A Photo and Story Analysis of Town Greens and Forests Across Vermont

Weston, Vermont Town Green

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Problem Assessment and Opportunity Statement

Since its creation in 1991, Vermont's Urban and Community Forestry Program has been funded in part by a grant from the USDA Forest Service in order to help communities plan, plant, and care for their community trees. Vermont has shown tremendous growth in the past few decades in its efforts to manage town forests and town greens by using them for timber, fuel wood, wildlife, habitat, and recreational activities. A 1931 report from the Vermont Commission on Country Life put the value of municipal forests this way: "Municipal forests are a valuable source of public education. Schools as well as the general public can here secure first-hand information that often is obtainable in no other way. Such a forest area may well be the recreational center for the community, and when properly managed and administered, should become a source of revenue…. (Northern Forest Alliance)." A 1970 VTFPR report to the State Legislature even more precisely identified what remain to this day as the multiple use forest resource management objectives of the municipal forest and green program:

1) Opportunities for environmental conservation education;
2) Timber production;
3) Watershed protection;
4) Forest based recreational opportunities;
5) Fish and game habitat and public access;
6) Local employment.

A new focus has come to light for the Urban and Community Forestry Program involving the environmental, social and economic benefits of trees, not just in the woods of our backyards, but on the streets, greens and parks of quaint towns or even in municipal forest lands. The Urban and Community Forestry Program has developed a mission statement, "To promote the stewardship of urban and rural landscapes to enhance the quality of the life in Vermont communities." Through this program, Vermont towns are able to build on relationships between each other based on their values for urban forestry and greens.

Relationships between these towns have the potential to help each other in promoting the different ways to involve communities with town forests and greens. This is another way to show the importance of coming together on common grounds. To build on these connections would greatly foster the mission of this program, however, complications lie in how isolated rural Vermont towns can be. Each town may have its own green or forest and a unique set of values surrounding these parcels but achieving connectivity between communities poses a significant issue. Considering the Urban and Community Forestry Program's limited staff, pulling together the story of Vermont's regionally unparalleled community and environmental values is all the more difficult. With the growing demand for information to be provided by way of internet sources, towns can find out news and goals easier through online networking provided there is sufficient guidance that isn't yet available on the Program's website.

To highlight values of some of Vermont's most appealing town greens and forests, it is essential to explore the untold stories. Stories are the insight to the real meaning and significance that individuals have which goes way beyond statistics. What we are looking for isn't just numbers. Anyone can find these forests and greens to be alluring, but there is much to still be explored. Through easily accessible visuals and stories, there is an opportunity for increased regional

connectivity, allowing towns to share how their green places are being used and collaborate on new ideas to improve their own community effort. Vermont towns have always worked side-by-side together and show a strong sense of collaboration improving the lives of locals and visitors as well.

Project Goals

1   Create an extensive portfolio of photographic artwork showcasing the beauty and importance of town greens and forests representing each of five districts in Vermont: Addison, Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle (Dark Blue); Rutland and Bennington (Light Purple); Caledonia, Orleans and Essex (Green); Lamoille, Washington and Orange (Light Blue); and Windham and Windsor (Dark Purple).

2   Complete a collection of interviews and personal stories that provide a setting and context for our photographic portfolio.

3   Organize one or more short video pieces documenting the use, management, and importance of town greens and forests across the state in a way that increases awareness of these resources and provides the means to connect Vermonters through a feeling of mutual interests and values.

Vermont Counties as Divided by VT Urban and Community Forestry
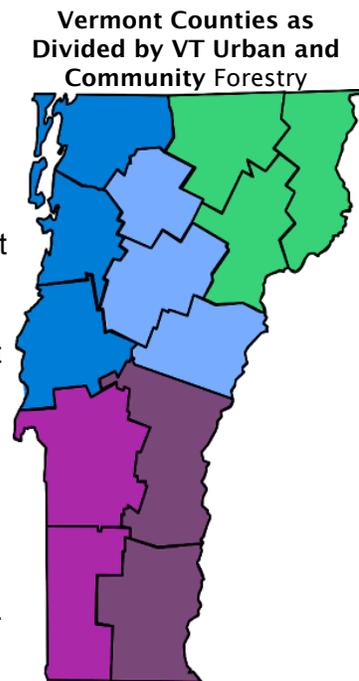
Courtesy of VT Urban & Community Forestry

Objectives/Methods

1. Establish a working definition of "town green/forest" (2/14)
> Definition: A town green/forest is a communal, natural area where people from all walks of life can come together to share and experience the outdoors in a way that emphasizes community, recreation, culture, and the environment.

2. Put together a list of all the different locations that we will visit (2/14).
> a. Compile our data and send our list to the Urban Forestry Team for approval and other suggestions. Our preliminary list: Charlotte, Burlington, Bristol, Middlebury, Chester, Weston, Dorset, Manchester, Irasburg, Craftsbury, Stowe, Waterbury, Rochester, and Brandon.

3. Complete five-seven documenting trips (depending on time constraints) to the various town greens and forests by April 15th.
> a. Trips will consist of at least one interview, complete trip video footage, and still photography coverage of the area.

4. Get at least one interview from each town green and forest. (At least 14 community members)
  a. Interviews will include video of people involved in the given location and will have their insights to different prepared questions.
  b. Video clips will be edited using imovie into our final video which will include the various multimedia we have gathered over the semester.
  c. Preliminary Interview Questions: What does your town green mean to your community/family? How is this space utilized? What is the significance of connecting Vermont communities through the environment?
  d. Interviews will start with these questions, but ultimately will be tailored to the person being interview.

5. Get comprehensive stories for each town green and forest by April 15th.
  a. Obtain stories through interviews examining what these spaces mean to
  people and/or how they are managed.

14 Potential Vermont Towns Chosen

6. Obtain a healthy mix of both winter and spring scenes by April 15th.
  a. We will have to be flexible time-wise around the weather and would like to
  obtain footage of snow scenery and the spring bloom.

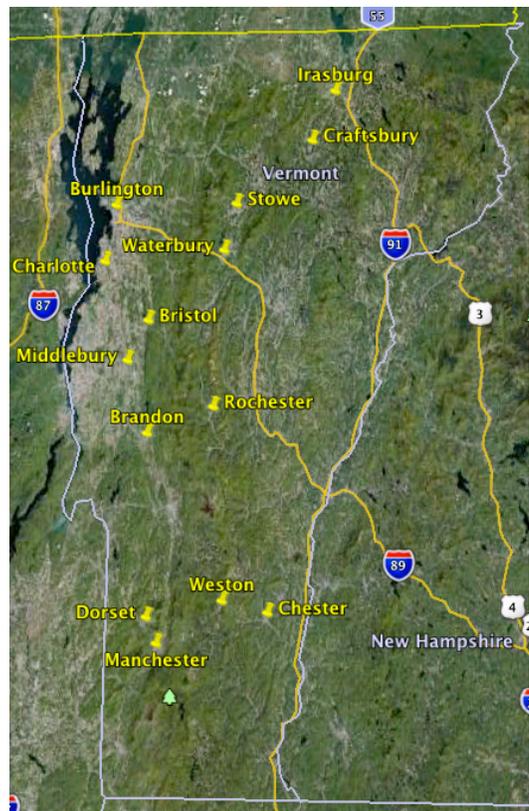7. Put together video that encompasses the entirety of our work by April 30th.
  a. Our video will be a promotional video supporting the community aspects of urban public spaces. We will incorporate interviews and video footage of the towns and compile and edit footage using a program such as iMovie or Final Cut Pro.

Courtesy of Google Earth

We plan to use many different facets of multimedia to capture the essence of town greens and forests. A great deal of the strategy we plan to execute relies on what the location has to offer. We will want to use the Urban and Community Forestry Program layout as a guide to the types of media we will capture.

Our main challenge is being able to be flexible around a changing schedule. We will determine our respective schedules are and figure out which of our schedules are compatible. Based on this, we can assess which members are available to travel to different town greens/forests. Completing everything by our deadlines will be a challenge so dividing our time and responsibilities is a must when completing this project.

Concerning the photography aspect of our project, our team must also be flexible around weather. In order to get great photos and videos the lighting and weather need to be conducive

to photography. We will attempt to obtain footage of these public spaces in different seasons so we need to be prepared for snow storms and sunny days during the winter and the spring.

Currently, the website for Vermont Urban and Community Forestry is in the process of being remade. The goal of the site is to give people the resources they need to become more aware of green areas in Vermont and encourage their use. However, there is a clear gap in visuals of these areas and also the stories of the community that make them unique. By being apart of this project we are building upon this organization's work by providing them the photos and information needed to spark the interest of people in Vermont and promote well-being through the future success of this website.

We hope to increase awareness as it is paramount to what we wish to accomplish with this project. Heightening the amount of information the public has about the natural areas in their community could not be more crucial. Based on this ideology we will seek to craft informative narratives around the photos we take in order to help our audience visualize the town greens. Once they can see these beautiful environments in their mind, they will be drawn to visit these areas in person and experience them for themselves and even share them with their community.

Project Evaluation and Assessment

Throughout our project we will follow our timeline as to trips to towns to document their town greens and forests. We will interview key players in management and town residents to communicate the stories of what these places mean to their communities. Over the course of the semester we will check in with our partners and show them what we have and seek their feedback, types of feedback will include advice on directions we can go in and things we can do differently in order to construct a higher quality end-product. Throughout the project duration we will also obtain feedback from the community members we will be involved with in the various towns we visit by discussing our project with them and asking if they have advice. When we reach our goal of 14 towns with adequate data from each, we will view our project as successful.

After the completion of our section of the project, the search for more data and information will hopefully continue with a group of next years students. Our findings will be put on the redesigned and independent Urban Forestry website so that they may be viewed and referred to by people all over the world as a great example of how natural areas and open spaces connect people through a variety of different means. Our intended end-result will be information that will convey essential messages including the importance of these spaces and crucial aspects of community and communication. When we have completed our goals and our timeline, we will evaluate our finished project by the quality of our data (Photographs, video footage, and interviews) and determine how successful we were. Our data will be further evaluated by the Urban Forestry team (Elise and her team) before being built into the website.

Work Cited

Urban and Community Forestry Project. Vermont Division of Forestry. 2001.

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<http://www.communitiescommittee.org/pdfs/TownForestStewardshipGuide.pdf>.