



VILLAGE INNOVATION PILOT BORDERLANDS PILOT TEAM - EXETER

In 1836, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, in *Nature*, “Build, therefore, your own world.” He was talking, at greater length, about two of New England’s most renowned institutions: the New England village and participatory democracy. The Borderlands Village Innovation Pilot is building on this tradition to create a twenty-first century shared sense of place in Exeter, centered on village-based development and rural conservation. We need you, the next generation citizen advisors and leaders, to help shape this view!

Background: The Borderlands Project is a partnership launched by the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council and The Nature Conservancy that focuses on creating opportunities for economic and community development in twenty towns along the CT-RI border while conserving and enhancing the natural amenities that make these communities unique. The Village Innovation Pilot (the Pilot) will provide assistance to two towns to explore and implement ways to enhance what makes them special while contending with future change. The Pilot was born out of past Borderlands activities, where local participants raised the question of whether it would be possible to protect rural lands by channeling future growth into existing or planned centers.

Through a competitive process, Killingly (CT) and Exeter (RI) were selected to undertake a community visioning process that will engage those who live, work and play in the community in planning for the future of their towns. Why do we live in this area? What connects us to this community? What can make living here better? Following the visioning, our work will explore options and implement actions for realizing their visions, including the possibility of establishing niches in an increasingly innovation driven economy and investigating how channeling growth into a village can both offset the consumption of critical rural lands and meet other important community goals. Although the Pilot developed from the question raised above, our expectation is that the outcomes of the visioning phase will guide the direction of the Pilot in each town.

By the Pilot’s conclusion, the two towns will have defined their visions, conducted a robust public outreach and awareness effort, explored creative options to move towards that vision and begun to implement actions. Success, in the short-term, may be defined by outcomes such as new design standards, focused land protection initiatives, and/or new local growth policies. In the long-term, success may be demonstrated by outcomes such as new businesses, protection of farms and forests and village center(s) with a well-designed integration of land uses.

The Pilot will also result in a better understanding of the technical assistance needed by towns, exploration of innovative partnerships to meet these needs, and the identification of state level policies necessary to encourage better patterns of land use. Finally, it will provide opportunities for other Borderlands towns to learn from the experiences of the two communities selected.

Resources & Timeline: The Pilot is estimated to cost approximately \$280,000 over its approximately two-year project period, including in-kind contributions from project partners. This timeframe includes an 18-month Pilot process as well as pre-pilot activities. The Pilot will be staffed by a Coordinator, supported by staff from The Nature Conservancy and Rhode Island Economic Policy Council, and have guidance from a bi-state Pilot Advisory Group comprised of key governmental and non-governmental partners and town representatives. It will also rely on the engagement of a Local Pilot Team. Please note that both the timeline and budget may be adjusted as the Pilot moves forward.

Local Pilot Team: The Pilot's success will depend on infusing local knowledge into this process. The Local Pilot Team, working closely with the Local Project Contact and Pilot Coordinator, will:

- Provide input into the design of Pilot activities within the town.
- Help integrate Pilot with other town initiatives and efforts.
- Help to connect with and encourage residents, businesses, local organizations, and other key stakeholders to participate in Pilot activities.
- Provide input on evaluating the Pilot's success and assist with evaluation.
- Think through ways to best communicate Pilot activities, progress and lessons learned.
- This Group will work in partnership with the Pilot's bi-state Advisory Group (and/or related Review Teams) on the development of specific pilot activities, including the hiring of consultants. We will make decisions based on consensus within the Local Pilot Team and between the Local Pilot Team and bi-state Advisory Group.
- Budgets, funding, Pilot staffing, and overall Pilot scope are managed solely by the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council and The Nature Conservancy.
- We anticipate that this Group will meet once a month (2-hour meeting) for the duration of the Pilot with the possibility for some work/communications between meetings. We may decide that additional working groups are needed for specific Pilot activities.

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