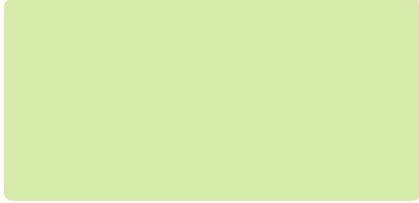
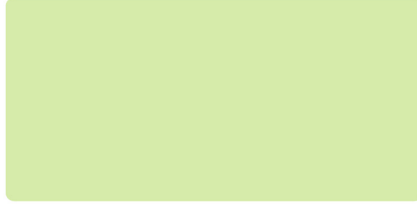
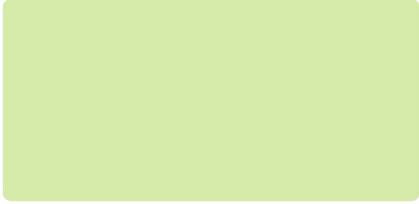
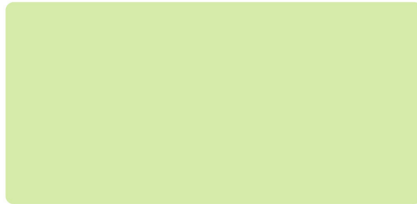
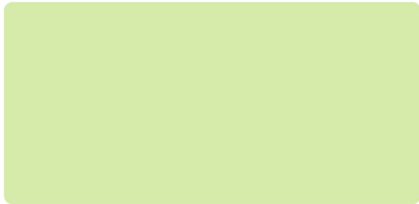


LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

Technical Assistance Program



Strengthening the
Local Foods System
and Downtown
Revitalization:
Actions and Strategies
for Keeseville, New York
July 25, 2016



Community Story

Keeseville is a hamlet split between Clinton and Essex Counties in Upstate New York with a population of approx. 1,800. The community is physically divided by the Ausable River with the western part in the Town of Ausable in Clinton County and the eastern half in the Town of Chesterfield in Essex County. The entire hamlet is within the boundaries of the Adirondack Park and it is just a few miles from Lake Champlain, directly across from Burlington, Vermont. The beautiful scenic landscapes and many recreational opportunities are a draw for tourists and second home-owners year-round.

Small-scale agriculture has been taking off in the Champlain Valley. Between 2007 and 2012, 18 new small farms were started, four of which are within three miles of the center of Keeseville. These new farms add to a robust existing agricultural landscape with many orchards, dairy, meat, and vegetable farms. Local food producers in the Keeseville area include a brewery, vineyard, creamery and cheesemaker, butcher shop, bakery, and several food truck vendors.

Keeseville has many other attributes that contribute to a vibrant local foods economy. The Adirondack Farm to School Initiative received a USDA Farm to School planning grant to organize food service, school gardens, and curriculum efforts in the Adirondack Park, which includes Keeseville. Momentum is also growing in the revitalization of Keeseville with plans for a waterfront park and commercial development in an adjacent historic industrial building, the renovation and reuse of the old high school, and restoration of the central business district already underway.

While Keeseville has many positive things happening, the town also faces socioeconomic and health issues. Like many small towns, Keeseville's young population is leaving due to lack of employment opportunities. Keeseville's only grocery store closed in 2013, limiting access to fresh, healthy food, which can lead to negative health consequences. There is currently no farmers market or other outlet for local food. One in



Figure 1 - Top to bottom: Sign at the Ausable Grange welcoming workshop; Stone Mill Building exterior former Au Sable Horse Nail Factory built in 1848; Stone Mill interior; Main Street storefronts

five children in Keeseville is obese and the rate of diabetes is above the regional average¹.

The Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA), and other local non-profit organizations, believe local foods initiatives can complement Keeseville revitalization efforts in housing, recreation, employment, green space, walkability, lodging, and arts and culture. Keeseville could coordinate its many resources to increase access to local food, embrace the seasonal fluctuations in the market and food production, and take advantage of nearby recreational opportunities and tourist destinations to help develop a thriving town center.

In 2015, ANCA and its partner organizations requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places program to develop an action plan to help Keeseville achieve its vision for a more prosperous downtown and robust local food economy. The program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Appalachian Regional Commission, and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). With the assistance of this program, Keeseville developed the following action steps. Implementing the actions described later in this plan could bring several benefits to the community including:

- A revitalized downtown that is the anchor of the community.
- More economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses.
- Better access to healthy, local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.



Figure 2 - Top to bottom: Inside view of Children's Development Group (Front Street business), which shares space with Fresh and Fancy Bakery; Mace Chasm Farm butcher shop; North Country Creamery; Fledging Crow Farm grow house. Photo credits: Renaissance Plannina/Tetra Tech.

¹ Data source: 2013 estimate from CDC BRFSS, accessed via Healthy Food Access Portal Mapping Tool, <http://www.healthyfoodaccess.org/>

Engagement

Community Tour

The two-day workshop began on April 6th with a group lunch among the project team and steering committee members. Following lunch, the group took a walking tour of Keeseville’s town center to see the renovated buildings, new businesses, and upstairs apartments located within the Front Street Business District. The group also visited the Stone Mill on the Ausable River, the historic center of downtown. The mill’s planned restoration could support the local food infrastructure with a market, restaurant, or other use. Finally, the group traveled to the town perimeter to see Ausable Chasm, a major tourist attraction, and visit several of the small farms in the area, including North Country Creamery, Mace Chasm Farm, Fledging Crow Farm, and the Ausable Brewing Company.

Public Meeting

A public meeting at the Ausable Grange was attended by approximately 38 community residents. The overall purpose of Session One was to help participants answer the question: “*Where are we now, and where do we want to be?*” Jason Espie with the project team provided an overview of the project and goals, followed by presentations from several steering committee members: Josh Bakelaar (ANCA), Steven Englehart (Adirondack Architectural Heritage), and Courtney Grimes-Sutton (Mace Chasm Farm). Josh described Keeseville’s assets, including the recent renovation of buildings on Front Street; the proximity to several natural attractions and recreational opportunities; good access to highways for tourism, commuting, and marketing; and the growing number of small farms in the area. Josh also discussed the many events (including several cycling tours), programs, and existing resources within the Keeseville community that could support development of the local food system and downtown revitalization. Steven discussed the plans for the renovation of the historic Stone Mill and



Figure 3 - Top to bottom: Workshop mapping exercises; Lunch on day two, homemade chili and raw milk and cookies by Northcountry Creamery; Josh Bakelaar addresses the workshop. Photo credits: Renaissance Planning.

development of an adjacent riverfront park, including the potential to use the mill as an outlet for local food as a market, restaurant, or lodging, among other ideas. Courtney followed with a snapshot of the various small farms in the area, their existing markets, and what they would like to see in Keeseville to help grow their businesses.

As part of the Values exercise in Session One, every participant was asked to express in one sentence what they believe about their town. Responses included the following:

- “Food connects people.”
- “Local food production is critically important to a stronger downtown.”
- “Community is a place where people live, work, and play together.”
- “Everyone has the right to access healthy and fresh food.”
- “The downtown revitalization effort will attract more young entrepreneurs.”
- “The work being done here will serve as a model for other communities.”

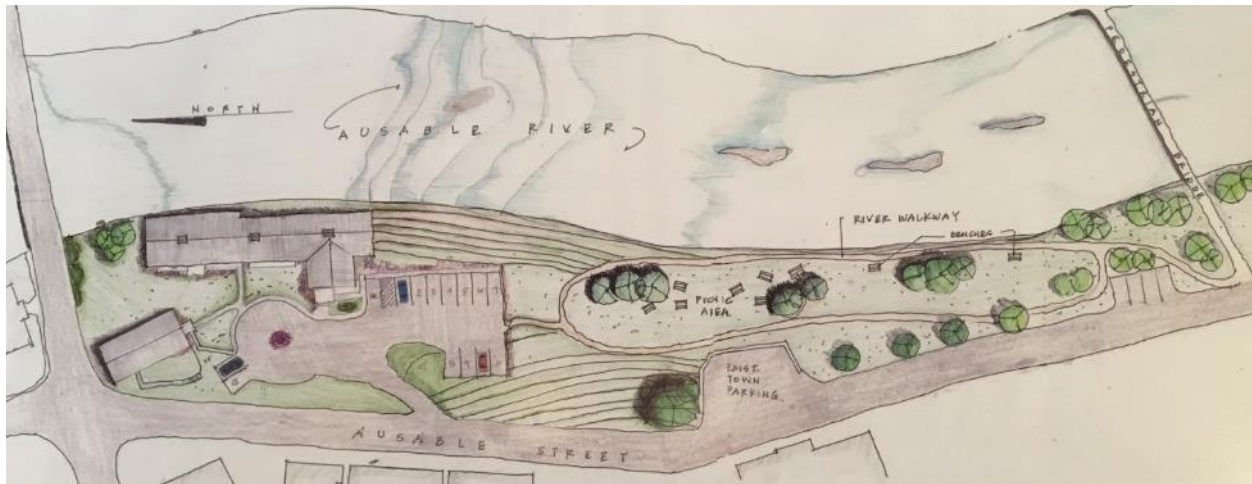


Figure 4 - Photo of Stone Mill and River Park rendering by SD ATELIER Architecture LLC. The illustration and concept were presented by Steven Englehart of Adirondack Architectural Heritage.

Finally, to help develop the vision for the community, participants broke into groups to brainstorm answers to three questions about the future of Keeseville. Some of the responses are included below.

- 1. What does success look like to you 15-20 years from now?**
 - a. More land is returned to diversified agricultural production, with farms of different types and sizes.
 - b. Keeseville has a more vibrant downtown throughout the year.
 - c. The region has more agriculture services available (i.e., meat processing and value-added production facilities).
 - d. A regional identity is established and branded, and is composed of multiple small communities with their own unique experiences to offer. All of these small communities are strategically networked and coordinated with each other to promote tourism, growth, and important value-chain connections among farmers.
- 2. What do you see as the greatest potential and opportunities for local food, economic growth, health, and vitality in or around Keeseville?**
 - a. Lots of natural amenities to attract visitors.

- b. A strong sense of nature because of Keeseville’s location within the Adirondack Park.
 - c. The desire for people to return to Keeseville to raise families and/or businesses.
 - d. A zoned industrial park.
 - e. Resourceful, independent, hard-working, and entrepreneurial people.
- 3. What challenges or possible barriers to success do you foresee, and what has prevented movement towards your goals so far?**
- a. Limited access to land.
 - b. Negative or apathetic attitudes among residents.
 - c. Lack of capital for investment or improvements.
 - d. Lack of access to high-speed internet.

Session One concluded with a report-out from each group and a review of the agenda for Day 2.

Technical Workshop

Day 2 of the workshop began with a session to help participants clarify “*what they want to happen.*” The project team presented several case study examples to show workshop participants how other communities have used development of their local food system to help revitalization efforts. Discussion among participants revolved around several important components of the community’s existing food system. These included:

- **Stone Mill and Riverside Park.** The vision plan and concept for the renovation of the Stone Mill property and a future Riverside park were presented for discussion. There was widespread encouragement and support expressed for the whole initiative, and many recognized its potential as powerful catalyst for positive change for both local food, the local economy and as a valuable community asset that will strengthen the destination appeal and attractiveness of downtown Keeseville. Both the mill and the park concepts received attention, and were identified priority actions coming out of this workshop.
- **Keeseville School System** – Representatives from the school system discussed their interest in ideas for grant funding and strategic partnerships that could help promote local foods through school programs. Keeseville Elementary School, identified as a strong asset to the community, would like to re-establish its school gardens but lacks the volunteer support during the summer growing season. ANCA was identified as an important partner for coordinating among school districts and farmers. Their partner, the Adirondack Farm to School Initiative received a USDA planning grant for cafeteria, school garden, and curriculum development that is helping create a suite of tools and resources for use by schools in the region. Building on this momentum, ANCA recently helped the initiative secure a two year NYS grant that hired a Regional Coordinator to expand the effort to include more schools.
- **Public Health and Wellness** – A representative from the Clinton County Public Health Department reported on a range of initiatives to support healthy food and families. They recently received a Creating Healthy Schools and Communities Grant in partnership with Essex County, intended to increase demand and access to healthy food and opportunities for physical activity. County Health Departments are also implementing a grant to bring more people to farmers markets in an attempt to make local food more accessible to the greater population. An element of the grant is to utilize a “farm-fresh cash” voucher program to incentivize purchases of healthier food among residents in need.

- **Hub on the Hill (HoH)** – This newly formed food hub located in Essex (about 15 miles from Keeseville) was identified as an important asset to Keeseville’s local food system. HoH contains a state-certified community kitchen targeted toward commercial-scale food processing, various types of processing equipment, cold storage, a co-packing provider, and a service to help producers develop value-added ventures. Currently, HoH is exploring a distribution service utilizing Wholeshare, an online cooperative grocery distributor, which can connect farm products with consumers, food deserts, and regional wholesale markets (including schools, restaurants, elderly-care facilities) outside of the immediate area.
- **Keeseville Farmer’s Market** – Residents identified several reasons the market was not doing as well as it could, including not enough produce vendors, not enough customers and profit to justify the attendance of local producers, withdrawal of a baker, and lack of access to EBT/WIC payment options. Suggested strategies for helping revitalize the farmer’s market included establishing a farmer’s market committee that includes several local farmers (not just downtown business merchants or non-producer members), and the need to coordinate the market with other events to draw more customers. It was recently announced that the Farmers Market will not operate in 2016, but this was not a permanent decision and that more coordination and planning will be needed to make this happen again when the time is right.

Other programs within the region were also noted, including the New York State Certified campaign sponsored by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Marketing and funding opportunities through USDA Rural Development.

Session Three of the workshop involved a break-out session of four groups to develop an action plan addressing the four overarching goals identified during the previous sessions:

1. Revitalize, reuse, repurpose, and renovate Downtown Keeseville
2. Live better, healthier, and prosperously
3. Attract tourists who visit often, stay longer, do more, and spend more
4. Create and propel partnerships, build synergy, and collaborate to move Keeseville forward

These goals and actions are presented below in summary, and in greater detail in Appendix A.

Action Plan

GOAL 1: Revitalize, reuse, repurpose, and renovate Downtown Keeseville.

Keeseville is a place with a long history and the “bones” of good infrastructure. It has an existing grid of streets, historic commercial and residential buildings, and a village charm that many small towns would envy. After some years of neglect and abandonment, Keeseville is now poised to build on recent momentum and breathe new life and investment downtown. The actions presented below represent some of the ideas and aspirations for this and other downtown properties to bring new life and energy to the area and make it a more desirable and vibrant place in the future.

- **Action 1.1:** Rehabilitate the Stone Mill building infrastructure into a usable space for local businesses
- **Action 1.2:** Develop the waterfront revitalization plan to create green space in the town center.

- **Action 1.3:** Restore Front Street with enhanced streetscape, signage, housing opportunities, and new businesses.
- **Action 1.4:** Create a joint committee for coordinating downtown revitalization goals with participation from both towns (Chesterfield and Ausable) and counties (Essex and Clinton).

GOAL 2: Live better, healthier, and prosperously

This goal focused on improving opportunities and amenities for residents of Keeseville so they can better enjoy the area; live healthier, more active lives; and experience greater prosperity because of increased economic opportunities. It was acknowledged that many of the goal areas have mutually supportive themes, for if you invest in amenities for visitors you are also giving residents more access to those amenities, and vice versa. For purposes of organizing the action plan, the following set of actions targets strategies that are focused more towards benefiting residents of Keeseville and the surrounding area.

- **Action 2.1:** Create a full-time or part-time brick-and-mortar storefront market for locally produced food, groceries, artisan products such as bread and coffee, and a deli counter.
- **Action 2.2:** Support hiking, biking, canoeing, and kayaking opportunities and couple these activities with access to healthy food.

GOAL 3: Attract tourists who visit often, stay longer, do more, and spend more.

This goal area targets the economic potential for Keeseville as a hub or destination place for visitors. The region, especially in non-winter months, gets a large influx of both seasonal residents and tourists. The actions outlined below are next steps to enhance the attractiveness of the Keeseville area, encourage more people to visit, enhance awareness and quality of amenities, and give people more reason to stay, enjoy and spend money in the area. Themes such as marketing, outreach and branding of key area amenities arose when discussing this goal and the actions below.

- **Action 3.1:** Develop a Marketing Plan for Keeseville.
- **Action 3.2:** Update the town website (<http://www.keesevilleny.com/>) and link to ROOST (<http://www.lakechamplainregion.com/>) to inform potential visitors about Keeseville's assets and attractions.
- **Action 3.3:** Offer more lodging opportunities for visitors to Keeseville.
- **Action 3.4:** Establish a transit loop connecting the ferry, beaches, Ausable Chasm, trailheads, downtown, and the Bike Bank.
- **Action 3.5:** Build and promote hiking, biking, and recreational trails in Keeseville.
- **Action 3.6:** Design a signage and wayfinding campaign throughout Keeseville.

GOAL 4: Create and propel partnerships, build synergy, and collaborate to move Keeseville forward.

The workshop was an opportunity to bring people from diverse backgrounds and areas of the local and civic economy together. There was ample discussion about how to build relationships, form partnerships and work together better to achieve a healthier and more prosperous future for the community. It was in this spirit of partnership building and collaboration that the below action items were created.

- **Action 4.1:** Form a Keeseville Farmers Market Steering Committee and Connect with Clinton County's Overcoming Obstacles to Food Access Grant
- **Action 4.2:** Reinvigorate Adirondack Harvest as a channel for the promotion, marketing, and support of local growers.
- **Action 4.3:** Support local supply with local demand by connecting farmers with Hub on the Hill (HoH) and schools.
- **Action 4.4:** Increase outreach around local agricultural production through the creation of a community bulletin kiosk and a digital presence.

Implementation / High Priority Actions

Actions that have a lead organization and create visible changes in the town center were identified as the top priorities by the steering committee. AARCH's Stone Mill (action 1.1) and Riverside Park (action 1.2) projects possess these qualities and create significant economic opportunities in Keeseville. The committee feels that these projects are realistic given the communities resources as well as transformative given their scale and multi-use nature.

In addition, following the workshop a number of on-going and noteworthy developments have occurred that relate to the action plan and the progress towards implementation.

Stone Mill (AARCH) and Riverfront Park (AARCH and Town of Ausable) The Stone Mill project continues to gain financial support with two new grants won after the Local Foods, Local Places workshop.

- A NY DEC Smart Growth grant from the Environmental Protection Fund for \$75,000 has been obtained for demolition of the building now on the park property.
- USEPA Region 2 will be performing a Targeted Brownfield Assessment (TBA) at the Former R. Prescott and Sons Mill. The TBA will consist of an "all appropriate inquiry" assessment (Phase I), including a historical investigation and a preliminary site inspection. Amount \$17,000

Farm to School (ANCA) Farm to School continues to develop in the Champlain Valley with a greater number of schools and farms participating. Farmers, Wholeshare, Adirondack Harvest, and the Hub on the Hill are exploring efficient ways to market local food and have it delivered to schools. Similarly, school food service staff are working together to find cooperative ordering and food preservation options.

Food Hub (Hub on the Hill) The Hub had its grand opening June 2, 2016 with nearly 200 attending a local food meal in their new outdoor event space. The retail space is now open and hosts a wide variety of locally made products including soaps, frozen yogurt, prepared meals, cheeses, frozen veggies, and more. New businesses continue to form and utilize the shared commercial kitchen with a 3 new users joining in during spring 2016 for a total of 10 fledging food businesses supported.



Figure 5 - Hub on the hill sign. Image credit: Josh Bakelaar

Bike the Barns (ANCA) Bike the Barns is a fully supported recreational road cycling tour supporting the rich agricultural movement of the North Country. This one-day Champlain Valley farm-by-bike experience will feature farm tour stops staged along the route where you can personally connect with the local food revolution. The agritourism experience culminates with a finish line local food celebration complete with a meal, beverages and music. Registration includes support on the route, an event t-shirt, food, drink and entertainment. All proceeds will support local farms and a portion of every rider's event fee will go directly into the [FarmShare fund](#).

Champlain Area Trail System (CATS) CATS continues to work with area landowners to develop easements and expand its extensive system inviting residents and visitors to “Hike the Lake”. CATS hosts a variety of events in the region including summer hikes, seeing in place; listening in place, and forest sustainability walks.

Cuisine Trail Applications for two cuisine trails with terminal ends joining in Keeseville were submitted to the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets. The trails will include a variety of food and visitor related businesses with signage and maps to help find our tasty places to visit.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Action Plan Details
- Appendix B –Workshop Asset Maps
- Appendix C – Community Profile Data
- Appendix D – Workshop Participants
- Appendix E – Funding Resources
- Appendix F – References
- Appendix G – Workshop Photo Album
- Appendix H – Presentation Slides