

WHAT IS CONNECTIVITY?

Connectivity is the linkages and connections of a town or neighborhood to its surrounding neighbors and larger bio-region. Connectivity is the outreaching arms linking the center of a community to the outside world—whether through systems of food, energy, friendship, trade, or transport. It is a relationship.

UNDERLYING PATTERNS AND ELEMENTS

- Continental Landmass: geopolitical identity, bioregions
- Infrastructure: media, telecommunications, energy grid, transportation
- Movement of People: history, trade, exploration, colonization, hegemony, tourism
- Trade Systems: goods & services, military & building products, food

WHY CONNECTIVITY?

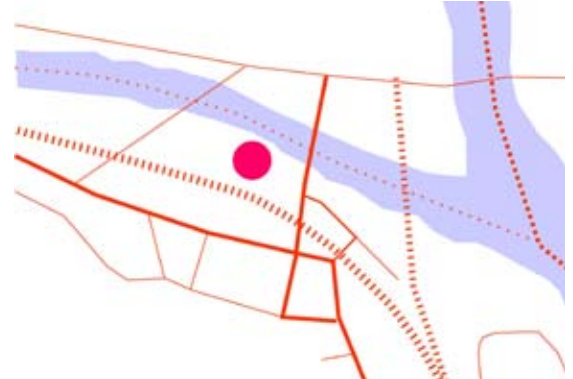
Our communities have many visible and invisible connections. The mountains and rivers which cross through our land and history connect us physically and emotionally with other places. Our stories are full of the memories, events, and relationships gained by sharing, exploring, and making. Connecting us across time, we talk of how ancestors established an early homestead or knew where and when the river flooded.

Rivers and streams flow in or out of our towns and villages in very physical and visible ways. For example, watersheds, policies up and downstream, and individual water consumption define our connectivity and determine relationships with others. Whether water, power lines, highway or trade this bridging quality of connectivity transcend our local boundaries of place.

COMMUNITY EXAMPLE

“Learning from the past, growing for the future.” The Center for an Agricultural Economy (CAE) has a vision of agricultural research and development known as Atkins Field. It is to be a community hub interwoven with learning opportunities and recreational activities in downtown Hardwick, Vermont.

CAE wants to build a link to the future through local practices, innovative entrepreneurship, and an agriculturally-based economy. The vision as defined through a hands-on planning workshop with community members and CAE board members includes: incubator and micro-enterprise plots, school gardens, greenhouses, grazing, seed demonstrations, composting operations, orchards and berries production; reuse of historic granite shed; outdoor trails; service-learning and practicum activities; space for agricultural, environmental, and food processing education; community celebrations; and a zero-waste demonstration site.



Levels of connectivity from car, rail, and river to pedestrian in White River Junction, VT.



New pedestrian access in Wolcott, VT.



Atkins field site plan for a new agriculturally-based economy, Hardwick, VT.

HOW DO WE USE CONNECTIVITY?

Connectivity is the means by which we balance reaching out with reaching in. It is the underlying pattern of stretching out to the world while holding on to the strength of the Center. For example when a community relies on its family members to send income home from abroad or a town gives away legal and environmental rights to a corporate business, the community loses its identity and core viability. Finding a balance between being defined by the outside and holding one's own center strong is not easy, especially given today's economic and political realities. Recognizing the connective and positive relationships communities form is a means of developing balance between these divergent forces and the dynamics of human activities within a living planet.

RECOMMENDED IDEAS AND PRACTICES

- Use geologic forms and watersheds to define community.
- Engage with climatic patterns and forms to make better use of solar and earth energy in heating and cooling. Design climatic control systems for the particular zone.
- Develop an energy network based on multi-locational supply to diversify the grid and change the pattern from large-scale producers and consumers to local and regional ones.
- Support a transport system based on human mobility rather than vehicle ownership. Build more durable and affordable longterm solutions through diversity and access.
- Connect with friends and family around the globe. Use new technology to serve traditional functions.
- Build local food systems from community gardens, farms, and food producers. Use collectively-owned food processing centers to help provide food security, create farm to school programs, and build a local food economy.



Envisioning food and energy systems for South Village Farm in South Burlington, Vermont.

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY DESIGN

The Vermont Design Institute has developed Five Principles of Community Design based on spatial forms, patterns, and design concepts observed and used over the course of their work.

PREMISES:

- * Community design is a collaborative planning process with the immediate goal of improving the quality of life for all community members of the ecosystem—from the smallest insects to us humans, and from, the waterways to the skies above.
- * Effective community design creates economic opportunities for local residents at different scales of interest—from global connections to bioregional needs and immediate solutions.
- * Sustainable communities depend on alternative forms of energy and transportation.
- * Sustainable lifestyles include changing our daily patterns, consumption habits, and production technologies to accommodate “closing the loop” and living with a no-waste policy.
- * Sustainable community landscapes allow for protection of open space, regeneration of native vegetation, stormwater mitigation, increased green space, local food production at various scales, and sensitivity to public-private zones.
- * Successful community design increases community knowledge of local history, cultural landscape, and sacred ground.

ASSUMPTIONS:

- * We need to be re-constructing our patterns of habitation, transportation, energy, water, waste, and food systems.
- * We believe individual empowerment and reconnection to place leads to transformation and healing for Earth.
- * People do care and have an amazing strength of vision if given the chance to be heard.