

Update Report
on the
Community Development Plan

Town of Kirkland
Village of Clinton
Clinton Central School District

Kirkland Ventures
December 2007

Contents

Summary	3
Step 1: <u>Identify and Quantify Deterrents</u> The Maxwell Report	4
Step 2: <u>Start the Conversation</u> “The Case for a Community Manager” Interview Key Stakeholders	5
Step 3: <u>Report on Findings</u>	6
Step 4: <u>Propose Solutions</u> (Create a Long-Term Plan)	7
Step 5: <u>Implement the Solutions</u>	10

Summary

Two years ago, Kirkland Ventures, an all-volunteer, *ad hoc* citizens' group, began a phased process leading to the creation of a comprehensive **Community Development Plan** for the Town of Kirkland, the Village of Clinton, the Clinton Central School District ("CCS") and the Clark Mills Fire District. Kirkland Ventures arose out of a concern for a community enjoying many strengths and opportunities, yet nonetheless facing weaknesses and threats to its financial stability, quality of life and future prospects.

On the one hand are the **strengths**: the diversity and quality of life, a world-class college, a unique and attractive village green, excellent schools, beautiful landscapes and farmland, a multitude of cultural and recreational opportunities, and an energetic, community-minded populace with dedicated elected leadership and virtually no public debt.

But the **weaknesses** and **threats** are also evident: a slow-growth tax base, a stagnant population with shifting demographics, increasing government expenditures, projected school budget deficits, reduced state school aid, fragmentation among stakeholders, and the lack of a long-range vision and development plan.

Kirkland Ventures proposed a five step process to develop a Community Development Plan, a shared vision and strategy for future:

- Step 1: Identify and quantify deterrents to economic growth
- Step 2: Start the conversation about a long-term Plan
- Step 3: Report on initial findings
- Step 4: Identify solutions by creating a long-term Plan
- Step 5: Implement the solutions

This report updates the Kirkland community on the progress for launching multi-faceted, systematic approach to defining the issues, identifying solutions, setting goals and strategies, and encouraging the community to take action. It includes adjustments to the "Case for a Community Manager" previously-issued in October 2007 based on comments from community leaders in one-on-one interviews. And it will further articulate the case for a Community Development Officer to lead, facilitate, coordinate and encourage the creation and execution of the Plan.

Step 1: Identify and Quantify Deterrents

The Maxwell Report

With the support of government officials, the Board of Education and senior administrators at CCS, Kirkland Ventures requested the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University to conduct a financial analysis of the Town, the Village and CCS and a “best practice” survey of other, similar communities in the Northeast. In May and early June, 2007, a team of professors and graduate students from Maxwell completed the “Financial Condition Analysis” of the Town, the Village, and CCS and presented their findings at a public meeting at the Kirkland Art Center on June 8.¹

From a quantitative perspective, the Maxwell Report provides a detailed analysis of past, present and projected trends in the financial health of the Kirkland community. It discusses the issues of Town and Village expenditure increases, unsustainable CCS budget deficits, and the need to balance capital spending requirements with the current lack of long-term debt, among other matters. The report also identifies certain accounting issues and practices which should be addressed.

Qualitatively, the report identifies practices and initiatives in other college towns in New York and New England that should be explored and considered for possible implementation by the Kirkland community. Several of these nine (9) other “college towns”² are significantly farther along than the Kirkland community in several key areas, including streamlined government, grant writing for funds to support projects without local taxation, enhanced Town/Gown relations, and expanded management capacity.

The major recommendations of the Maxwell Report were:

1. formalize communications among key stakeholders in the community;
2. create standardized and more transparent accounting practices;
3. develop a shared community vision and plan;
4. hire a professional manager to move initiatives forward.

¹ Copies of the full Maxwell Report are available for loan at the Kirkland Town Library.

² Canton, Cazenovia, Geneva, Hamilton, Potsdam and Red Hook, NY; Hanover, NH, Middlebury, VT; and Williamstown, MA.

Step 2: Start the Conversation

“The Case for a Community Manager”

The October 2007 document that proposed a “**Community Manager**” for the Town, the Village and CCS had two essential purposes:

1. summarize the Maxwell Report and make the information available to a wider circle of Kirkland stakeholders, and
2. offer a bold proposal that would, at the very least, start the conversation about the community’s future, the need for a long-term vision, and the plan to get there.

Operating in an advisory capacity, the proposed position would provide complementary professional assistance and to the Town, the Village and CCS, increase communication and collaboration among stakeholders, overcome fragmentation in the community, generate new revenue, facilitate efforts to streamline government, and cultivate the Community Development Plan. The community manager would act as a critical liaison not only among the three governmental entities, but among and between all stakeholders in the community: government; businesses and industry; the Chamber of Commerce; civic and non-profit organizations; Hamilton College; and individuals. The position would be funded through additional non-tax revenues such as user fees, grant income, private financial support, and in the long run, increased tax revenues from new, for-profit businesses added to the Town’s tax rolls as a result of the economic development plan.

Interview Key Stakeholders

To solicit feedback, gather input, gauge consensus and build support for the comprehensive community plan, Kirkland Ventures distributed the “Case For” document to over 150 key members of the Kirkland community. The list included elected officials in the Town and Village, business and commercial leaders, school district administrators, members of community boards, Hamilton College faculty and senior staff, and other “people of influence” representing a broad cross-section of the community. To date, Kirkland Ventures has conducted one-on-one “interviews” with nearly 60 of these community leaders, with more to come. The interview process will continue indefinitely as part of the community planning process and responses to the interviews will be included in future reports and updates

Step 3: Report on Findings

The interview process generated many significant comments. Several themes are summarized as follows:

1. **There is broad support for the concept of an advisor, advocate, facilitator, grant writer and planner.** Virtually every person interviewed agreed that the community must be proactive and can no longer afford to operate on a status quo basis.
2. **The term “Community Manager” is misleading.** The proposed position would not “manage” the community in a strict sense, as there already are elected officials and Boards, appointed officials and administrative staff members whose function is day-to-day management of the Town, Village and CCS.
3. **The term “Community Development Officer” is more appropriate.** The position would combine a number of functions: financial analyst and advisor; economic development coordinator; community collaborator; and grant writer, among others, with the most important being the creation and implementation of a long-term community plan.
4. **There are concerns for the cost of the new position, the reporting structure, authority and accountability.** Some questioned the need for “another layer of government.” Others voiced concern with the compensation package required to attract and retain a skilled person, as well as the source of those funds. Most agreed that these details would be addressed once the community as a whole agreed to the desirability of defining and creating a development position.
5. **There are many positive initiatives underway, but the community can and should do more.** In addition, current “successes” are not communicated to the broader Kirkland community as well as they could be.
6. **There is no plan for the community’s future.** While the process of updating the 1993 Comprehensive Land Use Plan is underway, that document is only one piece of a broader community development plan, which does not exist. Regardless of how the community views its future, a plan is needed to get there, and all the more so if the community’s will is to “stay the way we are.” A status quo vision does not preclude a plan to achieve that outcome.
7. **In the absence of some level of economic growth and expansion of the tax base, an ever-increasing tax burden on the existing taxpayers is inevitable and will gradually become a severe detriment to the community.**

Step 4: Propose Solutions (Create a Long-Term Plan)

There is no dearth of ideas and proposals to improve the quality of the Kirkland community. Furthermore, the physical, financial and human resources needed for positive change exist in the community, but it has been too fragmented to bring them all together in a meaningful way in the past. Without a plan for the future, the Kirkland community lacks direction, cannot articulate its goals, cannot measure its successes (and failures), and cannot make informed, intelligent choices when faced with decisions affecting the long-term viability of the community.

To be vibrant and successful, Kirkland must have a long-term plan, the strategies to support it and the will to make it happen. Kirkland Ventures proposes that the community as a whole commit to creating a Community Development Plan encompassing a long-term vision and strategy for the Kirkland community.

Requirements

- Broad participation and input to generate consensus, buy-in, enthusiasm and action
- Strong support from government officials and community leaders
- Commitment to make it happen

Timetable

- Begin in January 2008.
- Input Phase complete by June 2008
- Draft Plan by September 2008
- Additional input and consensus-building during Fall 2008
- Final draft by November 2008
- Publish, distribute and publicize during December 2008
- Annual updates beginning in January 2010

Elements

- Continuing **one-on-one interviews** with community leaders and “people of influence”
- **Focus Groups** to identify goals and strategies within specific areas of focus
- Re-engagement of the **Maxwell School** to expand on 2007 project
- Monthly **Community Forums** to report on progress and engage the community
- Quarterly published **Progress Reports** and other updates through newsletters and local media
- **Annual planning process** to renew, update and expand the plan.

2008 Activities:

1. **Define the “Focus Areas” of the Plan.**

These 6-8 categories will serve to capture and categorize major ideas and strategies. Kirkland Ventures proposes the following initial Focus Areas. Additions and adjustments are expected as the planning process moves forward.

- Economic Development Strategy
- Financial Planning & Management
- Stakeholder Communication & Collaboration
- Effective Government
- Marketing, Branding & PR
- School Budgets (already initiated by the CCS administration and a model for the others)

2. **Establish “Focus Groups” for each Focus Area.**

Professionals and other persons with expertise invited from the Kirkland community will convene in facilitated brainstorming sessions to identify SMART³ goals and strategies within each focus area. (As the process unfolds, focus groups will evolve into Action Teams to facilitate, oversee or manage the implementation of specific strategies or action items).

Focus Group activities will commence as follows:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| • Economic Development Strategy | - | late January 2008 |
| • Financial Planning & Management | - | early February 2008 |
| • Marketing, Branding & PR | - | late February 2008 |
| • Others | - | monthly beginning in mid-March 2008 |

³ Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely

3. **Publish SMART goals and strategies.**

Substantive goals and strategies from each focus area will be published on a timely and continuous basis for comment and input from government officials, community leaders and the public. Through several iterations the process will confirm the SMART goals, prioritize the strategies for achieving them, establish preliminary timetables for action, and provide a channel for additional participants to join focus groups, committees and action teams.

4. **Maxwell School Follow-Up Project:**

Potential subjects for a follow-up investigation, analysis and report by the Maxwell School during March-May 2008 include:

- Conduct a specific “best practice” survey of other, similar College Towns;
- Create a 10-year financial projection model for the Town, Village and CCS;
- Define the responsibilities, reporting structure and funding for a Community Development Officer;
- Identify specific opportunities for a grant writing program.

5. **Sustain a “Feedback Loop”:**

The planning process will continuously generate feedback, consensus and participation through:

- one-on-one interviews with community leaders;
- group presentations to community boards and committees;
- Community Forums for the general public;
- newsletters, email, media exposure and various websites.

6. **Publish a draft Community Development Plan by Labor Day 2008 and finalize by Thanksgiving.**

Step 5: Implement the Plan

Once the Community Development Plan is published, implementing the plan must become the follow-on priority for the entire Kirkland community. The Plan cannot be allowed to gather dust on shelf as energy naturally dissipates at the conclusion of the initial effort to produce the first edition.

The present structure of local government does not provide the vehicle or resources to create a Community Development Plan, let alone execute one. If properly managed, the planning process itself will energize participation and build momentum in the community. But executing the plan will also require leadership, oversight, coordination, communication, and funding. Kirkland Ventures is committed in its belief that a Community Development Officer is necessary for the community to craft and implement its long-term, shared community plan that builds on the strengths in our community, capitalizes on opportunities, minimizes weaknesses and defends against threats.