

RW 2008 Work Highlights and Our Plans for 2009

Revitalizing Waterbury, Inc. is a non-profit organization founded in 1991 and committed to preserving and enhancing the economic, historic and social vitality of downtown Waterbury, Vermont.

RW believes that 2008 was a great year for downtown Waterbury. More than a dozen new businesses moved to or relocated in the downtown. Vacant space and empty storefronts are not what define Waterbury's Main Street. Over the last year RW has often heard people in and outside our community refer to the 'buzz' about Waterbury. RW will continue to do whatever we can to maintain and build a vibrant downtown.

RW's capacity is directly related to our people-power – our board, committee members, membership and volunteers. In 2008 volunteers contributed countless hours of time planning, coordinating, and executing activities. Last fall RW hired a part-time Downtown Director to provide stability and a dedicated focus to downtown issues. Jeanne Kirby in her former capacity as RW President and now as Downtown Director serves as RW's point person for the Vermont Downtown Program (VDP). To the best of our knowledge Waterbury's downtown designation renewal will take place in 2011. In the first quarter of 2009 VDP staff will conduct an assessment to better understand RW's operations and help identify issues for local programs, and to provide suggestions to RW for 2009 goals and strategies.

Some highlights of our work in 2008.

RW worked to make Waterbury a great place to live and visit by:

- Partnering with other Waterbury organizations to build and enhance community events.
 - **Seventh Annual Waterbury Community Fair and Taste of Waterbury** (March). Over 600 people attended this event that takes place the Sunday before Town Meeting Day.
 - **\$pring for Good Neighbors** (April). Partner: Waterbury Good Neighbor Fund. This event boosted the profile of an important local organization that provides emergency cash assistance to local residents.
 - **Stowe Street Arts Festival** (July). Partner: WACC. RW organized and hosted the Friday night street dance and worked closely with WACC on publicity, outreach to artists, and development of new activities.
 - **Waterbury Mountain Bike Festival** (July). RW was a sponsor of this first-time event.
 - **Hunt for Sunzilla Festival** (September). Partner: Waterbury Rotary. This year had the highest number of contest entrants ever. The event was covered in *Vermont Magazine*, sunflowers were part of our downtown summer plantings and business owners also planted sunflowers and a beautiful event banner was handmade by Elizabeth MacGowan.

- **Leaf Peeper Half Marathon and 5K** (October). RW gave out 1,150 ‘Waterbury Welcome bags’ to runners that included samples and coupons from area businesses, information about Waterbury and a Waterbury holiday shopping discount/promotion card.
- **2nd Annual Holiday Stroll** (December). Partners: Rotary, WACC, HUHS, and businesses. Expansion of this event from one to three days. Feedback was very positive from both participating businesses and community members who took advantage of the offerings of family-oriented activities.
- Improving information about and image of Waterbury.
 - **The Best of Waterbury map.** Partner: Resort Maps. RW continues to give input and ideas when this Waterbury map is annually revised.
 - **Submission to Outside Magazine.** In April RW nominated Waterbury for Outside Magazine’s ‘Best Small Towns in America’ issue.
 - **State Award for Waterbury Railroad Restoration Project.** At the annual State Downtown Conference the Green Mountain Award for ‘Best Building Renovation’ was awarded to the Waterbury Railroad Restoration Project.
- RW worked to support downtown retailers and business owners by:
 - Maintaining and building a strong downtown organization (RW) that meets the Vermont Downtown Program’s expectations. Our downtown designation status provides businesses and property owners with special funding programs, tax credits, incentives and services.
 - Conducting a comprehensive **Waterbury Shoppers Survey** and presenting the findings to Waterbury retailers, restaurant owners and town officials in October. Marketing specialist, Kate Finley Woodruff, gave a professional presentation of the survey results to over 25 attendees.
 - “Keep Waterbury Green – shop local this holiday season” **cooperative advertising** appeared in the Waterbury Record and Seven Days.
 - Educating Waterbury businesses about the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing’s website www.VermontVacation.com. This visitor-targeted site lists restaurants, lodging, shopping, events, recreation and attractions. Businesses can sign-on at no cost and update their listing themselves.
 - Planning, coordinating and maintaining summer barrel and window box plantings.
 - Planning and implementing new elements to Waterbury’s winter holiday decorations.
- RW has secured grant funding and/or has supported the pursuit of funding by other parties to achieve major improvements in the downtown including:
 - **\$75,000** Downtown Transportation Grant awarded by the Vermont Downtown Development Board. In 2008 streetscape improvements took place on Railroad Street and around One Stowe Street.

- A Vermont Community Development Program planning grant for **\$25,000** to develop a comprehensive plan for the future growth of downtown Waterbury and strategies for implementation to address outstanding needs was awarded to Waterbury in February 2008. In response to an RFP six proposals were received.

What's ahead for RW in 2009?

Organization Committee:

- Research and submit grants for project-specific work
- Develop a fundraising strategy/goal and implement to increase revenues to support RW's work.
- Prepare information required by VDP for our assessment and organize the on-site visit by VDP staff.
- Participate in and support activities associated with the VCDP planning grant.
- Recruit additional volunteers to play active roles in the revitalization process.
- Re-launch of the RW website www.revitalizingwaterbury.org in early '09

Marketing and Promotion:

- Improve, expand, or seek opportunities for the following events: Waterbury Community Fair, \$pring for ..., Stowe Street Arts Festival, Hunt for Sunzilla Festival, and Holiday Stroll. In 2009 RW will be the primary organizer of Stowe Street Arts Festival.
- Develop a frequent shopper/passport card.
- Develop with downtown businesses an email list/database to alert VIP shoppers/diners of special events/pricing/deals
- Investigate a one-time Saturday shopping event to coincide with Halloween – 'Scary Savings'
- 'Shop' stories about Waterbury to local, regional and national media outlets – publicize Waterbury's successes.
- Plan a Recreation Map of Waterbury to include all fitness and recreational opportunities throughout Waterbury. Partner with Recreational Committee and others.

Economic Restructuring:

- In early 2009 participate in a meeting of stakeholders regarding the www.waterburyvt.com website.
- Engage stakeholders in a conversation about branding/downtown marketing plan. Sponsor a presentation by an expert in this field.
- Host two business networking mixers (Mud Season and Stick Season).
- Host business workshops in conjunction with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and/or SCORE.
- On-going communication with property owners in the downtown district about the tax credits program.
- Interface with new downtown business owners, "welcome wagon."

- Explore partnership opportunities and activities with LEAP, target downtown business and property owners with ideas and strategies for improving energy efficiency.

Design:

- Coordinate and implement the summer beautification program.
- Coordinate and implement winter holiday decorations.
- Develop a prototype trash receptacle that is attractive and functional. Research other locations where trash receptacles are in need.
- In Spring 2009 install 12 artist banners on downtown period lighting. Conduct round two of a banner design contest for the downtown period lighting.
- Identify possible ‘canvass’ sites for large murals. Possible partner: HUHS
- Participate in Country Walkers proposal to establish a Peace Park in downtown Waterbury.
- Speak with property owners who have empty or visually unattractive storefronts about window displays to improve downtown atmosphere.
- Develop an ‘adopt-an-area’ program designed to provide regular maintenance of downtown areas to eliminate garbage, weeds, etc.
- Encourage public art projects.
- Research locations, cost and options for downtown benches.

Below is a sampling of things RW has heard that relate to the Waterbury “buzz.” What have you heard?

- The Alchemist is a destination for appreciators of hand-crafted beer. They just marked their 5th anniversary.
- Hen of the Wood has become a nationally-known ‘foodies’ destination after chef-owner, Eric Warnstedt, was named a ‘2008 best new chef’ by *Food & Wine*.
- RJ’s competitive prices and selection of Vermont products have helped develop a loyal customer base. People like having an alternative to a chain supermarket.
- Locals and visitors alike are enjoying the GMCR Café and Visitor Center. It has become a place to bump into friends and neighbors.
- One Studio Dance and Yoga provides a full schedule of classes for youth and adults. Rather than going to Stowe and Montpelier for classes, people are taking advantage of this local fitness hotspot.
- Waterbury is seen as very family-friendly and community-oriented: fun special events, The Children’s Room, Rotary summer concert series, TBPS’ unique playground, the Ice Center, the Waterbury Community Fair, a good mix of locally-owned, independent businesses, etc.