



Great North
Woods Regional
Economy

Key Informant Interview Report

November 2015

Presented to:

Colebrook Regional Advisory Committee

Cynthia & Dana Bartlett*	Greg Placy
Jonathan Brown	Roland Proulx
Harry Brown	Larry Rappaport*
Suzanne Collins*	Elias Rella
Marilynne Cooper	Jamie Sayen*
Mike Daley	John Strickland
Steve Ellis	James Tibbetts
Dakota Fogg	David West
Wayne Frizzell*	Lisa Whitaker*
Raymond Gorman	Ginette White
Karen Ladd	Britni White*
Benoit Lamontagne	Sandy Young

*Advisory Committee members who interviewed key informants

Molly Donovan, Community Development Specialist
University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension
204C Nesmith Hall | 131 Main Street Durham, NH 03824
Extension.unh.edu

This project is funded by USDA Rural Development.
UNH Cooperative Extension is working in partnership with North Country Council and the Town of Colebrook.
For more information: http://www.colebrook-nh.com/Public_Documents/ColebrookNH_Webdocs/commvision

Key Informant Interviews

University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension (UNHCE) was retained to work with the Colebrook Region Advisory Committee to build the capacity of community leaders and community members to address local economic opportunities and challenges. The goal is to build strong, informed leadership to assist the community in a discussion of priorities as they relate to the local economy.

Phase one began in July 2015 with UNHCE working with local leaders to gather information and identify economic development challenges and opportunities as they relate to Colebrook and potential changes/development in the vicinity. The committee worked to identify components of a vibrant and resilient economy. The purpose of the key informant interviews was to learn about experiences and observations relating to the local economy from community leaders beyond the Advisory Committee.

UNHCE met with the Colebrook Region Advisory Committee to identify potential key informants; develop a questionnaire and to provide training in interview practices and techniques. The list of key informants targeted local leaders, business community, sectors of the economy, education and health care. A total of 30 interviews were completed from August through October 2015. The following were interviewed as key informants for this report:

Bob Baker, Attorney at Law
Mark Bigney, Brooks Chevrolet
Joyce & Christopher Brady, The Meat House/CJEJ Farm
Tom Caron, Tall Timber Lodge
Steve Cass, Colebrook Police Chief
Christine Charmin, Upper CT Valley Community Coalition
Laurie Cotnoir, Upper Connecticut Valley Hospital
Rod Degrief, Lopstick Lodge & Cabins
Julie Evans, Northern Forest Center
Jennifer Fish, Coos County Administrator
Dakota Fogg, Former student, military
Phil Freudenberger, North Country Muscular Therapy
Craig Hamlin, Coos County Corrections Department
Cindy & David Hicks, Hicks Hardware
Fred King, Retired legislator & County Administrator

Greg Lamm, Indian Stream Health Center
April Lemay, April's Maple
Kevin McKinnon, Colebrook Public Works
Lori Moran, North Country Community Recreation Center
Julie Moran, North Country Farmer's Co-Op
Rachel O'Mara, retired Stratford School nurse
Francine Rancourt, Re/Max Northern Edge Realty
Elias Rella, College student
Eric Stohl, Selectman, Columbia, NH
Paula Sweatt, Local farmer
Jim Tibbetts, Granite Bank
Marie Josee Vaillant, Khoeps International
Steve Young, Fire Chief
Anthony Young, Young's Restoration

Key informants are community members and/or leaders who are in a position to know the business community, have wide contacts in the community and other businesses and community members look to them for answers on community or economic development issues. Talking to key informants is often the first step in relationship building for a program, project and/or partnership.

Most Valued About the Great North Woods Region

Natural Environment: The most valued characteristic of the Great North Woods region is the natural environment, described by key informant interviewees as beautiful and available for outdoor recreation. It is valued for its scenic views and for wildlife.

People: The second most highly valued characteristic is the people. It is easy to connect with people and to connect with family. People are hardworking and have shared values and beliefs.

Sense of Community: The rural character of the community is important and valued. These are close-knit communities where people know one another and are helping each other. The environment is described as quiet, calm, and tranquil with a simplicity to the lifestyle.

Great North Woods Region What makes it unique?

- Natural beauty, natural resources and scenic views
- People
- Outdoor recreation such as fishing, ATV, snowmobiling, hunting, and wildlife viewing
- Proximity to Canada
- Protected Land
- Quality of Life

Vibrant and Resilient Economy

Key informants described three main characteristics of a vibrant and resilient economy: (1) a diversity of businesses (2) diversity of jobs and (3) local businesses with local jobs. The importance of small businesses was commonly cited as was the need for businesses working together. The local economy and businesses must also be flexible, adaptable and willing to change.

In relation to jobs, key informants expressed the need for good paying jobs – fair wages and decent wages; stable jobs and jobs that offer benefits. All of these factors are seen as important to keeping young people living in the region.

The natural resources and scenic beauty of the region was also cited as an asset for the local economy. Tourism related to these assets is important and can be built upon.

Also important to a vibrant economy is downtown areas and main streets. It is important that these are places where people want to stop. They should be attractive and show vibrancy by having people there for many activities. There should be local businesses and something for everyone. Downtowns and main streets are also important in the tourism economy.

Other characteristics of a vibrant and resilient economy

High speed internet, good political atmosphere, affordable shopping and restaurants, diversity of people, funding sources for businesses, agriculture, college or technical school.

Local Community Assets for a Vibrant and Resilient Economy

Key informants were able to identify a number of assets currently in place. Top assets identified include:

- A friendly and welcoming community
- Good education system
- Infrastructure
- Health care
- Effective local government and local organizations
- Strong leadership
- Natural resources
- Recreation
- Citizens that work together

Opportunities and Challenges for the Local Economy

OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
<p>MOST COMMONLY REPORTED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outdoor recreation ▪ Tourism ▪ The Balsams ▪ Hospitality industry ▪ Entrepreneurism <p>ALSO SUGGESTED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agriculture and agritourism ▪ Manufacturing ▪ Regional marketing ▪ Coordinated signage ▪ Towns promoting economic development ▪ Small Business and small industry ▪ Create opportunities for young people ▪ Homebuilding and construction ▪ Canada/Quebec ▪ Main streets/downtown ▪ Local food ▪ Railroad and road transportation 	<p>MOST COMMONLY REPORTED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cost of energy and utilities ▪ High taxes ▪ Lack of jobs ▪ Low paying jobs ▪ Matching right job with right worker ▪ Worker training, school preparation ▪ Condition of roads ▪ Inconsistent cell service and broadband <p>ALSO SUGGESTED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limits to seasonal tourism ▪ Attitude of feeling defeated ▪ Not wanting to change ▪ Loss of young people ▪ Brain drain ▪ Funding for businesses ▪ Training for entrepreneurs ▪ Substance abuse ▪ Climate change ▪ Lack of incentives for some people

Workforce: Opportunities and Concerns

Opportunities: The opportunity most often reported was The Balsams resort and businesses that are related to The Balsams such as shops, restaurants and lodging. The hospitality industry in general was also suggested. Farming and manufacturing were also seen as workforce opportunities.

Retaining and attracting young people is important. There were several suggestions to have social events and to engage young people. There is interest in skill building starting in high school and to offer other learning experiences to teens and young adults.

Concerns: There were many concerns expressed for the local workforce. Many of these were the same as the challenges for the local economy.

- High taxes
- Lack of jobs
- Low paying jobs
- Cost of living
- No job advancement opportunity
- Workforce is not trained
- Not qualified/trained for jobs at The Balsams
- Businesses will compete for workers with The Balsams

Small Changes with Big Impact

Interviewees were asked to suggest small changes – something to be done quickly and easily – that might have a big impact. Main Street Colebrook project was most commonly cited.

Many different ideas for small changes with big impact:

- Beautify community and green spaces
- Develop Community spaces and places to gather and connect such as a town common
- Add bike and non-motorized trails and functions on trail system such as races
- Solar panels and battery storage on homes and businesses
- Make visitors welcome with training for hospitality and service workers
- Tax breaks for small business
- Solar and wind power
- Open more roads to ATV's
- Better broadband to work at home
- Importance of local goods
- All towns working together

Some key informants noted that they were looking for big changes – there is no quick fix!

Notes and comments from key informants

Key informants were given an opportunity to share other thoughts and comments. They are organized by theme:

Leadership and Community:

- Town government should be more open
- Elected officials should set an example
- Be pro-active on the economy – invest don't cut
- Embrace change
- Be open to different points of view
- Citizens should become more aware and involved
- Need to work together

Economy:

- Market our wild side
- Need solar and wind
- Need manufacturing

Colebrook:

- Bury lines on Main Street
- Main Street to be transformed

Education:

- Do something with the High School

Natural Resources and Tourism:

- Add trails for bikes and skiing
- Be a “greener” town
- Interested in rails to trails

The Balsams:

- Ski are expansion is good
- Like the tourist traffic from The Balsams

Collaboration:

- Groups need to collaborate
- Coordinate economic development and chambers
- Towns need to collaborate
- NH/VT border issues

Infrastructure:

- Route 3 and 26 need improvement
- Windmills are not ugly

Taxes:

- Lower property taxes