

Community Heart & Soul®

— Guided by what matters most —

CANAAN, VERMONT

The town of Canaan is a picturesque community located on the Connecticut River in Northeastern Vermont. It is bordered by New Hampshire and Quebec, Canada, and many consider it to be the “real” Northeast Kingdom of Vermont.

Canaan is also the only town in Vermont to share a land border with New Hampshire, the town's far northeastern corner touches the southwestern corner of the town of Pittsburg, NH. The Connecticut River defines the state line from Canaan southward.

POPULATION:
1,000

CHALLENGE:
Economic and community recovery after the loss of a major employer

FOCUS: Plan, Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code, economic development, and tourism development plans

KEY TOOL:
Action Plan and Community Network Analysis

The residents wished to create a relationship with the towns of Pittsburg and Colebrook New Hampshire, to look at economic development on a regional scale.

Canaan “by the numbers”:

- 1782 – Canaan, VT was founded
- 238 Jobs lost when Ethan Allen Plant closed down
- Three new businesses started
- 200 stories collected
- Three Community Meetings held
- Four grants applied for and received

Local conditions:

The Beecher Falls Furniture Factory, a division of Ethan Allen, closed its manufacturing unit in August 2009, laying off 238 workers and leaving only the rough mill open. The plant opened in 1895 and was once the largest furniture factory east of Michigan. The people of Canaan were discouraged but determined to get their town back.

Many workers left the area, and many found jobs in neighboring areas, even across the river in New Hampshire. Canaan had become a commuter community and the people were becoming less connected to the place they lived.

Volunteer and Community Response:

The core team was a small but mighty group, seven members in total. They worked with the Community Network Analysis and discovered neighborhoods they did not know existed. They even realized that French was spoken as the primary language in many households, stemming from roots back to neighboring Quebec.

One of the first team projects was a Scarecrow contest held in Fletcher Park. The community came together, for the first time in years, to work on improvements to the park and view all the Scarecrows on display. Soon after, proceeds from a Farmers Market raffle went to help the Canaan, Naturally Connected

program, the name given to the Community Heart & Soul effort based on how the team connected Quebec and New Hampshire into the gathering of stories.

Heart & Soul Outcomes:

- Canaan Naturally Connect applied for and received a 501c3 nonprofit status.
- Canaan, VT was awarded the first ever, multi-state, USDA grant for water/wastewater, awarded jointly with Colebrook, NH. The Community Heart & Soul process was a positive deciding factor in the grant award.
- Canaan, VT received a seed grant in 2020 as part of Canaan Naturally Connected's rapid response and release of funds to support community group efforts towards the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Canaan, VT received a seed grant in 2019 from the Grass Roots Fund of New England for media promotion and public outreach materials to support the community visioning process.
- Canaan Naturally Connected was awarded a \$1,200 grant from Vermont Natural Resources Council to collect public input about usage of the Canaan Community Forest in the Northeast Kingdom. This project will include determining how to enhance connectivity between the forest and nearby towns.

