

# Working Together for Our Communities: Towns and Libraries as Partners in Community-Wide Initiatives



Lara Keenan

State Library Consultant, Governance & Management

VLCT Town Fair – October 3, 2019

## Why Do Public Libraries Exist? VSA Title 22

### Chapter 3, § 67

(a) The General Assembly declares it to be the policy of the State of Vermont that **free public libraries are essential** to the general enlightenment of citizens in a democracy and that every citizen of the State of Vermont should have access to the educational, cultural, recreational, informational, and research benefits of a free public library.

Amazing language in the statutes that recognizes the importance of public libraries.

State Statute set up public libraries to emphasize the important role of the trustees to guide the library's direction and to protect the privacy of library users. The success of the public library depends a great deal on the wisdom, guidance, and strategic thinking of its volunteer board.

And as this statute language emphasizes, libraries are essential to our democracy. The work libraries do is vital to our democracy – our local, state, and federal government functioning properly with an informed citizenry.

## Division of Powers: Trustees & SelectBoard

- Important: We Are All In This Together
- Also Important: Knowing The Law of Public Libraries
  - Municipal Library Trustees: “Shall have full power” 22 V.S.A. § 143
  - Incorporated Library Trustees: “have control and management of the affairs and property of the corporation” 22 V.S.A. § 105
- It’s a delicate balance to maintain and nurture

1. The legislature has set it up so that there is a division of powers – to protect our patrons from the threat of having their library usage monitored by the government. If people are going to be true participants in a democracy and have the freedom to read and access materials with a true promise of privacy, then they need to know that their SelectBoard does not have the power to dictate what materials are available and monitor what individual patrons are accessing. At the same time, it’s very important for the library trustees to work closely with the Town Administration, Town Clerk, and SelectBoard – because we are all in this together, especially in the small towns of Vermont. We are all here to serve our patrons/taxpayers.
2. So what powers do the library trustees have? It’s important to know them – and the limits of them.
3. Making sure the Selectboard and Town Administrator know what library trustees have jurisdiction over is important – while also making sure to play nice and follow procedures, benefits, and expectations set forth in other Town Departments or – if you deviate – make sure you can clearly articulate why you feel it’s important to do so.

# Working Together: Concepts to Consider

## Ideas for Working Together

# Community Needs Assessment

Source:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/airbnb/13915193802/>



Library Trustees and Selectboards can work together to assess the community – to turn outward and see what the community needs and how the library and the town can work together to meet those needs. Community Needs Assessments can help the Town create its overall Town Plan – and can help the library connect with institutions, organizations, businesses, and other community members to meet a range of needs.

## Ideas for Working Together

# Community-Wide Initiatives

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/niallkennedy/9587071278/>



Involve the library in community-wide initiatives – ex: Town Plan, Community Celebrations, Community Revitalization efforts, Opioid Awareness or other Drug Taskforces, Block Parties (and Town Meeting). The library is the one place where people from all parts of your community gather to access resources and see their neighbors – and socialize with the librarians. Because of this, librarians often hear the concerns of a wide range of community members – and know about the struggles people in your community face. Librarians are resourceful – and passionate about connecting people with resources. People use the library for a large number of reasons – and town officials can connect with the library and – in doing so – connect with a wide range of the taxpayers in your community.

## Ideas for Working Together

# Research Assistance & Information Dissemination

Source:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/pamwood707/5646757752>



Librarians are good at collecting information. If your town needs to research something, consider connecting with your librarian to see what resources they might have or what research they can do.

If you need to disseminate information to the town, consider approaching the library for help in doing so. Librarians see a wide-range of people and are good advocates.

## How Libraries Benefit Your Community

Libraries serve as a  
Community Hub -  
bringing the entire  
community  
together



Source: Burnham Mem. Lib. Facebook Page

People who might not normally connect in life will bump into one another at the library. The services and resources offered by the library are available to everyone – regardless of religion, socioeconomic status, age, or ability. At some libraries in VT, the only time people see one another is when they attend book club or storytime – or when they read the latest edition of their favorite magazine. The good will that the majority of citizens have for public libraries draws people to their library. And the resourcefulness and innovative mindset of library workers results in unexpected programs and services that can meet a wide range of community needs.

## How Libraries Benefit Your Community

Libraries are vital  
to a functioning  
democracy



Varnum Memorial Library, Cambridge

People who might not normally connect in life will bump into one another at the library. These interactions encourage civility, engagement, and relationship building. Libraries host programs that encourage citizens to engage in debate around tough questions. By fostering community engagement and civil discourse, libraries play a key role in preserving and strengthening our democracy. Libraries provide unfettered access to information – and in order for a democracy to function effectively, citizens need access to information so they can make informed decisions.

## How Libraries Benefit Your Community

Libraries provide a **space** for educational, social, cultural, and recreational engagement



Source:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/sanjoselibrary/31234520260>

The library space is a valuable asset for the community – and most public libraries are eager to have their communities use the library space to meet their community's needs.

## How Libraries Benefit Your Community

Libraries help your taxpayers connect with local government.



South Burlington Public Library

Municipal Libraries – as part of the local government – are a fantastic way for taxpayers to have a positive interaction with their local government. In many towns, more taxpayers visit their local library than they do the clerk's office. How can town officials and library directors capitalize on this?

## How Libraries Benefit Your Community

Libraries are the  
ultimate  
renewable  
resource



Source:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/awesomelibraryservices/16393118653>

Libraries purchase a physical or electronic copy of items that can be used by everyone. Rather than purchasing one copy and – when you are done with it – letting it sit on a shelf, libraries provide an easy way for resources to be used again and again. They are fundamentally green, renewable resource providers.

## How Libraries Benefit Your Community

Libraries Offer a  
Fantastic ROI\*

\*Library Value Calculator  
[http://www.ala.org/advocacy/  
library-value-calculator](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/library-value-calculator)



Source:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/143843618@N03>

Libraries provide a wide range of materials and services at a relatively low cost per capita. In most towns, the per capita cost of the public library is less than the retail cost of 2 hardcover books. Taxpayers can access resources worth thousands of dollars - and through interlibrary loan tens-of-thousands of dollars - for a very low investment of taxpayer funds. Taxpayers can access internet service, library events, and research assistance for the same low investment. There are few ROI better than that.

# Vermont Examples: Towns and Libraries Working Together

## Barnet Public Library



The Barnet Village water district was having some issues with its water system and repairs were a constant burden on the fire district which is composed of about 60 households and the library building. A few years ago, in an effort to raise some "match" funds for a grant, a local village resident decided to hold a townwide yard sale in hopes that people could donate some of their profits to the water district. The town has continued this as an annual event. The Barnet Public Library holds their book sale that day to not only to do some fundraising for the library, but to raise funds for the water district as well.

## Barton Public Library



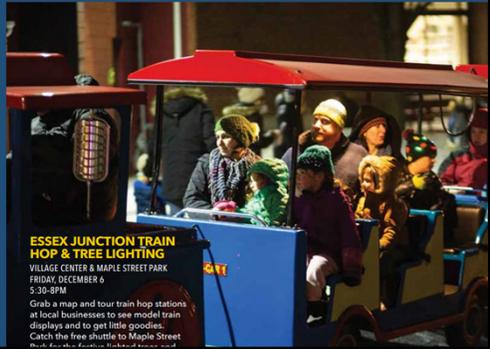
Barton Public Library has hosted a seed exchange for a number of years. In response to suggestions from the community, the library turned part of its lawn into a Community garden – and started hosting regular planning meetings for the garden at the library.

## Blake Memorial Library (Corinth)



The library has a really deep well - so during dry summers, people come and get water when their wells run dry. A local farmer fills up his huge tank when this happens. The library sees providing water to its neighbors as another of its many public services – along with a public restroom, A/C and heat, and Wifi. The library is here for a variety of needs – not just the expected ones.

## Brownell Library (Essex Junction)



The library works with the village's Parks & Rec and local businesses to do a community-wide evening Train Hop. Several "train stops" are set up at local businesses with train displays where people can get stamps on their "train card" to be entered into a drawing. There is also a motorized train car ride that people can jump aboard. At the Library there are train-themed activities, coloring sheets, a wide array of refreshments, a motorized train display, and more. It's a community holiday celebration.

## Castleton Free Library



The library participates in the Annual Castleton Day Celebration in which the Library collaborates with a number of other organizations, businesses, and the local parks & rec department to help produce a community-wide event that celebrates the history of the founding of Castleton.

## Dorset Village Public Library



The Dorset Village Public Library has helped make Halloween a huge town-wide event for Dorset. Over 300 people come through the haunted library. Several businesses and residences around the town Green participate in trick or treating. The Dorset Inn, the Dorset Union Store and the Dorset Historical Society also participate. Last year, the State Police helped with traffic control, and the library director even caught a few of them handing out candy, too. The scene is like something out of a movie: kids in costumes running around on the Green, fires, the setting sun behind the mountain... it's a very New England Halloween!

**Dance Parties:** The Dorset Library has been hosting Dance Parties for several years, complete with a lively 2-hour song list, disco ball and streamers. All ages attend from all over town, and even some people from outside of town come to dance. The library does themes, like the 80's. They have had up to 40 people attend the dances.

**Millennials Group:** This community program is for people in their 20s-30s. The group has grown into an age-inclusive (a few are in their 40s) group that meets for hikes, meals out, game nights, etc. It has connected people in several communities

who have similar interests and have said they wouldn't be out doing things if not for this group.

Dog Days – Yearly, in conjunction with the Dorset Historical Society, the library hosts the Dog Days cookout. They provide free hamburgers and hotdogs, drinks and sides, and the Historical Society has their ice cream social for dessert. There are a variety of activities; music, art demonstrations, and Dorset's Healing Arts expert had little laughter sessions. Everyone comes with or without their dogs, they eat, socialize, and hang out between the library and the historical society for an afternoon.



Enosburgh Public Library

A few years ago, the Enosburgh Falls Vital Village Program was started, and the library was involved from the start. The purpose is to engage the community to create a collaborative vision for a vibrant and healthy village center. The purpose of this effort is to promote economic development and community health with a focus on strengthening the tourism and recreation economy and developing a coordinated marketing identity for the village center.

The group meets regularly at the library. This group was responsible for proposing that the town fund a Grant Writer that can be used by all departments in the town – it started as a PT position, and now it's FT

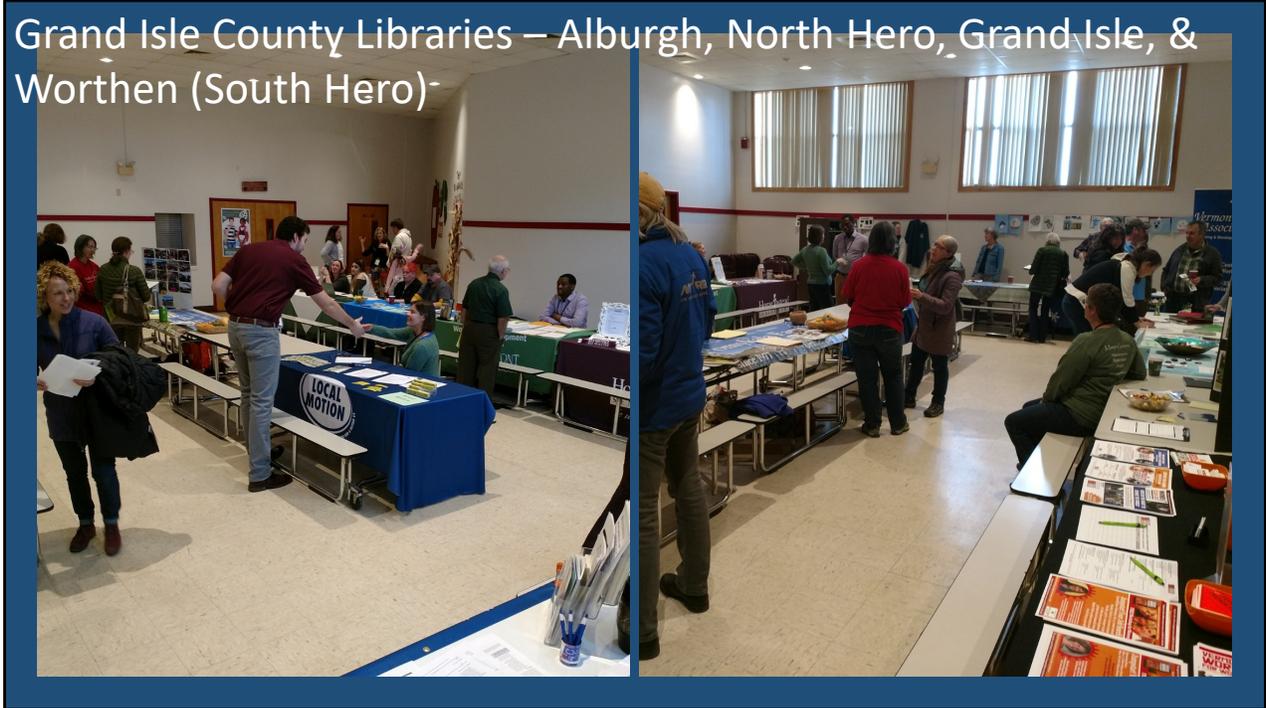
## Fletcher Free Library (Burlington)



The Fletcher Free Library has launched the Community Partners Desk to provide greater access to resources for the public. The Library welcomed its first partner -- the Howard Center -- as a resource for patrons. The Library anticipates adding additional partners throughout the year to answer questions, provide information, and educate the public about the services, volunteer opportunities, and activities the nonprofit provides.

The library also participates in a weekly safety meeting with the Church Street marketplace where businesses, library, officials, etc. talk about trends they are seeing and work to coordinate their responses and share ideas/experiences

## Grand Isle County Libraries – Alburgh, North Hero, Grand Isle, & Worthen (South Hero)



The four Grand Isle County libraries came together to create a Grand Isle Job Fair at the Grand Isle Elementary School Gym. This year was their second year, and they had 16 employers and almost 50 people. Employers included Creative Workforce Solutions, Grand Isle Lake House, Health Hero Farm, Home Instead Healthcare, Keeler's Bay Variety, Local Motion, Mama's Garden, North Hero House, Pomykala Farms, Viva Marketplace, SR Community Services Employment Program, Tree Tops Resort, Vermont Adult Learning, Vermont Department of Labor, Vermont State Parks, Vermont Works for Women.

## Jaquith Public Library (Marshfield)

**TONIGHT! 6:30**  
**OLD SCHOOLHOUSE COMMON BANDSTAND**  
**MARSHFIELD VERMONT**



**KAVA EXPRESS / WOODBELLY PIZZA**



FAMILY FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES

# MARSHFIELD HARVEST FESTIVAL

OLD SCHOOLHOUSE COMMON  
MARSHFIELD, VERMONT

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2019**  
**11 AM TO 3 PM**

#### SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

11 A.M. - FIELD GAMES ALL DAY  
11:00 - 1:30 - CHILI COOK-OFF  
12:15 - MUSIC: BELLA & THE NOTABLES  
1:00 - 2:30 - SLIDESHOW AND TALK: INDUSTRIES OF NORTH MONTPELIER  
1:45 - CHILI WINNER ANNOUNCEMENT  
2:00 - MUSIC: KICK 'EM JENNY  
2:00 - ULTIMATE FRISBEE GAME  
3:00 - FOREST FARMERS SUGARBUSH TOUR  
4:00 - HIKE TO MARSHFIELD CLIFFS

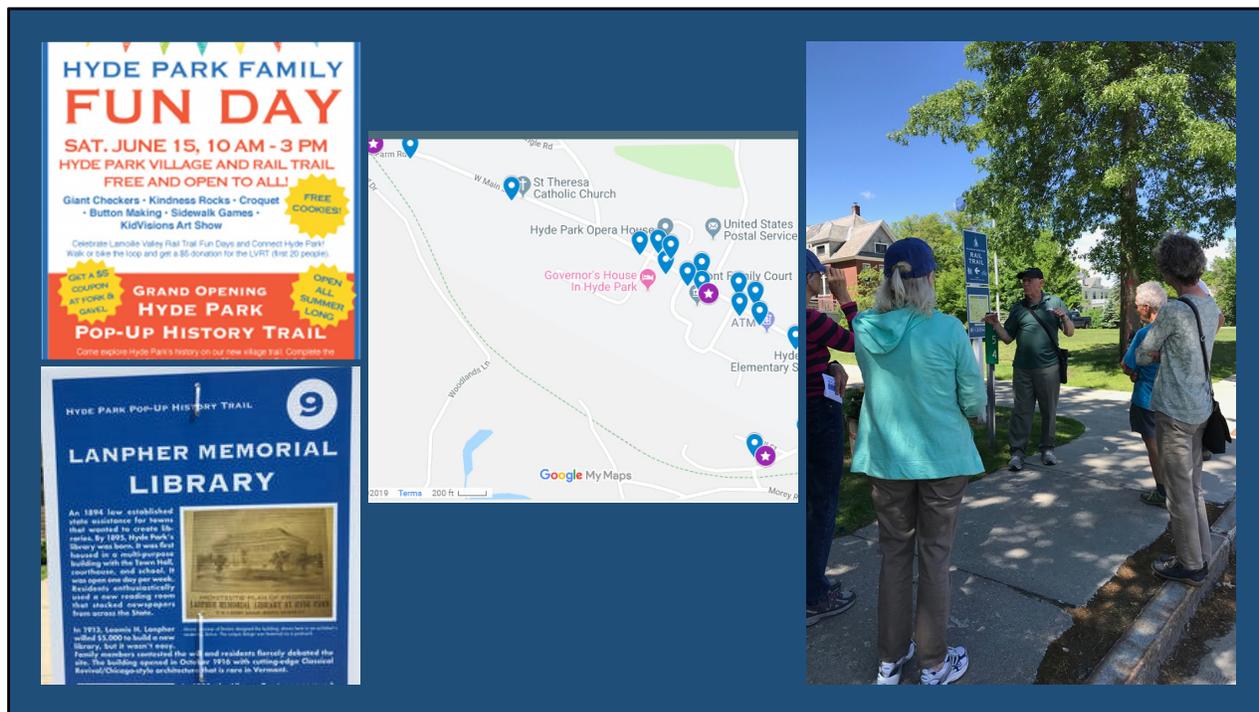
CHILI COOK-OFF  
LOCAL MUSIC  
CRAFT FAIR & FLEA MARKET  
HORSE & WAGON RIDES  
CIDER PRESSING  
FACEPAINTING & ART TENT  
FIELD GAMES  
BBQ & BAKE AND BOOK SALE  
RAFFLE

[WWW.JAQUITHPUBLICLIBRARY.ORG](http://WWW.JAQUITHPUBLICLIBRARY.ORG)

**JAQUITH PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
122 SCHOOL STREET, MARSHFIELD, VERMONT

Jaquith Public Library runs two huge community events for Marshfield – the Summer Concert Series and the Harvest Festival (which is part of the NEK Annual Fall Foliage Festival). For the Summer Concert Series, they produce 7-8 concerts which get hundreds of people. The evening includes a local business selling food. There is a raffle and silent auction. People from all the surrounding regions, including tourists, are drawn to this community event.

At the yearly Harvest Festival, the library runs a chili contest, hosts vendors, music, face painting, craft fair, hayrides, etc. The library works with the local parks & rec to get games and activities going.



The Library director is on a subcommittee of the Connect Hyde Park VT group. The library's website hosts information about the working group. Connect Hyde Park is a 14-month effort to develop a master plan for the Town and Village of Hyde Park to help the community invest in its future by improving walking and biking, promoting economic development and encouraging community engagement. This project seeks to improve safety in the village, and to take advantage of the Lamoille Valley Rail trail. By connecting the trail with the community's assets and making the village a safe and inviting place to be, they aim to enhance the sense of place and increase economic vitality. Out of this came the Pop-Up History Trail. The Library participated in the Pop-Up History Trail in which temporary signs were designed and posted at various historic places along the Rail Trail – and a website was developed to show all the historic markers in town.

A local man who grew up in the Village of Hyde Park and still lives there gave 2 "Walking History Tours." One was organized by the Lanpher Library for the general population and the other by a group called Lamoille Neighbors for their membership.

Using the Pop Up trail as a guide, Jack Anderson walked participants through the village telling stories about what things were like in Hyde Park Village in the 40s, 50s

and 60s. He told about what some of the buildings were used for, how they've changed and what kind of mischief a kid could get into.

Martha Canfield Memorial Library  
(Arlington)



Arlington Area Renewal Project was started after a local tragedy and the Act 46 school issue. There are several subcommittees - safety, arts, school, parks & rec., and more. The Library director is on the Arts committee and several trustees are on other subcommittees. It was set up as a focus group to address the threats and challenges faced by the town. The Economic Group started the Farmer's Market which goes for 6 weeks at Arlington Inn. The Project has a website to help increase communication with the town's residents. The Project also created a Community Calendar & the Library does the posting of events. Next up, they are going to do a map of the town with sites of interest and good locations for En Plain Air painting. The Project is also hosting a Young Professionals Group which meets 1x/month to network.



Community Conversations Series (spearheaded by the VT Historical Society and the VT Dept. of Libraries) on Repeopling Vermont focuses on how Vermont has handled questions of development and progress in the past, and how we might use those lessons to discuss a path forward to the future. The program will open with Northern Vermont University professor Paul Searls, author of *Repeopling Vermont: The Paradox of Development in the Twentieth Century*. In the book, Searls highlights the stories of different communities and their responses to difficult questions as part of his inquiry into how Vermont balanced competing visions for the state in the last century. In the second part of presentation, there will be facilitated discussion. How can we use the lessons of history to frame our planning going forward? What is important to preserve, and when is it important to move forward? How can we balance different interests and create a Vermont that works for everyone?

The Norwich Planning Commission is currently engaged in community outreach for the rewrite of its town plan, and the Chair welcomed the opportunity to diversify their outreach [beyond informational sessions](#) when the Norwich outreach librarian brought the Community Conversations idea to their attention. Both town officials

and planning commission members are reading the book *Repeopling Vermont* and will be facilitating a Norwich-specific conversation (with the help of the Historical Society's discussion guide!) after Paul Searls presents. The Planning Commission also prepared background reading suggestions for the town plan process which the Norwich Public Library will use for a book display during the week of the event:

Ebikes: When a member of the Norwich energy committee shared with the that they couldn't find a space for their e-bikes initiative or figure out how to administer the program, the library asked "Why not the library?" So they partnered with Burlington-based [Local Motion](#) and worked with [Vital Communities](#) and the Norwich Energy Committee to bring e-Bikes to Norwich for five weeks. The e-Bikes were available to borrow for four-day loan periods, through [Local Motion's online booking page](#). Locks and bicycle helmets circulated with the e-Bikes and were available at the library's circulation desk during pick-up. All the available slots were quickly taken, and so the library and the Energy Committee hosted e-Bike test rides on four Wednesdays.

## Westford Public Library



The town of Westford recently got its first cross walk – it went up between the library/town offices and the town green. The library knew this crosswalk was needed across this state roadway because people were often leaving the library and crossing the road to use the town green. The library worked with Town and VTRANS to show library usage stats to provide justification for the crosswalk. This is one step in the revitalization of the town green currently in progress (and in which the library is participating) – which includes a new general store, restoration of an old church, and more.

Whitingham Free Public Library

For more info call 802-368-7506

**WHITINGHAM EDG & PUBLIC LIBRARY**

*Jacksonville*

**Blueberry Festival & Street Market**

Friday August 2nd ▪ 4 pm — 7pm

**Featuring Jacksonville Blues Band, Antique Car Show, Street Market Vendors, Kids Activities, Jacksonville General Store Jacksonville Community Church Spaghetti Dinner & Blueberry Pie**

**WHITINGHAM FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY**

*"Enriching lives for over a century"*

**DIY Compost Barrel Workshop**

Monday July 22 6:30 pm

Join Almira Aekus on July 22 at 6:30 pm to make your own compost barrel. BYOB - Bring Your Own Barrel. Barrels may be available at a discount call Almira at 368-7887 to inquire.

Whitingham Municipal Center, Village of Jacksonville  
802-368-7506

Blueberry Festival- The Whitingham Town Economic Development Committee requested that the library assist with the 2019 Village Blueberry Festival, organizing a small street market and providing children's activities. The library advertised for vendors, reached out to known local vendors, farmers, blueberry producers, crafters, jewelers, authors, etc., organized a vendors meeting, helped vendors set-up, and acted as market manager through the day. The vendor spaces were free, and so each vendor donated an item for the library to raffle in the future. They also had a librarian on the sidewalk with chalk promoting sidewalk art with the kids.

Composting- Due to the new 2020 Vermont Solid Waste laws taking effect in July 2020, each town was required by the state to provided a public program about the new laws about composting. The selectboard and town clerk approached the library about facilitating such an event. The library had 3 panelists who talked about the different ways in which people can compost, including a full demonstration of worm composting. The library also offered a 2nd hands-on composting program where participants made composting bins from round trash barrels on wheels. Barrels were offered at a discount to participants



Libraries are places to bring local businesses together.

Pierson Library joined the local Shelburne Business & Professional Association, hosted their meetings at the library, trained them on databases and other resources available at the library for entrepreneurs and small businesses. Because of feedback from the community, the new library which opened in September has a space for entrepreneurs which includes a business center with computers, printers, copiers, and working space.

Island Pond – The director participated in local revitalization efforts by helping to bring the local business community together to brainstorm things that could be done to help the town get out of its economic depression and encourage new local businesses to open up. The library director was featured in the 2017 Vermont Magazine “Comeback in the Kingdom” article.

Orwell Free Library – Several small businesses in Orwell are just starting to explore forming a local small business association, and the library director and trustees are looking into ways that the library can assist this nascent group in getting off the ground.

Ideas & Questions?

## Contact Me

Lara Keenan

State Library Consultant, Governance & Management

60 Washington Street, Suite 2, Barre VT 05641

802-636-0026 | [lara.keenan@vermont.gov](mailto:lara.keenan@vermont.gov)