provided by the area's vineyards.

The growth of the wine industry has helped revive tourist interest in Riverhead Town. While there have always been beaches and parks in Riverhead, tourists have been coming to Riverhead in recent years for its other amenities. In addition to the many wineries, tourist attractions include the *Tanger* Factory Outlet and its numerous retail clothing stores, *Splish Splash* water park, and the recently opened *Atlantis Marine World* aquarium. It is the hope of many that the tourist dollars generated by such attractions can

help ease some of the financial strain of rapidly diminishing farmland due to housing demands and its associated development.

While still a relatively sparsely populated area of Long Island, in comparison to its neighboring towns, Riverhead's population is growing quite rapidly. From 1990 to 1996 the population of Riverhead Town increased 6.9 percent while its bordering neighbors, the Towns of Southold, Brookhaven, and Southampton, grew at rates of 2.7, 2.9, and 2.9 percent respectively.¹ Riverhead is also slightly more racially diverse than its immediate neighbors. While African-Americans make up nearly 13% of Riverhead Town's population, they make up only 8.9% in Southampton, 3.6% in Brookhaven and 3.5% in Southold.² In the central hamlet of Riverhead, which has a population of just below 9,000, the African-American population is 28%. In addition, of the four towns, Riverhead has the lowest median household income and the highest percentage of families living below the poverty line.³

Riverhead hamlet is the busiest commercial center of this largely rural town and has been the seat of Suffolk County government since it was decreed by the New York colonial assembly in 1727. Although many of the county's offices have moved west in recent years to Hauppauge, those who work at the offices and courthouses that remain are a vital part of downtown Riverhead's economy. The downtown, as mentioned earlier, has also recently become the home of *Atlantis Marine World*. This newly opened aquarium is

¹ Places, Towns and Townships. Second Edition. Edited by Deirdre A. Gauquin and Richard W. Dodge. Lanham, MD: Bernham Press. 1998.

² Ibid.

hoped to bring 800,000 visitors to the streets of Riverhead's downtown in this its first year.⁴

Riverhead, as evidenced by the preceding paragraphs, is a community in flux. Its traditional role as a rural outpost at the confluence of Long Island's twin forks is evolving. Socially, economically, even physically, Riverhead Town is undergoing change just as many other communities across the country are. To help cope with these changes, different factions have mobilized in an effort to direct the process as much as possible. In fact, the Riverhead Town government has chosen this time to update their Town Master Plan for the first time since 1973. This Master Plan will be the blueprint for the next twenty years of Riverhead Town development.

III. Review of Efforts Nationwide

Riverhead is just one of the many communities around the country which have been faced with such changes and been forced to find ways to accommodate them. They have seen the very things that they value in where they live threatened by overdevelopment, crime, apathy, and changing economic conditions. To see the effects of these and other factors, many had to look no further than their towns' respective Main Streets. In town after town, as downtown businesses moved to outlying malls, shoppers dwindled and storefronts gradually were boarded up. The empty buildings and empty streets soon bred the notion that downtown was not a place where anything worthwhile

³ 1990 Census of Population and Housing. Summary of Social, Economic and Housing Characteristics. U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration.

⁴ Bruchey, Sam. "Some Say Boom Hurting Business." *Newsday*, July 22, 2000. p. A16.

was happening anymore. It was a downward spiral that many did not have the time, energy or wherewithal to halt. Thankfully, there were those that tried and many who have succeeded.

Many of the community groups who have taken on the task of reclaiming their downtowns have done so with the assistance of the National Main Street Center. This national program was created in 1980 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation to provide structure, support and money to revitalize America's small downtowns.⁵ So far over 1200 communities have adopted the Main Street approach in an effort to restore their historic buildings, revive their commercial districts, counteract sprawl and preserve a sense of community and place in their towns.⁶

The "Main Street Approach to Downtown Revitalization" has a four-pronged strategy with which to attack the problems facing America's downtowns. The first is "design." This area is concerned with enhancing the physical appearance of the downtown area by rehabilitating storefronts and historic buildings, encouraging supportive construction in the commercial district, and through long-term planning. The second area, "organization," aims to build consensus and cooperation among the many often disparate groups that play a role in the revitalization process. Third is "promotion," which deals with the marketing of the town's commercial district and its assets to potential customers, merchants, investors, and tourists. The fourth and final prong of the

⁵ Kozleski, Lisa. "Main Street Program Will Give Perkaskie a \$190,000 Boost." *The Morning Call (Allentown, PA)* February 7, 2000.

⁶ "National Main Street Center: The Decline of Main Street." www.mainst.org/about/decline.htm

“Main Street Approach” is “economic restructuring.” This area concerns itself with strengthening the business district’s existing economic base and infrastructure while finding ways to expand it to meet new opportunities and challenges, specifically those that may come from outlying development.⁷

As a complement to the National Main Street Center, 32 states have instituted their own main street programs using the national center’s theories and guidelines. One such example is Main Street New Jersey. The Main Street New Jersey Program was established in 1989 in an effort to encourage and support the revitalization of New Jersey’s downtown commercial districts. Every two years the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs accepts applications and selects communities to join the program. The designated communities receive training and technical support to assist them in their efforts.⁸ According to figures made available by Main Street New Jersey, since 1990, 649 new businesses and 3,678 new jobs have been created in the state as a result of this program. Furthermore, over 84 million dollars of private money has been reinvested in building improvement projects. In all, the ratio of private to public reinvestment dollars has been more than 26 to 1.⁹

In Connecticut, the main street program is sponsored by the Connecticut Light and Power Company. While the communities must provide their own funding, this public utility contributes human resources, training, technical support and other assistance. One

⁷ “National Main Street Center: The Main Street Approach” www.mainst.org/about/approach.htm

⁸ Main Street New Jersey. “What is the Main Street Program.” p. 2.

⁹ Main Street New Jersey. “Economic Impact Summary.” p. 5.

participant in the Connecticut Main Street Program is New London Main Street. In existence since 1995, New London Main Street has an annual budget of \$130,000 provided by the City of New London, a business improvement district fund called the City Center District, foundations, corporations, member dues and individual gifts. It currently has four fully staffed committees for each of the four areas of the Main Street Approach and each committee has outlined goals and specific projects it is responsible for.¹⁰

Quakertown, Pennsylvania, is another town reaping the benefits of this approach to downtown revitalization. Quakertown Alive!, the organization spearheading the town's efforts, has a long list of accomplishments despite the fact that it was founded only 16 months ago. Included in those achievements is a successful beautification project in the town's downtown triangle and parking lot, the first "Upper Bucks Day of the Arts" festival, the formation of a grant program for business owners and landlords to improve building facades along the town's major thoroughfare, Broad Street, and the acquisition of a \$590,000 grant and historic status for the Quakertown train station. Furthermore, in June, they announced the creation of the Upper Bucks Micro Loan Fund, for which seven banks will contribute \$50,000 each to a pool that will enable start-ups and expanding businesses to access loans of between \$5,000 and \$35,000.¹¹

¹⁰ From New London Main Street website. www.newlondonmainstreet.org.

¹¹ Ferry, Joseph. "Quakertown Alive! Certified as National Main St. Group." *The Morning Call (Allentown, PA)*. June 16, 2000.

Another Pennsylvania downtown that has witnessed remarkable success with its embrace of the Main Street approach is in the small town of Emmaus. In January of 1998 the vacancy rate for buildings in downtown Emmaus was 20 percent (Riverhead's is 30 percent). That was when a Main Street program was embarked upon by the Emmaus Borough Council. The program director began aggressively seeking out businesses thinking about relocating and personally giving them walking tours of Emmaus' downtown. In 1998, 21 new businesses opened downtown. In 1999, 16 more opened. By the end of 1999, the vacancy rate had decreased to only 5 percent. What makes this turnaround even more remarkable is that it has been done with little financial strain on the borough of Emmaus. In fact, the government of the borough has not contributed any money itself since the spring of 1998.¹²

Wilton, New Hampshire has also managed to accomplish much with little in the way of local public money. Wilton has focused its efforts on creating a pedestrian-friendly downtown. The Wilton Main Street Association spent the early part of 2000 competing for a \$435,000 grant for sidewalk renovation and repair. The money, which would have been provided under the auspices of the federal Transportation Enhancement Act, was part of \$5 million allotted by the federal government to New Hampshire for such improvements. Due to a lack of a strong business base in Wilton, much of the other funds the association has relied upon have come in smaller increments. A large portion of their budget has actually come from small personal contributions, many as low as \$25.

¹² Gelman, Jeff. "Emmaus' Main St. Filled With Shops." *The Morning Call (Allentown, PA)*. November 10, 1999.

Still, the Wilton Main Street Association has managed to organize itself into four organizing committees of about ten members each. The committees are modeled after the Main Street approach; organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring. In all, the association boasts over 100 active members, nearly all volunteers, who are dedicated to revitalizing their downtown. Among the work done by the volunteers has been intercepting people on the street to ask them what they would like to see in the town. These “intercept surveys” are only one way in which residents are reached out to. The association also plans and sponsors community activities for the fourth Saturday of every month.¹³ While the Wilton group has yet to achieve many of the material gains of some of their counterparts around the country, it appears they have managed to mobilize a good portion of the community, which is certainly no small feat.

Residents of the Town of Riverhead, presumably, do not only want to see their downtown revitalized, they want to see that the town’s open space and natural resources are preserved. For many it was the unique quality of rural life that attracted them to the area in the first place. It is somewhat ironic that this bucolic character that draws people to the region is also the first thing threatened by that influx. The migration of refugees from the nation’s cities into its rural areas requires more and more open space to be developed to provide for houses and backyards. Furthermore, many of these areas that

¹³ Bliss, Gil. “Wilton’s Main Street, Not Much Money But a Whole Lot of Spirit.” *Manchester Union Leader Sunday News*. January 23, 2000.

promise scenic beauty also harbor threatened species of plants and wildlife. In the Davis Mountains of western Texas this is a particularly hot issue.

The Davis range is traditionally ranching country with family ranches in the thousands of acres being common. However, the price of land in the Davis range is only about \$300 an acre. This makes the land much more valuable for recreation than it is for ranching. For that reason, land prices have begun to be driven up by people from the cities and developers who want to subdivide the land to put up houses or build golf courses. To fight this trend, and the traditional inclination of Texas government to stay out of land use issues, The Nature Conservancy has stepped in.¹⁴

The Nature Conservancy [TNC] is a non-profit land trust whose mission is to preserve wild and open spaces around the world. Their game plan in the Davis Mountains has been to get the ranchers of the region to donate or sell to TNC what are known as conservation easements. A conservation easement is legal contract to keep the land in its natural state in perpetuity. The landowner may either donate the easement to TNC or the Conservancy may buy the land and resell it subject to an easement. The advantage to the landowner is that by giving up the opportunity to develop the land for its “highest and best use” (the legal doctrine which allows owners to develop land in any way they see will give them the greatest financial reward) he lowers the value of the land and thereby benefits from lower income, property and inheritance taxes. Furthermore, he and his descendants can forever go on using the land for ranching, limited only by the

¹⁴ Patoski, Joe Nick. “Land That I Love.” *Texas Monthly*. March 2000.

grazing and management plan worked out between him and TNC. In one such deal alone, TNC managed to preserve 32,000 acres of land. This land will never be anything but a cattle ranch or a nature preserve. The Conservancy has also used these easements as tools to preserve land in New England, Florida, and North Carolina.¹⁵

Of all the groups I have come across in this research, the one that can perhaps best be used as a model for Riverhead Vision 2020 is the central Alabama community organization, Region 2020. This area of rural Alabama has long been the domain of poverty, racism, and deterioration. Region 2020 was founded in the summer of 1997 for the purpose of developing a process whereby all the citizens of central Alabama could be involved in sharing ideas about the region's future, translating them into goals, and working together to implement them. Region 2020 has been aggressive in pursuing those ends and has been quite successful thus far.¹⁶

In the fall of 1997, Region 2020 began the "idea gathering" phase of the process and, thanks to the participation of over 1,800 people, received nearly 5,000 ideas for improving the quality of life in the region. Thirty four potential goals were culled from those ideas, and a "vision fair" was held in the spring of the next year. Through the input of 1,300 fair participants, the goals of the organization were honed even further. Since then, the group has been in the "implementation" stage of their process. This has involved setting up workgroups in the areas of Environment, Recreation & Culture, Education, Places, Economic Development, Community, and Government. Each

¹⁵ Ibid.

workgroup has been responsible for developing action plans for each of those areas, relating specifically to whichever of the 34 stated goals fall in that sphere.

These action plans (which are all available on the group's website, www.region2020.org) are nothing short of calls-to-arms for the community they aim to serve. In order to facilitate the government involvement necessary for many of these challenges, Region 2020 has also set up a Regional Roundtable of Elected Officials and an Intergovernmental Committee of volunteers to keep the elected officials informed of Region 2020's progress and activities. Very much due to the fact that the group has been the beneficiary of the extensive donations, not the least being the labor of over 1,500 volunteers, the 1998-99 budget expenses totalled only \$167,589.¹⁷

These are just a sampling of the ways that, around the country, people are taking back control of the places where they live. In the Main Street cases they are doing it with the modest assistance of the government as a mere facilitator. In the case of the Davis Mountains it is being done without any government assistance whatsoever. And in Central Alabama it is the tireless work of volunteers that has made Region 2020 a force in their communities. These are instances in which ordinary citizens have stared in the collective faces of economic pressure, citizen apathy, and government nonresponsiveness to turn back the tide of downtown deterioration and rural overdevelopment. These being the two key issues facing Riverhead Town, lessons can perhaps be learned.

¹⁶ "Region 2020: The Vision." www.region2020.org/vision.html

¹⁷ "Region 2020: About Us, Leadership, and Funding." www.region2020.org/about_us.html

IV. Problem Definition*

All of the groups mentioned in the previous section were responding to a perceived problem or problems in their communities. The question that must be asked then by Riverhead Vision 2020, or anyone proposing to evaluate them, is what are the specific problems facing Riverhead. For this analysis, the process of identifying the problems in Riverhead Town centered around a survey conducted of Riverhead residents. This survey was conducted as part of the development of an updated master plan for the Town of Riverhead. As part of the survey, Riverhead residents were asked, among other things, to identify the best and worst things about living in Riverhead, the best and worst things about the downtown area and to rate the conditions of various aspects of life. From the respondents' answers I was able to come to some conclusions about the biggest problems Riverhead is facing.

First, I looked at the very things the residents defined as problematic. For the question, "What are the three....worst things about living in Riverhead?" the most popular answer was "traffic" at 36.8%. Following closely after traffic was "taxes" at 31.4% and third was "overdevelopment" at 15.1%. "Rundown appearance" and "unsafe" both polled nearly 10% and the town government itself was mentioned over 8% of the time. By merely looking at these responses we start to get a laundry list of grievances but a clear picture, let alone a definition, of the area's overarching problems is still lacking.

The next section of the survey that gave insights into Riverhead's problems was the one that asked respondents to rate the conditions of certain aspects of the town.

* All survey data in this section comes courtesy of the Riverhead Town Planning Board and its resident

Conditions could be rated “good,” “could be better,” or “poor.” The condition that received the highest frequency of “poor” ratings was “traffic on Route 58.” 60.7% of those who responded rated traffic along this commercial corridor north of downtown as “poor” while only 6.7% rated it “good.” By contrast, “traffic on local roads” was rated “good” by 56.2% of respondents while only 8% rated it “poor”. The full results are depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

	Good	Could be better	Poor	Don’t know	Totals
Traffic on Route 58	6.7%	32.1%	60.7%	0.5%	100.0%
Traffic on local roads	56.2%	35.3%	8.0%	0.5%	100.0%
Open space and farmland preservation	46.8%	39.8%	9.3%	4.0%	100.0%
Appearance of Route 58	12.5%	49.7%	37.2%	0.5%	100.0%
Appearance of main roads	30.6%	56.5%	12.2%	0.7%	100.0%
Historic preservation	35.6%	41.7%	10.2%	12.6%	100.0%
Commute to work	49.3%	22.2%	12.4%	16.1%	100.0%
Quality of office and industrial development	20.6%	35.9%	24.2%	19.2%	100.0%
Property taxes	10.3%	40.7%	47.9%	1.2%	100.0%
Town government	20.1%	49.5%	23.7%	6.7%	100.0%

Here we get a clearer picture of what exactly residents were talking about when the said traffic was the worst thing about living in Riverhead. They were not necessarily talking about traffic throughout the town in general, but mostly traffic along this

survey conducted in the fall of 1999.

particular road, Route 58. Further indication of this is given by the fact that 49.3% of those surveyed rated their “commute to work” as “good.”

Despite the fact residents are frustrated by Route 58’s heavy traffic, it is where most residents do their regular shopping. Indeed, nearly 70% of survey respondents said they generally do their grocery shopping on Route 58 and over 50% do their “quick errand shopping” there as well. One can certainly make the case that the “traffic” people are talking about is specifically the traffic they encounter when they are shopping locally and are forced to deal with the throngs of cars that line Route 58. This coupled with the fact that 37.2% of those surveyed gave the “appearance of Route 58” a rating of “poor” indicates that Route 58 may be a place to concentrate on when we are looking for the biggest problems in the town. Specifically, people seem to be looking for an alternative to Route 58.

One potential alternative to Route 58 has always been downtown Riverhead. Downtown, however, is certainly not without its own problems. When residents were asked, “What do you like least about downtown Riverhead?” the most frequent answer was “vacant buildings” at about 28%. Next was “loitering” at 16.5%, followed closely by “unsafe” at 15.5%. “Not enough shopping opportunities” and “run-down” rounded out the top five with 13.2% and 10.8% respectively. It seems that a lack of desirable activity like shopping and nightlife downtown and the presence of vacant buildings has made it an area where undesirable activity has become more the norm. This has fostered an image of the area being unsafe. People seem to stay away from downtown for essentially two

reasons: they don't feel comfortable and safe about going downtown and there is nothing to do when they get there.

The main problem in downtown Riverhead, therefore, is the lack of desirable activity. The large numbers of vacancies and its run-down appearance only add to the perception that it is a place where nothing worthwhile is happening.

The coincident problems of increasing traffic along Route 58 and diminishing business for downtown only stands to get worse if current conditions persist. Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse is planning to build its first ever store on Long Island on a site along Route 58 in Riverhead. Further up the road construction is underway for an Applebee's restaurant and if you travel east just past the traffic circle you will see where a new Wal Mart is being built. Yet another major project is proposed for a 50 acre site along Route 58 and has been the subject of four years of contentious litigation.¹⁸

The controversy surrounds a 435,000 square foot shopping complex known as Riverhead Centre, which is to include a Home Depot, a Waldbaum's, a Circuit City, and a 12-18 screen multiplex theater. Opponents argue that this project is just too large and will lead to an unacceptable level of car traffic along Route 58 and attract even more shoppers away from downtown Riverhead's merchants and retailers. Lee Koppelman, director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board, believes that the rate of development along Route 58 poses a threat to the future viability of the downtown

¹⁸ Martorana, Jamie. "Alone No More." *Newsday*. July 31, 2000.

commercial district.¹⁹ Many have also charged that the town government has played “fast and loose” with zoning laws to accommodate the development.²⁰

This dispute has its roots in another matter of great concern to residents of Riverhead Town, and that is land use. When asked to name the best things about living in Riverhead residents rated the best thing as “rural atmosphere” and third was “open space.” In fact, Riverhead residents’ top three responses all concerned the natural environment, as the presence of Riverhead’s many waterfronts on the Long Island Sound, Peconic Bay and Peconic River rated number two on the list of the best things about Riverhead. When residents were asked what the worst things about living in Riverhead were, third on the list was “overdevelopment.” The top five responses to each question are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Best Things About Living In Riverhead		Worst Things About Living In Riverhead	
Response	Rate	Response	Rate
Rural atmosphere	51.1%	Traffic	36.8%
Waterfront	43.9%	Taxes	31.4%
Open space	18.0%	Overdevelopment	15.1%
Shopping	15.5%	Run-down appearance	9.8%
Quiet	12.2%	Unsafe	9.8%

While a great deal of this development is commercial and has added to the glut along the much-maligned Route 58, another large portion is residential. As mentioned

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kelly, Tim. “Riverhead Centre dispute continues.” *The News Review*. February 24, 2000.

earlier, the population of Riverhead Town is growing at a rate of about two and a half times that of its neighbors. To accommodate this development, many of the farms that make Riverhead the number one agricultural town in New York State's leading agricultural county have been subdivided for housing or are being considered for such. This threatens not only Riverhead's precious farmland, but also many of the region's rare species of plants and animals.

One example of this was the subject of a lawsuit this year in Riverhead Town. Construction was approved by the Town Board for an 18-hole golf course and accompanying luxury homes on a farm in the hamlet of Baiting Hollow. The farm, which sits atop steep bluffs overlooking Long Island Sound, is said by environmentalists to be part of the "grandifolia sandhills" and that the site is a unique ecological formation and the home of several endangered plant species. On those grounds they sued to halt the development of the land. Supporters of the project called this argument "a ruse" and countered that a small number of luxury homes and a golf course are preferable to a development of hundreds of homes on the land. This story highlights not only the issue of development in the town but also of the conflict between developers and environmentalists that accompanies all such projects.²¹

Riverhead residents also showed how important the environment of the town is to them when they were asked in the town survey what they wanted the town to spend their tax dollars on. It seemed residents' top priority was for the town government to provide

²¹ Kelly, Tim. "Sandhills saga lands in court." *The News Review*. March 2, 2000.

more ways whereby they can enjoy their town’s natural endowments. When asked what recreational items the Town should spend “more money and effort on” the top responses all involved communing with nature. Beach facilities, parks and picnic areas, nature trails, bicycle paths and playgrounds were all thought to be requiring more attention.

Table 3.

	More	Same	Less	Don’t Know	No Answer	Totals
Beach facilities	52.0%	35.7%	3.6%	4.4%	4.3%	100.0%
Parks and picnic areas	50.8%	34.3%	5.1%	4.9%	4.9%	100.0%
Nature trails	48.9%	31.5%	7.0%	8.0%	4.6%	100.0%
Bicycle paths	45.7%	33.1%	8.0%	8.7%	4.4%	100.0%
Playgrounds	43.0%	35.4%	6.4%	8.2%	7.0%	100.0%
Indoor ice skating	41.3%	16.7%	21.5%	14.8%	5.7%	100.0%
Indoor public swimming pools	35.7%	16.7%	26.2%	15.6%	5.7%	100.0%
Jogging trails	34.6%	39.0%	10.2%	10.7%	5.6%	100.0%

Furthermore, as Table 3 shows, when asked what they should spend “less money and effort” on, the most popular answers were “indoor public swimming pool” and “indoor ice skating.” It certainly appears that when it comes to recreation, Riverhead citizens want there to be more opportunities outdoors.

Another problem identified by the resident survey, though perhaps not explicitly, concerns the relationships between and among the various communities that make up Riverhead Town. As stated earlier, Riverhead is more ethnically and economically

diverse than its neighboring towns. While this diversity has the potential to be a tremendous strength, it unfortunately can often become a source of mistrust and suspicion. This can be especially troublesome in a region that is not enjoying the best of times. The propensity can arise for people to blame those different from themselves for difficulties in the community. There is evidence that this is occurring in Riverhead.

As stated earlier, when residents were asked what the worst things about living in Riverhead Town were, most answers centered around general economic, social, and physical aspects. However, interspersed within those responses were fair amount that suggest an underlying climate of intolerance. For example, the phrase “too many_____” was completed by various respondents with “foreigners,” “low class people,” and “welfare recipients,” among others. While this is not necessarily evidence of racism, per se, it does raise concerns about racial, ethnic, and class-based prejudice. As a further indication that this should be an area of concern, “racial problems” were also mentioned as a bad thing about the town by several respondents.

The preceding section has highlighted several areas of contention in Riverhead Town and matters that perhaps should be of concern. There are certainly, as in any town, a lot of things that need improvement, not all of which have discussed. Judging from the survey of town residents, however, it seems that most of the difficulties facing Riverhead Town can be broken down into three main problems:

1. Lack of desirable activity in the downtown area.
2. Overdevelopment and the accompanying conflict between developers, town officials, and environmentalists.

3. Racial, ethnic and class tensions.

For the rest of this evaluation, I will for the most part view the work of Riverhead Vision 2020 in the context of these three problems.

V. Policy Alternatives*

There has been no shortage of suggestions as to how to best approach these problems facing Riverhead Town. The town government, the consulting group it has hired to update its master plan, Riverhead Vision 2020, and concerned citizens of Riverhead have all weighed in to some extent on the subject. Many of these suggestions have involved policy changes or initiatives by the local government. In this section I will review some of the more prominent policy alternatives that have been put forth thus far, examine the feasibility of each, and discuss some of the obstacles that may affect their implementation. Due to the fact that Riverhead Vision 2020 has largely been an advocate of community-based solutions rather than those resulting from a change in policy, this section will be somewhat brief and less than all-encompassing. I will also only be concerned with policy alternatives that are specific to the Town of Riverhead as Section III of this paper has already dealt with policies elsewhere.

The first source of policy alternatives I will discuss is the Riverhead Town Master Plan. The Manhattan consulting firm of Abeles, Phillips, Preiss & Shapiro [APPS], was

* Some of the policy alternatives mentioned in this section came from a June 20, 2000, Riverhead town meeting. This meeting was hosted by the consulting firm of Abeles, Phillips, Preiss & Shapiro and many of their policy suggestions for Riverhead's downtown were discussed. It should be noted that none of the policy recommendations have necessarily been adopted or even formally proposed.

hired by the town to update its master plan, last formulated in 1973. This is to be the town's blueprint for development over the next twenty years. While the bulk of the plan's recommendations will be made in the fall of 2000, as of the writing of this paper, the only portion for which policy recommendations had been made available was that which dealt with Riverhead's downtown business district. This discussion will, therefore, be limited to those policies.

Perhaps surprisingly, the planners thought very little in the way of major policy initiatives were needed to revive the town's beleaguered commercial district. The planners proposed wholesale changes to neither the town's infrastructure nor to its zoning laws. Instead they suggested modest changes that could be made to maximize Riverhead's existing assets. Many of these suggestions centered around increasing pedestrian traffic around town and decreasing automobile traffic. For example, rather than building new parking lots near the new aquarium, as many have proposed, the planners advised the town to install numerous signs around town directing traffic to the existing municipal lots. That way, aquarium visitors would be required to walk through town and past its shops and restaurants on their way to their actual destination. While this plan would have the benefit of boosting the business of local merchants, it is not without flaws. First of all, many of those coming to visit the aquarium do so with small children. Forcing parents to walk any distance with small children in tow may not be the best way to foster good will towards the town. Secondly, many town residents say the existing parking is barely sufficient to handle its current demand, let alone that of the aquarium's projected 800,000 visitors a year.

Another aspect of the master planner's efforts to make Riverhead more pedestrian friendly involved installing more crosswalks and traffic lights and instituting traffic calming ordinances. This would include lowering speed limits and altering the physical structure of the road to force automobiles traversing Main Street to slow down. While these changes would probably make downtown a safer and more welcoming place for pedestrians, these are not things that Riverhead Town can initiate on its own. The reason for this is that the road that Riverhead residents call Main Street is actually New York State Route 25. That means that any changes made to the traffic lights, speed limit, etcetera, would have to come from the state. This cooperation may not necessarily be difficult to come by, but it provides a stumbling block nonetheless.

Another recommendation for which governmental regulation could provide a roadblock is the creation of a downtown Arts District. The idea behind this proposal is to provide financial assistance to artists seeking housing in the downtown area and to provide incentives for landlords to lease space to those artists. It was thought by APPS that this would provide a "high visibility small business" for Riverhead and that as few as 25 artists could help the town develop a vibrant arts scene.²² A side benefit would also be to spur a revival in downtown residential living. Critics of the idea, aside from questioning what incentives could be given to landlords to rent their apartments at below-market prices, say the town building codes are too restrictive to make the plan work. The

²² Shapiro, John. Abeles, Phillips, Preiss & Shapiro. Riverhead Town Meeting, June 20, 2000.

upgrades necessary to bring the apartments into compliance with these codes, it is argued, will make them too expensive for artists to afford.

APPS's suggestions did also include some "updating" of the town's zoning ordinances to make some of their suggestions possible. Most of these updates were, however, nonspecific and involved primarily allowing for more landscaping and minimizing land use in incorporating their suggestions. In all, however, the plans for Riverhead's downtown rely a great deal on market factors. For example, they suggest Riverhead's lack of eating establishments will be solved primarily through the profit motive of entrepreneurs seeking to cash in on the crowds coming to town to see the aquarium. There is evidence that this is already happening, judging by the "coming soon" signs that have begun cropping up along Main Street advertising new eateries.

This suggests that ever-present policy alternative of doing nothing. Sometimes, it can be argued the best thing to do from a policy standpoint, is get out of the way. While that strategy may possibly work to revive Main Street business, it is not going to work to preserve farmland. The market is a notoriously poor protector of the environment and open spaces. Many will probably argue that this is not the strong suit of the Riverhead town government either. Notwithstanding the disputes over project approvals that were outlined in Section IV, Riverhead officials have evidently recognized the importance of Riverhead's rural character, having earmarked public money for the purchase of the development rights of North Fork farms. This effort, similar to the Nature Conservancy's program of purchasing conservation easements, makes the land valuable

to those that want to farm on it and worthless to those that want to build a Home Depot on it. This is a good example of government seizing control of land use decisions back from the often unforgiving market.

Similarly, the market cannot be expected to renovate dilapidated houses outside the core business area. This is a market failure that Riverhead Vision 2020 has suggested town government may be able to aid in overcoming. One suggestion the organization has made is that the town could issue tax breaks to foster renovations. The general thought is that the residents need their government's cooperation and assistance in such an endeavor and that some sort of partnership needs to be forged. Riverhead Vision 2020 has, however, been short on specifics as far as what form these tax breaks might take or on how an alliance between the government and townsfolk might be implemented.

VI. Riverhead Vision 2020's Program

In the introduction to this paper, I gave a general overview of Riverhead Vision 2020 and their program of study circles and community outreach. In this section I will discuss the organization and its activities in greater detail in advance of the evaluation portion of the paper.

As stated in the introduction, Riverhead Vision 2020 is a grassroots, community based organization made up nearly entirely of volunteers. It is apolitical and can not be said to be ideologically either liberal or conservative. Riverhead Vision 2020 is also not an advocate for any environmental cause or any specific population demographic. Its

stated mission is “to assure that a broad and diverse representation of Riverhead citizens participate in community-wide study circles, to learn of people’s concerns for their community, and to record and compile their ideas.”²³ The organization is structured around a Steering Committee, an Advisory Council, and a salaried Coordinator. The primary unit of the Riverhead Vision 2020 program is the study circle.

The very first study circle was formed by the group’s Steering Committee. Each member invited one or more people to attend. For the first circle, this led to fairly wide range of diversity, in terms of where people lived, ages of participants, and levels of income. It ended up bringing together several African Americans, one Hispanic community leader, a high school student, and some of the leaders of local civic associations, among others. The first study circle met four times, at the Congregational Church and at the Riverhead Free Library, from the middle of November to the middle of December, 1998.

Other study circles have since been held in many different hamlets in the town. The circles were run by trained facilitators and the participants were those personally invited by the facilitator. For example, one Steering Committee member started several circles in her home hamlet, finding participants through her church and her friends. Another brought together people from his neighborhood association and colleagues from work to form a study circle. Each circle, made up of anywhere from eight to fifteen people, would meet for four consecutive weeks to discuss issues facing their town and

²³ “2000 Fact Sheet.” Riverhead Vision 2020.

communities. In the eighteen months since that first study circle, more than a dozen have been held throughout the community, with more than 150 participants.

Earlier this year, Riverhead Vision 2020 also sponsored a “mini vision fair” as another way to reach out to the community. Held at the Riverhead Library on June 3, the event’s purpose was to showcase the ideas generated from the first year and half of study circles and enable residents to give their feedback on which of those ideas they would most like to see implemented. Despite the best efforts of the organizers, only 47 people attended the fair, a number swelled by those from an AARP defensive driving course being held next door who were attracted by the free coffee and refreshments being served.²⁴

Due to the lower-than-anticipated turnout, a full-scale vision fair originally scheduled for October of 2000 has been postponed indefinitely. Instead, Riverhead Vision 2020 has planned to hold another series of study circles in an effort to drum up greater interest and awareness in the community.

VII. Program Evaluation

Many of the problems facing Riverhead can be overcome by superficial changes like streetlights, welcome signs, and friendly market forces. Many more will need the

²⁴ “Mini Vision Fair Overview” Riverhead

strong hand of government. There are, however, still others that can be solved neither by a booming economy nor an activist government. Most prominent among these is the climate of intolerance that pervades our entire culture, Riverhead being no exception. The mere fact that the directors of Riverhead Vision 2020 have chosen to try to do something about this in their town is worthy of our esteem. To step in where both the market and the government have failed and attempt to forge a solution based on simple human relationship is indeed an admirable aim.

Riverhead Vision 2020 has stated that one of its primary goals, if not its very mission, is to bridge the gap between the disparate communities of Riverhead Town. This refers not only to its racial communities. It refers to environmentalists and developers, citizens and public officials, summer renters and lifelong residents. The series of study circles it has sponsored in the community have been the main way they have tried to open the lines of communication between these groups. The main idea has been to find a certain level of common ground on which to build.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of Riverhead Vision 2020's endeavor thus far is the way they have framed the issue of community revitalization as one of mutual benefit for all involved. As we can all bear witness to, it is quite easy to assign blame for a state of affairs we may find dissatisfactory. It is much more difficult to reach out to the people you might want to condemn and try to reach a common ground. The avenues of litigation, confrontation and protest are well-worn and can very often get you where you want to go. It is, however, very refreshing to see people attempting to swath a path of

cooperation. Nancy Gray, one of Riverhead Vision 2020's most active members, vocalized this idea very nicely to members of her study circle who were slowly disintegrating into this blame game (of developers, the town board, etc.). She said how she was tired of just "fights and lawsuits" and "wanted to be part of something positive."²⁵ Riverhead Vision 2020, no doubt, has the potential to be something very positive for Riverhead Town. It still has some work to do, however.

While it appears that members of the Riverhead community that are traditionally underrepresented are having a greater chance to speak through these study circles, it is unclear whether they are being heard. By this, I mean that it appears that the study circles minority residents, specifically African-Americans, have participated in have been attended largely by other members of that same minority community. At a recent Riverhead Town Board meeting, Mr. Larry Williams, an African-American and active member of Riverhead Vision 2020, spoke of his participation. He told the Town Board how he has been a facilitator for two study circles which were attended by 20 other African-Americans. By contrast, a recent study circle I attended was 100% white and nearly 100% female.

It is wonderful that Riverhead Vision 2020 has been able to reach out to the African-American community and gotten them to participate in the process. It is also impressive that they have been able to inspire working women and mothers, who often have the busiest schedules among us, to make the time to take an active role in the future

²⁵ Gray, Nancy. Riverhead Vision 2020 study circle. June 20, 2000, Shoreham-Wading River HS.

of their community. What is sorely lacking however is a real, meaningful dialogue between these groups. The same goes for homeowners and developers, customers and businesspeople. To break down the walls of racism, suspicion, and mistrust that exist, these types of discussions must occur. In addition, there are other resident groups that have not yet been made involved at all, most notably the Hispanic laborers that toil on Riverhead's many farms. These people must be given an opportunity to participate and, in so doing, be provided with a stake in Riverhead's future. It is, after all, their community too.

Riverhead Vision 2020 must also generally see to it that a greater number of people from any and all walks of life become involved in the process. Based on their own estimates, not quite 200 residents of Riverhead Town have participated in the dozen or so study circles and mini vision fair they have held. Considering that these study circles have been going on for over 18 months that is simply not enough. In fact, it does not even account for 1% of Riverhead's population. For Riverhead Vision 2020 to be a viable participant in Riverhead policy-making and to claim to represent its constituents' interests, it must make a more persistent effort to reach a larger portion of the population.

Which brings me to a matter that may not seem like much but which I consider a fairly significant shortcoming of the organization. I am speaking of the lack of any presence for Riverhead Vision 2020 on the internet. I don't believe it is an exaggeration to say that, in the year 2000, if an organization does not exist on the web it barely exists in reality. In my research, I have come across a great many similar organizations both

large and small, from cities and small towns, and with various budgets. Nearly all of them had their own website. In fact, for many, the web was the very way that I learned of them.

Due to Riverhead's Vision 2020's lack of a website, it would be easier for a person in the hamlet of Aquebogue to learn about Region 2020 in central Alabama than it would be for them to find out more about similar efforts going on in their own back yard. It therefore makes it much more difficult for potential volunteers and other interested parties to learn about and get involved in the organization. Many people aren't comfortable picking up the phone and asking questions and many more do not have the time to give up two hours on a week night to attend a meeting of a group they know little or nothing about. The internet allows people to, on their own time and at their convenience, find out more about an organization. The fact that Riverhead Vision 2020 does not have a website causes an enormous missed opportunity for disseminating their message and reaching out to like-minded people.

Another place where Riverhead Vision 2020 is notably absent is downtown. The lack of desirable activities to draw people to the downtown business district has been identified in many circles as a significant problem facing the community. While we can not expect an organization like Riverhead Vision 2020 to necessarily counteract the unsavory activities or to provide vacant storefronts with tenants, it can try to provide activities of its own and support those that already take place. It seems that too many of Riverhead Vision 2020's meetings and events currently take place in the outlying hamlets

and away from the core business area. Moving more of these functions to locations downtown and sponsoring others could help promote the idea of the area as one of community vitality.

It also seems that, due to the fact that Riverhead Vision 2020 has not received feedback from quite enough people, the conclusions they have drawn about the wants and needs of the community are somewhat lacking as well. For example, the goal that has been identified in media reports as the “number one community project for improving the town’s quality of life” was building a YMCA.²⁶ The evidence used for that statement was that 21 out of the less-than-50 people who attended Riverhead Vision 2020’s mini vision fair in early June named it as their top choice out of ten potential projects. Riverhead Vision 2020 has since touted the building of a YMCA in Riverhead Town as one of their top goals.

I would submit that this is a questionable course of action for several reasons. First of all, as stated earlier, Riverhead Vision 2020 has simply not received enough community feedback to be able to make any valid conclusions about the needs and wants of town residents. As evidence of this, note that in section IV of this paper survey results were cited that showed the indoor recreation a YMCA would offer to be among the least popular potential public projects. When the residents were asked what they wanted more spent on they responded almost exclusively with projects conducive to outdoor activities. When asked what less should be spent on, the most popular answer was “indoor

²⁶ “YMCA heads top ten list.” *The Suffolk Times*. June 15, 2000. p. 27.

swimming pools.” This poll of 610 Riverhead residents and its results should give pause to anyone wanting to pursue a course of action based on an informal poll of less than 1/10th that amount. Furthermore, the fact that the voters at Riverhead Vision 2020’s mini vision fair were treated to a presentation by the head of the committee hoping to build the YMCA might have also swayed their votes.

I use this example not to belittle the public response to Riverhead Vision 2020’s mini vision fair or to say their wishes for a YMCA in town are not sincere. I merely mean to illustrate that Riverhead Vision 2020 must seek out the thoughts, ideas and opinions of a much greater portion of Riverhead Town. A town of 25,000 is not unmanageably large. With a greater effort, a much larger portion of the town’s population can be reached. When that happens, Riverhead Vision 2020 can start building a consensus and can begin truly representing the citizens’ interests.

VIII. Recommendations

Following is a list of potential things Riverhead Vision 2020 can do to begin to become the organization the Town of Riverhead needs it to be:

1. Riverhead Vision 2020 should treat every activity downtown that attracts a significant number of people as an opportunity to reach out the community and receive their input. The organization’s directors should not only be meeting people at the activities they sponsor, such as their mini vision fair. Instead, they should treat every festival, farmer’s market and sidewalk sale as a sort of mini vision fair of its own.

Riverhead Vision 2020 should maintain a presence at all these events, be it a table with literature or volunteers handing out brochures in the crowd. Every single one of these events provides a chance to meet people who perhaps do not attend town board meetings but who, quite likely, would take an active interest in making their town a better place to live.

2. Riverhead Vision 2020 should sponsor downtown activities of its own. It is not enough to say you would like their to more activities and attractions to bring people downtown. They must play a role in attracting people themselves. Many of the citizen groups I came across had regularly scheduled meetings and events in their town's centers. Riverhead Vision 2020 should pick one day a month, the first Saturday for example, and schedule some sort of event for that day. This would serve the dual purpose of attracting attention (both media and citizen attention) and of reminding people of the treasures of their downtown. Something like an afternoon barbecue in one of Riverhead's parks could also provide an avenue whereby residents who don't ordinarily have contact with eachother to meet and acquaint themselves. They may also consider holding one of their study circles at a downtown eatery. This could not only serve the purpose of bringing more people downtown, but it might also spark a stronger relationship between Riverhead Vision 2020 and the local business community.

3. Riverhead Vision 2020 must establish a website. At a recent town board meeting, Riverhead Vision 2020's director made a very nice presentation of what her group has been working on. As a way to get involved, she provided her phone number.

As mentioned in an earlier section, it may be expecting a lot for someone to pick up the telephone and ask questions as their only way to get involved. Were there a website address to announce at such a meeting and to put at the bottom of all their brochures, it would provide an easier way for people to discover more about the organization.

It need not be anything fancy or “high-tech” either. At first it would need to include little more than the literature that is already in existence and which outlines Riverhead Vision 2020’s mission, goals, and accomplishments. Add a telephone number and a link to an email address and you have a terrific way for people to get informed and, more importantly, get involved. Very likely it could be set up in a short amount of time by a volunteer from the community or even a student from the high school. One of the local internet service providers, like Peconic Online may even be willing to donate some of their time or expertise in the process. The main thing is to get something up and running soon. It can always be upgraded and reconfigured later as time and money allow.

4. Develop and distribute a resident questionnaire. A short survey with basic questions like the ones used in the town’s survey may provide valuable insights into the mindset and priorities of the town’s citizens. This would be especially so if the results were used in conjunction with or as a complement to, the study circle findings. So far, Riverhead Vision 2020 has made its assumptions about the wants and needs of town residents mostly from study circles while the town (and this paper for that matter) has used primarily survey results to gauge the townsfolk’s interests. Riverhead Vision 2020 could make a more legitimate claim to represent residents’ interests if it were to do both.

5. Establish a set of goals that are understandable, achievable, and measurable.

Many of Riverhead Vision 2020's stated goals, while relevant to important areas of the community, are vague or ill-defined. They can probably be more accurately thought of as 'objectives', rather than 'goals'. Goals must be set up so they can be concrete yardsticks whereby the group's progress can be evaluated. For that reason, goals that start with phrases like "show support for...." and "gather information about...." are insufficient.

Here are a few examples of clear, measurable goals:

- Establish Vision 2020 website by end of 2000.
- Get 500 resident questionnaires filled out by November 1.
- Sign up 50 volunteers by October 1.

While these are just examples, one can see how much easier it is for both those inside and outside the organization to see how well it is doing. Having concrete goals and accomplishments may also make it much easier to prove to potential funding organizations that Riverhead Vision 2020 is worthy of their support.

6. Riverhead Vision 2020 should be a constant reminder to town government that the citizens of Riverhead are not satisfied with the status quo. This requires Riverhead Vision 2020 to be much more persistent in involving itself in policy-making in Riverhead Town. For example, at a recent town board meeting the director of Riverhead Vision 2020 gave a brief synopsis of what the group has been working on since its inception 18 months ago. While this is a positive step, a five minute presentation every year and half is certainly not enough. While Riverhead Vision 2020 has been active in its discussions with town officials in private meetings and smaller citizen forums, they need to be more

public and visible in their interactions with the town. Riverhead Vision 2020 should make a presentation at every town board meeting to tell the board, and the town residents in attendance, specifically what they have been working on since the last town board meeting. By highlighting all their hard work in this very public way, they may help spur the town government into more immediate action of its own.

7. Riverhead Vision 2020 should aggressively pursue funding and support from the Lt. Governor's "Quality Communities" program. Riverhead is an historic community and the county seat of Suffolk County. It is also the geographic and economic hub of the eastern end of Long Island. The importance of preserving the town's viability must be communicated to the state government in a way that makes assisting this project, the only one of its kind in Riverhead, an obvious conclusion. This paper highlighted the tremendous strides some towns have been able to make with modest assistance from their local and state governments. Riverhead Vision 2020 can benefit greatly from the help of the Lt. Governor's program. They should believe they are worthy of this support and be tireless in their pursuit of it.

8. Riverhead Vision 2020 should be more aggressive in its media strategy. A recent article in Newsday featured development and revival efforts in Riverhead Town and depicted a renaissance of sorts in the town. In the entire two page article there was no mention of Riverhead Vision 2020. Riverhead Vision 2020 is the only community action group in Riverhead advocating for a reasoned, responsible approach to its future growth. One would think that the input of Riverhead Vision 2020 would have been very

valuable for someone attempting to paint a picture of where Riverhead is heading. Riverhead Vision 2020's financial supporters probably thought so and may have been surprised by their lack of mention. The problem is that this reporter probably didn't know Riverhead Vision 2020 existed.

Riverhead Vision 2020 should regularly be sending out press releases to the local media. Reporters covering the East End for Newsday and Suffolk Life, not to mention the Riverhead papers, should be very familiar with who they are and what they are doing. Letters to the editor from its directors, which are frequently published in the Riverhead papers, are important but insufficient. Riverhead Vision 2020 may not get the content of any of their releases turned into hard news features but they may, the next time someone is writing a story about the Riverhead, get a call from the reporter and be mentioned in the article. That will help raise awareness and it will make those funding the group feel their money is being spent on a player.

9. Riverhead Vision 2020 should continue hosting their study circles but they should be make a few changes to how the groups are formulated. For one, they should not let the study circle's participants choose which circle they participate in and with whom. The point of the circles is to bring people together who would not ordinarily sit across a table from each other. This does not happen when people from the same neighborhood, church, club, etc. get together and form a study circle themselves. People should sign up to participate, and Riverhead Vision 2020 should randomly assign them to study circles.

The other change that should be made is that Riverhead Vision 2020 should cast a wider net in search of participants. This can dovetail with the earlier recommendations of distributing questionnaires, being present at downtown events, and establishing a website. The questionnaires can ask people to give their name and number if they would like to be part of a study circle. A booth or table at a downtown street fair could also provide an opportunity to sign people up. And a Riverhead Vision 2020 website can link a potential participant to an email address whereby they might express their interest in participating. These are just a few of the ways that more people can be involved in this important process.

The preceding recommendations highlight just a few of the things Riverhead Vision 2020 can be doing to make it a more effective organization. It may be noted that a majority of them involve creating a more conspicuous presence for themselves in the town's affairs. Over the next 6 months the most important job for Riverhead Vision 2020 and its directors should be getting to know more of the people who make up the Town of Riverhead. They have to become more familiar with the wants and needs of the townsfolk, and the town's residents certainly need to know more about who they are and what they are trying to accomplish. If Riverhead Vision 2020 wants to truly represent the community, they have to do a better job of being part of the community.

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Maintain a presence at all downtown activities as a way to reach out to members of the community and receive their feedback and, perhaps, get them involved in the organization.
2. Host activities and events in Riverhead's downtown to attract people to the business district. These should be held on a regular basis and can consist of anything from a barbecue in the park to a study circle meeting at a local eatery.
3. Establish a website to enable town residents to more easily learn of Riverhead Vision 2020's mission, accomplishments and activities.
4. Develop and distribute to town residents a short survey of what they would like to see happen in Riverhead. Use the results in conjunction with those of the study circles to set goals and priorities.
5. Establish a set of goals for Riverhead Vision 2020 that are understandable, achievable, and measurable. Use these goals as yardsticks to measure the progress of the organization.
6. Regularly promote Riverhead Vision 2020's policy and program agenda to town officials. This should be done as often and as publicly as possible in an effort to challenge the town government to assist in those efforts.
7. Aggressively pursue the funding and support being made available by New York State's "Quality Communities Task Force."
8. Engage in a more aggressive media strategy of regular press releases and media advisories to help Riverhead Vision 2020 develop a higher profile among local actors and reporters.
9. Reach out to a wider variety of people to participate in study circles and randomly assign them to groups so as to ensure a greater diversity of viewpoints.

SELECTED WEBSITES

ORGANIZATION	ADDRESS
National Main Street Center National Trust for Historic Preservation	www.mainst.org
Region 2020 Central Alabama	www.region2020.org
New London Main Street New London, Connecticut	www.newlondonmainstreet.org
New Hampshire Main Street Center	www.nhcdfa.org/mainstreet.html
Pennsylvania Downtown Center	www.padowntown.org
Main Street New Jersey	www.state.nj.us/dca/dhcr/msnj.htm
The Nature Conservancy	www.tnc.org
Quality Communities Task Force New York State Department of State	www.dos.state.ny.us/qcp/qcp2.html
Town of Riverhead Riverhead, New York	www.riverheadli.com
Vision Huntington Huntington, New York	www.visionhuntington.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks should be given to the following:

Barbara Blass, Chair of the Riverhead Town Planning Board, for furnishing survey data and information relating to the updating of the town's master plan.

Augusta Field, Project Coordinator for Riverhead Vision 2020, for providing full access to all of her organization's printed materials and for answering any and all questions that arose throughout the writing of this paper.