

Community Heart & Soul®

**Founded by Lyman Orton, Proprietor
The Vermont Country Store**

Community Heart & Soul is a resident-driven process that engages the entire population of a town in identifying what they love most about their community, what future they want for it, and how to achieve it.

Developed and field-tested over a decade in partnership with over 90 small cities and towns across the United States, Community Heart & Soul is a proven process for engaging a community in shaping its future.

Based on three powerful principles—involve everyone, focus on what matters most, and play the long game—Community Heart & Soul helps towns move toward a brighter, more prosperous future by bringing community residents closer together.

Community Heart & Soul is unique in how it engages residents. It is a highly inclusive process that reaches deep into communities to ensure all voices are represented in determining a town's future. Instead of bringing residents to the table, Community Heart & Soul brings the table to residents at community events, neighborhood block parties, schools, businesses, and virtual gatherings.

When residents get closer, differences fade and the things they care most about replace the differences. Trust is built and residents become stronger believers in their communities and more collaborative in their decision-making. People continue to stay in their communities, new people move in, and investment in towns increases.



Heart & Soul communities experience a range of social and economic benefits:

- ✓ Pride and confidence grow in the town
- ✓ Civility and respect increase
- ✓ Residents feel more connected to one another
- ✓ Volunteerism increases
- ✓ New young leaders emerge
- ✓ More residents run for local office
- ✓ Economic conditions improve
- ✓ Investment in the town increases
- ✓ New local businesses open
- ✓ Town officials gain a deeper understanding of what matters to residents
- ✓ Towns are better prepared to respond to emergency situations

How Community Heart & Soul Works

Community Heart & Soul begins with a four-phase, step-by-step process that brings residents together to identify and honor the unique character of their town and the emotional connection of the people who live there.

Phase 1–Imagine: Heart & Soul teams are formed to build awareness, interest, and commitment in all segments of the community.

Phase 2–Connect: stories are gathered from residents, leading to the development of Heart & Soul Statements that identify what matters most and reflect what they love about their towns.

Phase 3–Plan: residents develop action plans to guide future town planning based on their Heart & Soul Statements.

Phase 4–Act: Heart & Soul Statements are officially adopted by town and city councils, incorporated into comprehensive and other plans, and are used to guide future policies and decisions.

Playing the Long Game

Community Heart & Soul is an ongoing practice that provides municipal officials with a clear understanding of what matters most to their constituents—all the residents—and forges a partnership that builds on the first thing everyone has in common: they all live here. It's not a report that sits on a shelf; it's a way of coming together to make your town a better place to live in and visit.

About Community Heart & Soul

The seed for Community Heart & Soul was planted by businessman, Lyman Orton, who, with his three sons, is the proprietor of The Vermont Country Store. Orton served on his town's Planning Commission when it was wrestling with divisive proposals and grew frustrated that decisions being made that would shape the town's future were without guidance from the majority of the residents.

Orton recognized that there had to be a better way—one that reflected the hopes, dreams and ideas of the entire community and not just the few who regularly attended Planning Commission meetings.

Funded through profits from The Vermont Country Store, Orton created a nonprofit organization with the mission of establishing a community development process that engages all voices within a community in determining what matters most to the people who live there, and using their ideas and aspirations as the blueprint for future decision-making.

