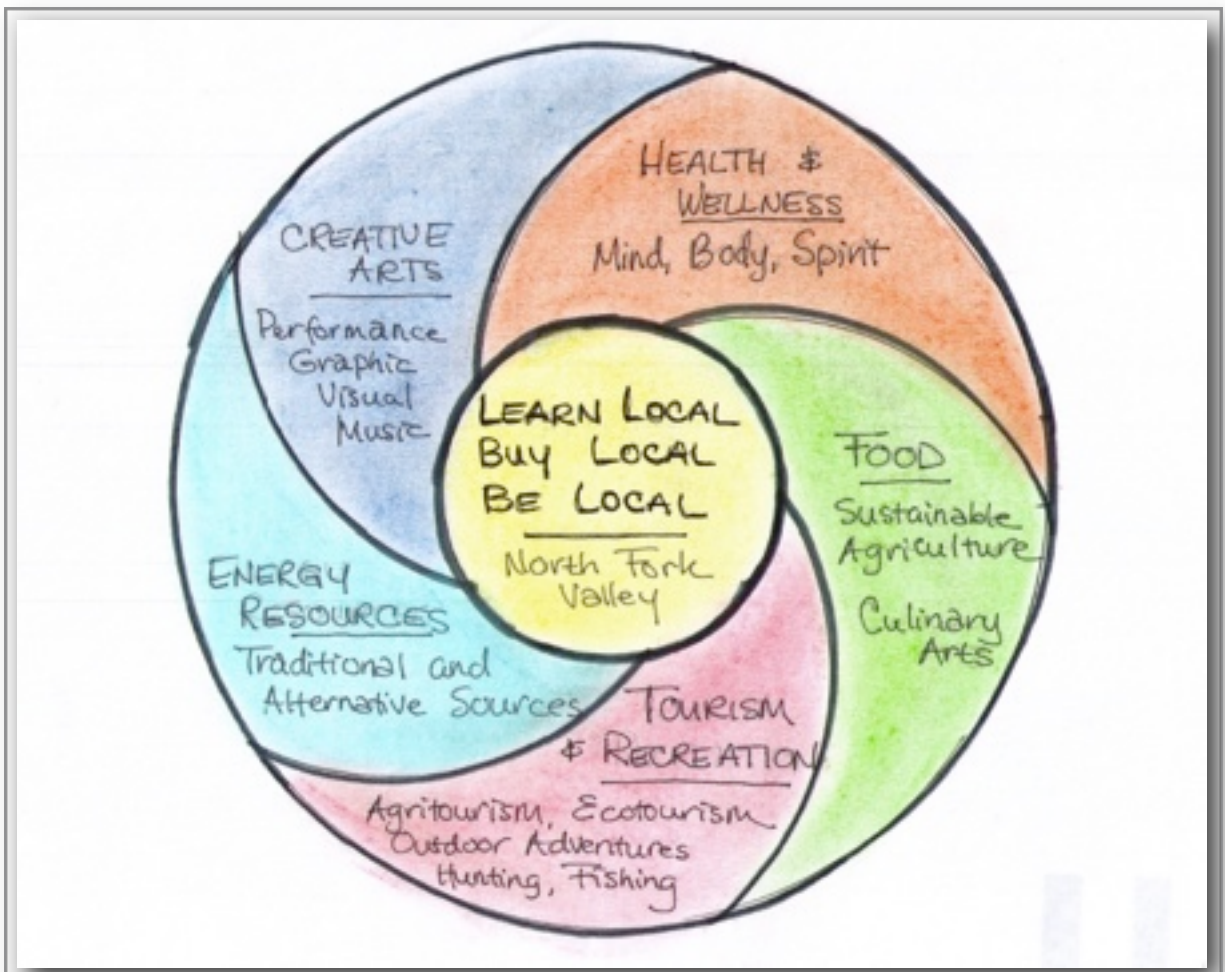


NORTH FORK VALLEY VISION 2020



WHAT'S YOUR VISION?

In April at the North Fork Chambers Business Symposium we began some conversations about how members of our community envision the future of the North Fork Valley. Since that time, there are been more informal conversations and a “buzz” in some circles. People are describing what they would like to see and what it will take to get there.

Everyone that I have heard from has a true interest and caring about the people, the land and, the quality of life in this community that we call our home. People seem to understand that, no matter what our personal belief system is, we can make a difference today and the choices we make now will affect our future and our childrens’ future.

To encourage more conversation about how we can grow a healthy and prosperous future for the North Fork Valley and its community, we would like you to take a look at the picture below. Graphic Facilitator, Anne Nelson from Paonia, has tried to capture what is important – what really matters - to our community. It is no surprise that there is not one thing that moves this community forward. Rather it is a tapestry of diverse interests that if intentionally strengthened, developed and woven together will create a vibrant future local economy and local culture.

Two BIG Things stood out from the initial conversations: **We are a Learning Valley (*Learn Local*)** and **We Need to Support our Local Economy (*Buy Local*)**.

Areas and interests that you said can grow and develop on our roadmap to the future include

- **Food:** Sustainable Agriculture & Culinary Arts
- **Energy Resources:** Traditional and Alternative Sources
- **Creative Arts:** Visual, Graphic, Performance ...
- **Health & Wellness:** Mind, Body & Spirit
- **Tourism & Recreation:** Agritourism, Ecotourism, Outdoor adventures, Hunting, Fishing ...

No one person or no one committee will lead us. Individually and collectively this community has the wisdom and the passion to explore the possibilities for a positive future. Together we will “fill in the blanks” and to agree or disagree on the right course. What is important to you? How can you play a leading role in our journey to 2020? What things (ideas and resources) are needed to get us there?



Beginnings ...

“Old assumptions blind communities to new opportunities”

Michael J. Kinsley

Over the course of the last 5 years there have been numerous conversations about the fate of the community(ies) of the North Fork Valley. “Newcomers” have come with new expectations and ideas. “Oldtimers” reflect the history and indigenous culture of the area. We are an intriguing mix of socio-economics, not a melting pot, but a salad bowl of beliefs, philosophies, and lifestyles. At the core, the value of “rugged individualism” is a strong.

Many live in this valley to express their individualism. We are creative, self sufficient people whether we are farmers, ranchers, artists, business people or nonprofit volunteers. We don’t want to be told how to live or what to do - by our neighbors or our governments. And yet, we are a community that takes care of itself and others.

The Valley is rich with nonprofit organizations who work for people, animals & the land. Churches and neighborhoods will come together to help a troubled family or individual. We would prefer to add a few dollars to a donation jar than a few mils to a tax bill to provide for our social needs.

We are a lot of things, and we are changing every day as the world changes around us.

It is time to reassess who we are as a community, what we value most and what we want to be in the future. If we choose to ignore the changes around us we will allow external circumstances to decide our future. If we can vision what we want our future to be, we can make decisions and choices today that will get us to that future destination. We have the opportunity to create the future that we desire by the actions that we take today.

With these things in mind, a small group set out to initiate a series of conversations to engage the people of the North Fork Valley to begin planning our roadmap. The initial process was a small yet diverse sampling.

The process...

1. Conversations with over 100 people took place in 4 facilitated meetings. Participants included representation from many parts of the community including business owners, government officials, farmers, miners, retirees, artists, and nonprofit staff. Information was recorded by a graphic facilitator and data was collated and analyzed for recurring themes.
2. A Facebook discussion board was opened and the question “What will the North Fork Valley be like in 2020?” was posted. Themes were noted.
3. Numerous one-on-one dialogs were conducted with members of the community. Areas of interest and desired future outcomes were noted.

The following page shows examples of the Graphic recordings of some of the meetings.





Summary of Conclusions:

“If our development strategies aren’t sustainable, they will be terminal.”

Michael J. Kinsley

After collating the comments, several overarching themes were noted:

- **The importance of supporting local businesses, including local farms;**
- **The propensity of the North Fork Valley to be a center of learning.**

In addition, five interconnected fields were identified as distinct “industries” that currently exist in the North Fork Valley community and that are desirable to develop as economic and social drivers.

- Food and Sustainable Agriculture
- Energy Resources
- Creative Arts
- Recreation and Tourism
- Health and Wellness



Requirements to move forward include

- Necessary Resources
- Community involvement
- Commitment
- Collaboration

Possibilities...

Potential Projects to initiate or continue:

We suggest that the Five Fields are critical to the long-term sustainability of the North Fork Valley. In a small community, the dependence on a single industry is high risk. (Examples: The demise of mill towns in New England, the struggle of blue collar manufacturing cities of the Midwest, etc.). Ensuring that each of the Five Fields is encouraged, supported and challenged will help them to grow and become a solid base for economic and social development. For-profit businesses, local governments, nonprofits and individuals who align with one or more of the Five Fields will find success. As we grow the economy in these Five Fields, we build a strong economic and social network.

The following list provides some examples of projects that could enhance our lives and create the sustainable thriving community that many desire. It is not about changing what we have, rather it is about using the assets that we have to develop a vibrant, thriving community that is prosperous without excessive growth.

We realize that these projects cannot and will not all be accomplished at once. A phased, strategic, well-coordinated plan for implementation is needed to make this work.

• Food and Sustainable Agriculture.

The agricultural history of the valley and current trends in culinary arts set the platform for food production and preparation to be primary assets. The land is ideal for organic and naturally grown fruits and vegetables. Open ranch lands provide grazing for grass fed beef, buffalo and game. These fresh and value-added products are in demand and the market is constantly growing. Projects that encourage and instruct young farmers to be the next generation of producers will contribute the economic base. Here are a few examples of potential projects:

➔ There are two major hurdles to establishing small farms - cost of land and start up costs. A **community micro-loan program** is needed that assists farmers in getting started with facilities, equipment, seed, and other necessary implements could jump-start productive, quality farms, ranches, orchards and vineyards.

➔ Processing small commercial batches of value-added products in certified commercial kitchens extends the season for farmers and allows them to use less than perfect looking fruits and vegetables. A **fully equipped collaborative community kitchen and storage facility** would provide the necessary structure to create artisan-crafted food products that could be sold in retail stores or on the internet.

➔ **An agricultural and culinary learning center** could be the training ground for future farmers and home gardeners. Small scale efforts are already in place such as the S.O.U.L Cooking classes at Fresh & Wyld Farmhouse and Inn and the school at The Living Farm in Paonia.

➔ **Projects that emphasize locally grown foods in institutional settings** (schools, senior centers, medical facilities) will support local agriculture and the local economy while providing healthier, nutritious meals to critical segments of the community.

- ***Energy Resources***

The North Fork Valley has a strong tradition in mining, in particular coal mining. In addition, alternative resources - sun, wind and water - are abundant.

➔ Supporting a project that promotes and produces **alternative energy solutions** would provide new jobs and be a natural outgrowth of the efforts of Solar Energy International. The building on Matthews Lane near Paonia that formerly housed Chaco, could house an **energy incubator and/or manufacturing facility**.

➔ At the current time, coal mining is an integral part of the valley's economy. However, the predicted lifespan of the mines is relatively short. We must be prepared for the day when the mines will be closed. **Training opportunities** aimed at keeping folks in the community and diversifying their technical skills and knowledge will provide sustainable employment.

➔ **Emphasizing science and technology programs in our schools** will provide our youth with 21st century skills that will ensure good jobs and future success.

- ***Creative Arts***

The beautiful environment and magnificent surroundings provide an inspiring backdrop for artists, musicians and writers. The North Fork Valley has the potential to be a haven for the art community and to attract visitors to enjoy the talent that we attract. It has been demonstrated that creative arts are an economic driver for a small community

- ➔ **Projects that support creative thinking for young people** encourage imagination and innovation. Classes in visual arts and performance arts will benefit young people now and in the future.

- ➔ **The renovation and maintenance of historic facilities** (including The Paradise Theater, The Blue Sage, Crawford Town Hall, The Creamery Arts Center, Hotchkiss Memorial Hall, Delta County Fairgrounds) can provide community gathering places for classrooms, exhibitions and performances. Regular promotion of events will result in a steady stream of visitors who not only enjoy but also contribute to the local economy

- ***Recreation and Tourism***

The abundance of natural resources in and around the North Fork Valley offer many opportunities for residents and visitors. In addition, farms, wineries and arts venues offer interesting destinations for travelers.

- ➔ **Projects creating a network of biking and walking trails** along the river, connecting the towns and leading to farms and wineries would offer local residents and visitors transportation alternatives.

- ➔ **Outdoor educational and adventure programs** for children and adults would attract visitors and showcase the history and the beauty of the land and the river.

- ➔ **Marketing and promotion of area attractions** that bring visitors to the valley would support local business and impact the local economy in a positive way,

- ***Health and Wellness***

There are tremendous resources in the community for traditional and nontraditional healing and wellness practices. The community conversations indicated a desire to be **“The Healthiest County in the Nation.”**

- ➔ Additional **Recreational facilities** would support a healthy population of all ages.

- ➔ A program to **document and promote health and wellness** in the community could keep us on track and create a sense of pride in the “North Fork Lifestyle.”

➔ **Healthy living classes and seminars** using local practitioners would be a benefit to residents and would attract visitors who come to “recharge & enjoy” the North Fork Valley.

General Needs

In order to attract visitors, tourists and businesses, the valley needs reasonable **lodging alternatives**. The current number of rooms and camp sites limits the capacity for visitors who plan multi-day stays. Therefore, limiting attendance at events and educational programs.

➔ **A collaborative Marketing center** that supports small businesses, farms and nonprofit organizations is needed to promote the projects and programs now and in the future. Developing a “North Fork” brand identity would increase demand for products originating from the valley.

➔ **Beautification programs that enhance the entrances to the towns of the North Fork Valley** will create an inviting feeling for visitors and tourists.

➔ **A communications network** needs to be developed so that information about the community is available in a reasonable timeframe. Resources, things to do, a calendar of events should be readily accessible to all.

➔ **Create a North Fork Valley inventory of old infrastructure** and implement a plan for upgrading roads, water delivery systems, utilities and community services to identify and prioritize current and future needs.