



Community Action Summit & Volunteer Fair
Essex High School
September 25, 2013
DRAFT
Meeting Summary



September 25 Action Summit & Volunteer Fair Executive Summary

On September 25, nearly two hundred people gathered at Essex High School to learn about the work of the Heart & Soul of Essex, and to set priorities for action.

The evening began with a tasty dinner prepared by CCSU Child Nutrition services. Guests also enjoyed the lively sounds of the EHS Jazz Ensemble and visited a volunteer fair featuring over a dozen local organizations working hard on behalf of our community. Following dinner, participants gathered in the auditorium to hear what Heart & Soul of Essex has been up to. Here's some of what we told them.

Over the past year and a half, the Heart and Soul of Essex has engaged close to 1,000 people in a wide variety of activities. As the result of this work, we identified six core community values. We gathered hundreds of action ideas. And, we brought town and village staff and officials together for several shared conversations about the community's future.

Following this overview, participants weighed in on the six core community values (**Local Economy, Health & Recreation, Community Connections, Education, Thoughtful Growth, and Safety**). Using keypad polling technology, participants were asked to assess how well the community is currently doing to promote and strengthen its core values.

A strong majority of participants (75%) believe the community is doing average or better on promoting and strengthening five of the six values. Participants believe our community is doing especially well when it comes to Health & Recreation and Education. Thoughtful Growth and Local Economy are two areas where participants see the most room for improvement.

Armed with the this information, participants left the auditorium to talk with each other in small "meet-ups." Each meet-up was organized around a particular topic. During the meet-ups participants discussed the topic, and prioritized a list of community-generated ideas for action. By the end of the summit, participants had narrowed a list of 124 action ideas down to 45.

The Heart & Soul of Essex has spent the past year and a half engaging the community in a conversation about the future. Now it's time to act. During the final months of our grant, the Heart & Soul of Essex will help the community move to action on a few key issues; identify ways to ensure that the community's values inform local decision-making; and explore ways to foster ongoing connections and collaboration among citizens and leaders.

If you would like a detailed summary of what happened during the forum, including the results of the keypad polling and the forty-five top action idea ideas (as prioritized by participants), please read on.

Participants Assessed Core Values

Heart & Soul of Essex identified 6 core community values: Local Economy; Health & Recreation; Community Connections; Education; Thoughtful Growth; and Safety. Participants used keypad polling during the summit to weigh in on how well the values are currently being promoted and strengthened in our community. Participants also weighed in on the values they feel a sense of urgency about.

How are we doing at promoting and strengthening our values?

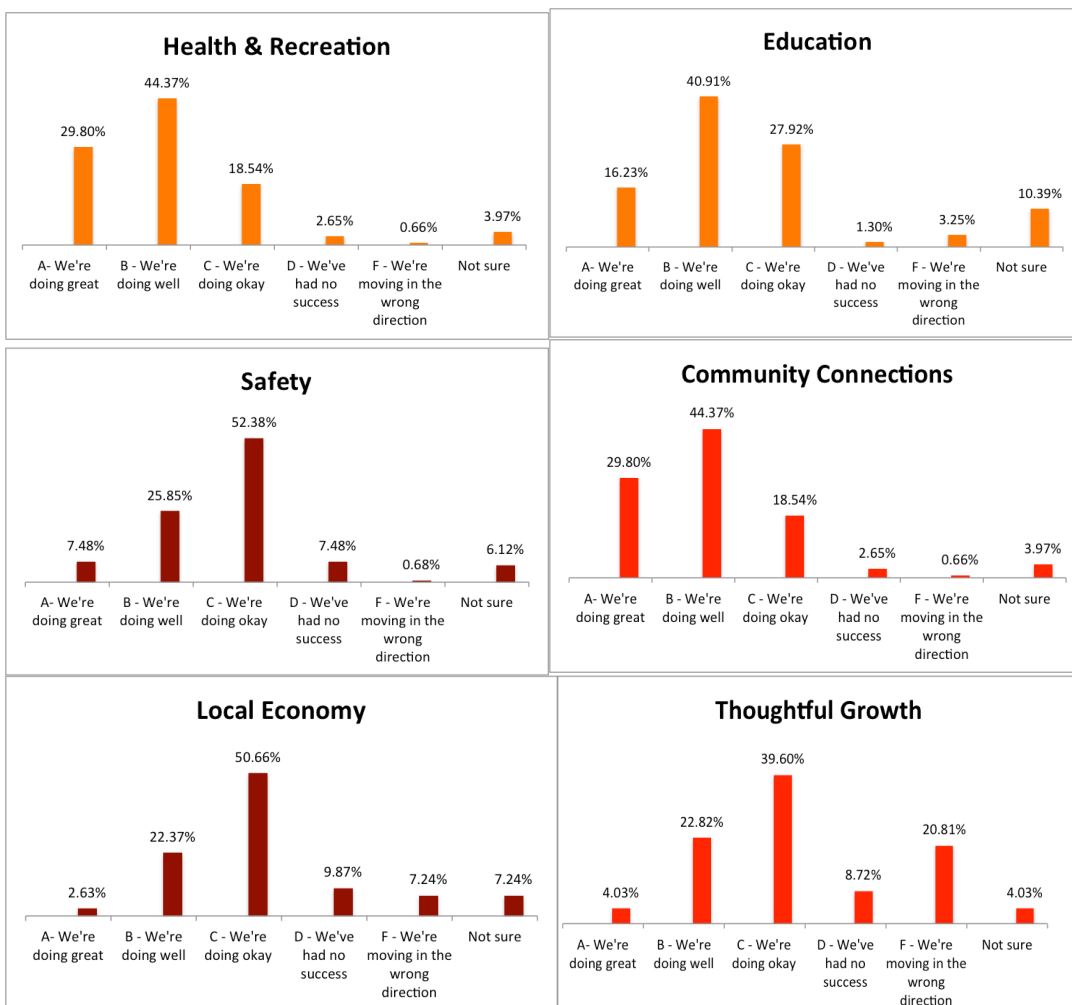
- A majority of summit participants think we're doing great or well at promoting and strengthening two of our values, Education (57%) and Health & Recreation (75%).
- At least 75% of participants think we are doing okay or better on five of the six values (Thoughtful Growth is the exception to this).
- Health & Recreation is the most favorably rated value, with over 90% of participants thinking we are doing great, well, or okay in this area.
- Thoughtful Growth and Local Economy were rated the lowest with only 27% saying we are doing well or great on Thoughtful Growth and only 25% saying we are doing well or great on the Local Economy.
- Participants who live inside the village are well aligned with people who live in the town outside the village in their assessment of how the community is doing on these values.

What values need attention right now?

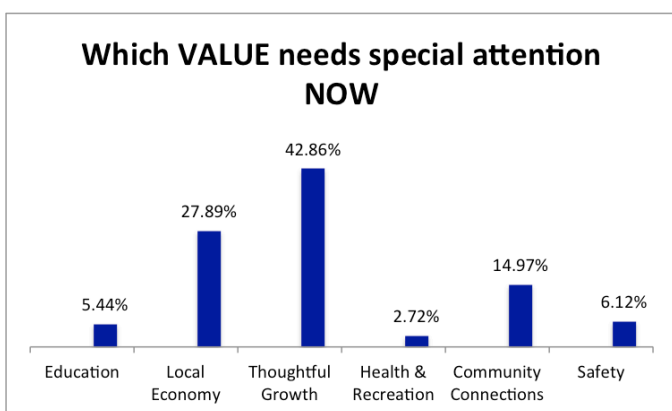
- Thoughtful Growth is the value that people are most concerned about, with 43% of participants saying that this is the value that needs attention right now.
- The two other values that need most attention in the view of participants are Local Economy (28%) and Community Connections (15%).
- Attending to Community Connections was especially important to town residents (24% of town residents prioritized community connections as compared with 11% in the village). Less than 7% of participants feel the remaining values require urgent attention.
- Participants in the Town inside and outside the village are aligned in their view that Thoughtful and the Local Economy and are the two values that most require attention.

Keypad Polling Results

How well are we doing at promoting and strengthening community values?



Which of these community values needs special attention right now if we want it to be stronger in our community?



Participants Discussed and Prioritized Action Ideas

Prior to the summit, Heart & Soul of Essex collected hundreds of comments and action ideas through a series of neighborhood conversations, a survey and a meeting with project partners. The Heart and Soul team filtered these ideas through the lens of things that are already happening, combined similar ideas, and connected the ideas with community resources. One hundred twenty four ideas were presented to participants during the September 25 Action Summit.

Participants worked with these ideas during a series of small group “meet-ups” facilitated by trained community volunteers. The meet-ups were organized by the following topics. Heart & Soul identified these topics based on what we heard during the neighborhood conversations and a community survey.

- *Diversity*
- *Green up & Beautification*
- *Local Agriculture*
- *Unified Municipal Services*
- *School Programs*
- *Planning*
- *Bike & Walk Friendly Community*
- *Transportation*
- *Events & Learning*
- *Community Gathering Spaces*
- *Affordable Housing*
- *Arts & Recreation*
- *Community Grants & Partnerships*
- *Public Engagement & Communication*
- *Local Business*
- *Meet-up for people who speak Nepali*

During the meet-ups, participants shared their interest in the topic, reviewed potential action ideas to address the topic, and prioritized those actions. By the end of the summit, participants winnowed the list of possible action ideas from 124 to 45.

Priority Action Ideas

Below are the forty-five top ideas. These are organized first by value, then by meet-up topic.

LOCAL ECONOMY

Local Business

- Email/social media stories about Essex businesses (consolidation of stories) with a possible connection with the Essex Reporter
- Create retail space/re-zone Fort Ethan Allen
- Strengthen cell/wi-fi connectivity/access
- “Buy Essex” campaign
- “Create a space (like [Magliano](#) in Burlington) for “work from home” residents/users

HEALTH & RECREATION

Arts & Recreation

- Venue that creates an ability to connect people with similar interests.
- Open opportunities for people to try new things
- Create art enthusiasts group
- Essex specific Open gallery/ Art Hop

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Nepali Language

- Nepali Culture and local culture; farming rice and Nepalese food. (*similar to dinner idea under Events & Learning*)
- Exchanges: mountain climbing, have people visit Nepal.
- Training for an Everest expedition
- Affordable Housing

Diversity

- Hold multicultural events and small group learning opportunities (e.g. dine & discuss, classes, etc.)
- Offer cultural competency training for local organizations
- Develop task force to assist Town and Village in diversifying (develop strategy to lead to more cultural and economic diversity)
- Promote hiring practices that promote diversity and cultural competence

Community Gathering Spaces

- Build support for a coffee shop that serves as a community gathering space
- Establish a community kitchen to provide meals, nutrition, education and food services to residents
- Inventory spaces we have and connect on schedules and host groups and experts free of cost (e.g., public rooms, churches)

Community Grants & Partnerships

- Organize quarterly meetings of community agencies/projects to share resources, progress, opportunities
- Create a source/bank for volunteer opportunities/resource
- Develop a centralized website for grants and project information and resources

EDUCATION

School Programs

- Apprenticeships/internships at local businesses – skill building
- Intentional Communication with community (“what’s going on in our schools)
- Increase school/community partnerships
- Mentoring/literacy programs
- Academic & social transitions

Events and Learning

- International pot luck/cultural demonstrations night (*similar to dinner idea under Community Connections*)
- New partnerships with the library around environment and life long learning courses and lectures
- Create a children’s museum/indoor space to play and engage community members of all ages
- Taste of Essex that would feature food prepared by local restaurants, caterers and vendors.

THOUGHTFUL GROWTH

Green Up & Beautification

- Beautify through clean up days, plantings, family activities, resident participation
- Develop recommendations to strengthen Town and Village land use code to encourage preservation of green space
- Create an incentive plan for businesses to improve exteriors

Affordable Housing

- Invoke the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 (% of banks' income mandated for reinvestments in local community)
- Review and strengthen zoning regulations that address affordable housing
- Develop public/private partnerships with all parties/developers.

Local Agriculture

- Create an edible front yard contest
- Map potential land available for agriculture and who owns it.
- Winter Market with farmers and vendors
- Establish farmer forum to learn their needs
- Create plan to offer incentives/grants to maintain farmland for edibles
- Create a venue like [Summervale](#): bread oven, root cellar, activities

Unified Services

- Joint programming for two libraries
- Study further efficiency opportunities
- Combine rec. departments (footnote: make sure senior services are also included)

Planning

- Research the benefits of replacing zoning regulations with a form based code to improve aesthetics
- Add design criteria to Town and Village regulations/studies
- Create a Town Conservation fund/trust/land acquisition fund.

SAFETY

Bike/Walk Friendly & Transportation

- Signage! (Especially crosswalks)
- Enforce cars stopping at crosswalks (better signage, painting on the road)
- More communications and information about safe routes
- More communications about what's happening around Town/Village (map of construction, etc.)
- Build more sidewalks.
- Safety! Make it safer to cross roads (crosswalks at fairgrounds)