

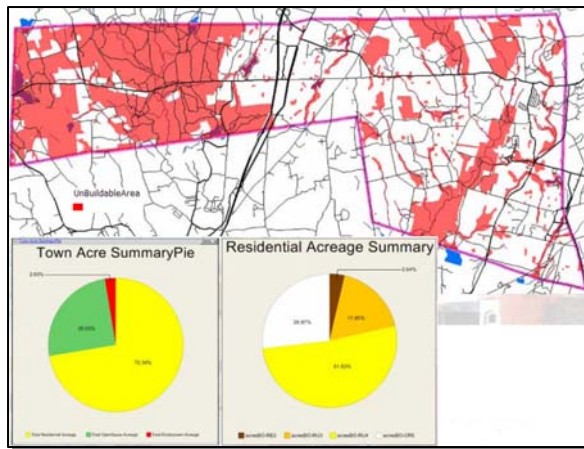
## Visions & Values in the Rural “Borderlands”

Developing a game plan for the future

**Location:** Exeter, Rhode Island

**Partners:** Town of Exeter; Dodson Associates; Foresee Consulting, Inc.; Consensus Building Institute; the Orton Family Foundation; The Nature Conservancy; and others

**Context:** The “Borderlands” is a 20-town patch of mostly undeveloped lands along the Connecticut-Rhode Island border. The “Borderlands Village Innovation Pilot” is working with two pilot communities in the area as each seeks to discover their “heart and soul” attributes and to build a shared vision for their community’s future. The Town of Exeter, Rhode Island, one of the pilot communities, has recently completed the visioning phase of its project, called “Developing a Game Plan for Our Future.” Phase 2 will research recommendations from the visioning and Phase 3 will develop implementation strategies.



Overseen by a local Pilot Team made up of town staff, residents and business owners, Exeter engaged a consulting team of Dodson Associates, the Consensus Building Institute, and Foresee Consulting to lead the project. The project is staffed by a project coordinator, and the Nature Conservancy and the Orton Family Foundation have provided further assistance.

**Project Description:** A robust public engagement process included interviews with stakeholder groups, a citizen web survey to solicit input about Exeter’s heart and soul characteristics, and ideas for improving the Town. In a first public visioning workshop, participants used keypads to prioritize local heart and soul resources and to respond to a visual preference survey. Small group discussions focused on local issues and opportunities.

In preparation for a second public workshop, Foresee Consulting used CommunityViz® to create a build-out analysis for the Town, showing the likely amount and pattern of development under current zoning and development practices, and illustrating likely impacts of the build-out on Exeter’s rural landscape. In order to help visualize the spatial extent and density of the build-out, Foresee used CommunityViz SiteBuilder 3D to show a portion of Exeter with existing and potential new development overlaid on aerial photos.

At the second workshop, participants played the “Growth Challenge Game,” or “Chip Game” by placing chips representing new development on a game board showing a map of Exeter illustrating a variety of planning factors, including identified heart and soul resources. Working in five teams, participants wrestled with issues about where to place future development. This resulted in five distinct alternatives for future growth, each of which improved upon the build-out scenario with respect to potential impacts of development on important the natural and cultural resources. Workshop

*“CommunityViz showed us what build-out really looks like and what the impacts would be. It is one thing to say that a certain number of homes are likely, it is quite another to show it. It makes concepts easier to explain.”*

– Scott Millar, Chairman of the Exeter Pilot Team



*“CommunityViz allowed our local team to get quick results back from our consultants (Foresee) and see how their work impacted the various resources they cared about.”*

– Kevin Essington,  
The Nature Conservancy

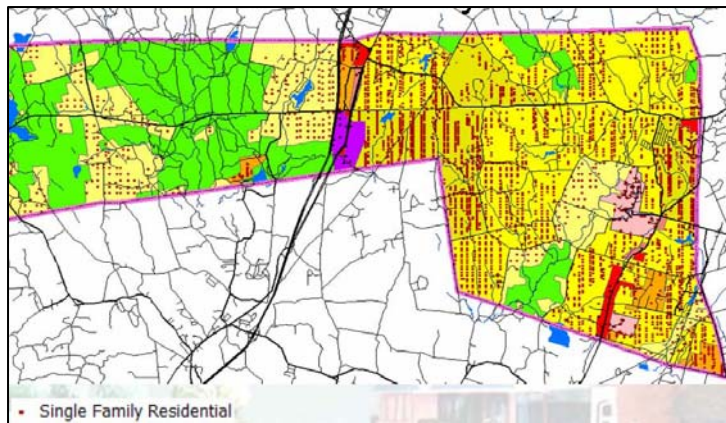
participants also completed a survey to gauge local values for two factors in land-use decision making—landscape sensitivity and growth efficiency. Participants ranked protection of ground water and conservation lands as most important in analyzing sensitivity, and they gave the highest efficiency rating to lands close to existing paved roads and public services.

Following the second workshop, Foresee Consulting used CommunityViz to analyze and compare the impacts of the five chip game alternatives against those under the build-out scenario. A final composite map showed areas most suitable for jobs and housing based on the results and values survey.

Not content to move forward with “business as usual,” most participants showed support for clustering new growth into 6 or 7 villages or mixed-use centers, setting the stage for more detailed Phase 2 discussions about location and extent of targeted growth areas.

**Technology and Tools:** CommunityViz, including Build-Out, Growth Allocation, and Impact Analysis tools and SiteBuilder 3D™; Model Builder. Public engagement tools included focus group interviews, resource allocation surveys, a project website, a web survey, workshops, Heart and Soul mapping, visual preference survey, Growth Challenge Game (Chip Game), and keypad polling.

**Outcomes:** Phase 1 of Exeter’s “Game Plan” project resulted in a definition of shared values and concerns, and it began to develop a consensus about a shared vision for the future. The Exeter Pilot Team adopted a recommendation that the Town Council and Planning Board integrate the findings of Phase 1 into the Town’s planning process. Subsequently, the Town Council endorsed the vision and the incorporation of the vision into the Town’s Comprehensive Plan under development at the time. A Phase 2 work plan is in preparation to refine the broad concepts adopted in Phase 1. Phase 3 will develop strategies for implementation.



#### KEY LINKS

- CommunityViz  
<http://www.communityviz.com>
- Town of Exeter  
<http://www.town.exeter.ri.us>
- Dodson Associates, Ltd.  
<http://www.dodsonassociates.com>
- Foresee Consulting, Inc.  
<http://www.foreseeconsulting.biz>
- Consensus Building Institute  
<http://cbuilding.org>
- The Orton Family Foundation  
<http://www.orton.org>
- The Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island  
<http://www.nature.org/rhodeisland>
- Borderlands Project  
<http://www.borderlands.org>