

Youth Liaison Community Interviews

“Visions for the future of our Hilltowns”

April 2025

As part of the Ashfield Rural Climate Resilience and Living Culture MVP Project, twelve middle and high school students from the Mohawk Trail Regional School interviewed members of the community on topics related to creating a more resilient town and region. Each student interviewed six community members – three school peers and three family members or neighbors. These were the interview responses.

What kind of vision of Ashfield / the Hilltowns do you have that would make you want to keep living here or come back to live here after school?

- *I think that we need more public transport, because it's often a struggle for anyone to get anywhere, due to the lack of public transport. The only bus in my town goes to Greenfield, so if you need to go anywhere else, you need to have a car or a bike, so if you can't afford a car, you're kinda stuck! you can't go anywhere.*
- *I think if my family lived here, that would want to make me live here more.*
- *I love the landscape around here*
- *I love the location of Ashfield, but one thing I would like to see is more stores and shops, to make access to stuff like food quicker to get.*
- *I think that the town would be better if there was a little more housing, and we need to make sure to keep all of our small businesses so we can get to know the people who run them, and funding education better, and being prepared for climate change.*
- *I love the beauty of Ashfield. I also like all of the small farms.*
- *I think Ashfield should try to maintain its quiet, rural atmosphere without pushing too much development. Many people are attracted to the beautiful, rural environment, and maintaining that as much as possible would help preserve the major attraction factor. Some development is fine, but let's seek a balance.*
- *Keeping schools / local businesses open.*
- *I like it here because there are nice people, I like to chill outside for a bit.*

- *I love the stores and plants and land*
- *Friendly and loving community. Peace and quiet. Not too expensive. People working together in town*
- *See tight community*
- *Preservation of wildlife. Supporting farmers. Strong community.*
- *A cleaner environment*
- *More people expanding the town. More stuff.*
- *More job opportunities*
- *Small community, very active communities*
- *Rural area that also has vibrant culture of the arts and farmland*
- *Affordable housing. Sustainable food systems. Diversified farming.*
- *Sort of the way it is now – we have a very aging population, so it would be nice to have some help with the changeover*
- *Resilience. Interdependence. Community*
- *Strong sense of community. Natural landscape and the care put towards it. Very ‘human’ scale of community*
- *Lots of nature (hiking places like high ledges). Opportunities for same-interested communities (e.g. yoga, art events, live music, etc.)*
- *Clean. People here are generally nice. A lot of untouched land. “All my family’s here.”*
- *Thriving community that supports local and independent businesses and organizations that attract a diverse population. Better functioning school district that addresses the needs of local children and families.*
- *More job opportunities = more people and bigger schools*
- *More public transportation and a nightlife/ things to do and ways to get there*
- *Hopes there is enough funding and grants to farms. Keep core of our libraries funding and community events.*
- *Keep it rural. Don’t destroy land for technology.*
- *More affordable housing. More activities and people.*
- *More available resources close by – medical care, grocery store, affordable housing*
- *More communal areas. “Stuff to do” ex: → sidewalks to walk with people on → A library exists but that is pretty much it → Colrain is a “barren wasteland of roads”*
- *There needs to be more places to go – more restaurants, more stores*
- *No additional development; protect/ maintain natural history rural beauty. → no stores/ gas stations. → not city like*

- *More grocery stores: more urbanization. → more options: restaurants, general stores, gas stations. → provide more of a reason for people to come to the Hilltowns. → more people coming in results in more money to invest into the towns*
- *Keep it rural*
- *The town already provides: a friendly environment, spaced out houses that have backyards and are surrounded by woodlands. Needs more responsibility from the town for damaged property, more/ better road signs in more locations to improve safety*
- *Preserved woodlands/ wooded areas, more things to do (recreational areas for kids and teens, events, sidewalks, recreation areas with in walking distance). Some small town areas as well as some more suburban areas → allows the quaint benefits of a small town, as well as provides recreation. A variety of careers that are close to home*
- *Forests being maintained*
- *Bike paths/ lane*
- *Trees surrounding*
- *Strong community access to good quality food*
- *Some sort of ride sharing arrangement so we all don't have to drive to the valley. Especially for older residents. Clustering development for a walkable village.*
- *Staying relatively the same. Not becoming a bedroom community.*
- *It's a small close community (she likes this about it already). Being closer to stores (she wants this as an improvement).*
- *More food stores around because there is a limited amount of them right now. Coffee shop. (she likes there being one.)*
- *Political demographic – she would like it to be more even in order for more things to get passed. Opening up more stores because there are not many stores for food or other things around here.*
- *Protecting natural beauty of Ashfield like farmland, forest, open spaces, lake. Maintaining community spirit (people knowing and helping each other out). Continuing love and support for the arts (like DET, film fest, musicians, and artists).*
- *She hopes that Ashfield stays similar to how it is now (A lot of open land, clean water, close knit community.*
- *Improve the cell service (it is not the best right now). Have more things to do/ stores*
- *Needs a wendy's*
- *Stores and restaurants*
- *Keeping local stores/ businesses open.*
- *World peace*

- *It's in the country*
- *Keep schools open. Keep local businesses open.*
- *If there were more stores and a bank*
- *Better roads*
- *Retain as a farming town. Stay small. Promote local shopping and goods.*
- *Preserve small town character. Multi-use facilities.*
- *Child care and after school support. Easier access to groceries.*
- *Safe and small farming town.*
- *More events to enjoy. More hangout places. Supportive nice community.*
- *Need improvement to fire department. Now there are less volunteers, too far from communities. Positive communities, community events. Free public transport. Announce public meetings*
- *Interest young families to live here. More young people living here*
- *He wants to make sure we continue to preserve open land and have more cultural events.*
- *Community events. More money to improve fire department. Positive/ supportive community.*
- *Increase in affordable housing, hard to get a house here, so families can live here. Increase in mental healthcare resources.*
- *More public transport, more activities to do with friends, more food diversity, more diversity, less racism*
- *Keeping up with making sure to preserve nature and wildlife.*
- *More job opportunities and recreational activities.*
- *She envisions the beautiful trees and wildlife and says that those would be very important to preserve as she would like to stay here after school*
- *Wilderness. I value privacy*
- *Peaceful, not busy, quiet*

What do you think we can do in our communities to help make our town(s) resilient to the climate/extreme weather events like storms, droughts, and floods we have seen?

- *We could have community shelters, which i know that shelbourne and buckland don't have many, so i think if we were to have community shelters in our towns, as well as free resources or people who have been affected by weather events, so if, for example, someone's house was flooded, they could go to a shelter and get food, as well as a place to sleep for the night.*

- *I think that we need to build more sewers and storm drains to soak up the water from storms. As for floods, I think that we need to build floodwalls to stop the floods from reaching farms or houses.*
- *I think that our towns could evenly distribute resources, because some smaller towns might not have enough tax money to build stuff like dams, which could affect communities downstream.*
- *I think that we could (A. we could improve on and build more culverts, and (B. build more dams near the edge of flood zones to stop flash floods and stuff.*
- *I think that we need to be aware of the condition of our roads and our culverts, so that the roads will remain passable. As for droughts, I think we should teach people how to conserve water on their property.*
- *Because of the way the roads were made in western Massachusetts, the rivers are forced into very narrow waterways, which makes it easy for them to overflow. This means that we need to probably redesign the roads and other infrastructure to account for climate change.*
- *I think the town should continuing its work to deal with the dam/lake/storm water system. Support the highway department to maintain roads, and possible provide financial support to residents for small projects that might fit into this category. Things like grants/discounts on materials for roads/driveways. I know the town is pursuing some municipal solar and this sounds like a mostly good plan with some reservations about what future power line installation might look like.*
- *Being prepared*
- *Maybe we could alert other people that they need to be prepared.*
- *The store and the whole book*
- *Help each other through the tough times. Help people that are in need but we also need help and a number to call when there is a problem and who to go to and money to help with damage*
- *Easier access to resources*
- *Community collaboration, sharing knowledge.*
- *Restore flood plains*
- *Updated building codes. Sustainable resources. Make sure buildings can be resilient to floods*
- *Restore flood plains*
- *Connect the communities through the internet*
- *Restore wetlands. Preserve flood plains.*
- *Infrastructure improvements – roads, electrical, drainage, fixing bridges.*
- *Loss of trade. Kids who stay here means we don't have enough "person power to do jobs like plowing etc." "have to be willing to move things around."*

- *Invest in public infrastructure. Reevaluate the flood plain. Commission a study for wildfire risk.*
- *Localize our energy sources (especially solar). Prioritize sustainability at the Town level. Solarizing rural towns*
- *More advancements of the programs we already have like snow plows, sustainable energy, etc.*
- *Update our infrastructure. Could try to get new stuff but updates would work. Solar panels*
- *Preparedness. Making sure our infrastructure is secure and that we have an effective emergency response system in place.*
- *Update building codes to make sure everything sustainable. Solar power*
- *Better road crews and maintenance. More car pooling.*
- *Funding for those times like no interest loans and grants. Helping people with food stamps buy local farm products. Disaster relief money for roads, Govs. Shutting down FEMA?*
- *Trying to develop town resources like police, and firefighters making people know we need this people.*
- *Town meetings about possible events to prepare.*
- *Working together as a community. Help fight against pollution*
- *Preparation*
- *Previously pipes have been placed under the roads to help with flooding – no additional examples or suggestions/ ideas*
- *Pre-planning for emergencies → include emergency services and local committees and select boards not just the fire or police department, but all of the above planning together*
- *More volunteerism: public safety complex → boosts community →manned facility/ safe location in case of power outages and other emergencies*
- *Solar panels. →cleaner energy to fight against climate change. Side note: teslas have debatable environmental benefits*
- *Work to repair and reinforce structures such as bridges. Solar panels could be useful assets*
- *More education about weather/ climate events. Affordable appliances like generators for power outages*
- *Planting more trees*
- *Reinforce dam. Software that can predict extreme weather*
- *Fewer fossil fuels being burned*
- *Look at ways to make sure we are taking care of our water, vegetation, and soil*

- *Types of things like software that can predict extreme weather and helping to fix roads to stay properly safe and together. Planting more trees.*
- *Ensure the stuff that helps us like tree growth. Don't cut down forests.*
- *Making sure people have resources prepared before a storm so that they are able to be safe in the event of an extreme weather event.*
- *Better road maintenance (salting, paving, etc) because this will help lower accidents in extreme weather situations.*
- *Having more food prepared in case of extreme weather events/ food security as a community*
- *Be as self sufficient as possible (grow local food, solar energy with battery storage). Support local businesses. Managing the Ashfield dam in a thoughtful way (letting water out before storm).*
- *Investing in renewable energy (solar panels) and off grid houses that are not reliant on power grid during outages. Any new housing needs to be built to be prepared for severe weather. Houses in flood zones need to be updated and drainage systems improved.*
- *Clear out guggers more often so they don't get flooded during heavy rain. Have more generators in order to be prepared for any storms that might happen.*
- *Pave roads better*
- *Create more things to help the climate*
- *To be prepared*
- *Make it not liberal*
- *Be more prepared*
- *More water towers for droughts*
- *Technology to warn us of bad weather like storms and floods, also more barriers next to river to prevent flooding*
- *Barriere at the rivers*
- *A warning system or technology to warn us of big storms before they come (storms that can cause damage). Promote native plants.*
- *Increase local food protection and CSAs. Promote wild and natural landscapes. Foster community preparedness. Tree planting.*
- *Community Solar. Liberty and gardens and food banks. Wildfire preparedness.*
- *Don't waste water. Preparedness checklist. Get to know each other parties.*
- *Having safe areas that people can meet up in case of bad flooding or storms. Also researching to be prepared.*
- *Plant trees to help with flooding. More wells to help with droughts.*
- *Educate the public about climate change. Take better care of wild areas.*

- *We could make sure water has a place to go in case of flooding, prevent flood damage, and research into storm abatement.*
- *For flooding we can prepare by draining water from lake in preparation for flooding. Community could buy supplies to help for flooding and support community in case their things are damaged.*
- *Maintaining forests, forestry. Making buildings flood resistant. Offering help for people affected by floods.*
- *Making adaptable infrastructure, lowering heating and air conditioning prices. Escape plans that are acceptable, community safe place, easy and cheap food access.*
- *Enforcing more use of recycling.*
- *More advocacy for sustainability and encouragement of eco-friendly activities*
- *Make better dams, use less vehicles*
- *Education. There are many steps to make our towns more resilient to all of these subjects but education is the first step. Many people (young and old) do not realize the impacts that these topics can have directly on the community.*
- *Build safety bunkers*

What would you do in your local town government towards balancing the need for farm land and the need for affordable housing? What ideas come to mind?

- *I think that we should start selling a lot of older homes that have been on the market for a long time for a much cheaper price. This would help the housing crisis, while also making it easier for families to farm, because they will have more money due to the cheaper homes.*
- *I think that we could renovate abandoned houses, to sell them cheap to farmers who need money for farm equipment.*
- *I think they can look at what is unnecessary and is taking up tax money that could be used to lower the cost of houses around here. I also think that the town could fix up the old broken buildings in our towns and sell them for cheap.*
- *I feel like there's a lot of unused land in Ashfield that the town could use to make houses that they could rent out to get more money for other stuff.*
- *We should help older people renovate their houses, and if there are large houses for sale, we could convert those into apartments to rent out.*
- *I think if we had more subsidized housing and tiny homes in Ashfield, people would have a bigger budget to buy farmland and farming equipment.*
- *I would try to prioritize maintaining as much agricultural land as possible. I don't have an understanding of how many new farms are trying to start but can't or*

people trying to get in to the existing affordable housing in Ashfield, but unable to, so it's hard to really figure what the best balance is. I think part of the attraction of a rural town like Ashfield is that there isn't a lot of development, so that is a quality to try to preserve.

- *More funding*
- *Farms in flat areas. Apartments in Town areas*
- *To make like taxes lower*
- *I think we need to prioritize affordable housing because it is so expensive to live and provide food for the family. Sometimes due to the increase in our economy. Not sure what we can do. I think we need to stop using people's gross income because that's not the money we take home*
- *I feel that affordable housing takes priority so people can live easier in this area*
- *Allocating money for both*
- *Don't put housing on good farmland*
- *More houses. Not more farmland*
- *More apartments*
- *We need more senior/ disabled housing and help. Senior services to make it possible to stay living there*
- *Making sure some area is zoned for multi family housing*
- *Don't put housing on prime farmland. Change zoning laws to encourage multi unit homes*
- *Put all the houses next to each other with a shared open space (zoning laws). Too limited in affordable housing, just the Ashfield House. How do we build more houses but keep "small town" culture*
- *Invest in mixed-income zoning. (Arrange low income housing near high income housing with zoning laws)*
- *Preserving farmland on the one hand, but on the other hand rethinking zoning to allow for more population density in some areas.*
- *More affordable apartment style housing/ multi-family living spaces. More short-term lease options.*
- *Stop pricing houses so high. Adding more shared housing. Compensate farmers in return for building on their land.*
- *Start allocating local preserved land rather than farm land for site-specific and ecologically responsible housing opportunities for young families and elders alike.*
- *Schools if combined used as apartments. Preserve the farmland and use unused space for housing it would be better.*
- *Stop buying houses and making them airbnbs. More support for farmers in climate change*

- *Definitely need more affordable housing. Maybe restrictions on selling and buying homes as rentals*
- *Reserving spots for farm land and houses evenly*
- *Bigger population – more people to tax.*
- *Funding cleanup projects. Use deforested areas wisely → for housing/ farming/ anything; → anything other than leaving it barren*
- *Majority of Colrain is already farmland → farms cannot be gotten rid of due to logistical challenges – you can't just take the land they [others] own*
- *Evenly distribute land → people who buy houses will also receive farmland for subsistence farming*
- *Farms offering affordable housing for the workers. Similar to the one in the center of plainfield. Gains labor for the farms by bringing in workers at the opportunity of affordable housing.*
- *Courtyard for gardening/ greenhouse → offsets space → greenhouses are good for seasonal changes → provides access to healthy groceries/ food → less money put towards food is more money put towards housing*
- *Farmland is the priority → increased population decreases the safety benefits of a small town → small towns create an environment where everyone knows and trusts everyone well*
- *Split/ divide the land → a house would come with good farmland. → good farmland would come with some level of housing. Side note: housing is waaaaaay too expensive due to recent political events*
- *Encourage subsistence farming – hand some of the farming over to the average townfolk. Implement community gardens. → Also places some of the farming back in the hands of the average townfolk. → could also be in the form of children's programs to teach children valuable lessons about this topic*
- *Prioritize farming*
- *More farmland to absorb rain.*
- *Not really a problem.*
- *Building in places that already have houses. Making population more dense around towns.*
- *Put more affordable housing in the villages and hope to keep the farmers farming planting trees and farm crops.*
- *Doesn't think that any of that is an issue. Only issue is the cost of building a house.*
- *Taking down abandoned buildings that were already there and making them affordable to protect other land (so that no farm land has to be built on and harmed).*

- *Communicate with the town government how it needs to be done to benefit the community (have better communication between the people and town government).*
- *Keep farms that we have right now and support them so they can stay open. We can build houses where there are not already farms.*
- *Housing where each house doesn't have as many acres for their yard in order to preserve more farmland. Promote more accessory dwelling units (barns renovated into houses, tiny houses..)*
- *Build houses that are energy efficient. Maximize the land we have (cluster housing, tiny homes) to house more than 1 family. Build homes on land where farming is not ideal.*
- *Make lower cost houses that are small such as tiny houses so that they can be more affordable and don't take up much space on farmland*
- *I don't know.*
- *Lower prices*
- *Better funding.*
- *Lower real estate*
- *More funding*
- *More houses/ rental houses. Cheaper housing*
- *Make more land for farms and houses and more housing little more affordable*
- *Give more money to helping farm land*
- *Provide land grants for affordable housing*
- *Reduce agriculture tax. Promote incentives for local business.*
- *Allow people to live and work on farms.*
- *Provide support for new farmers. Build community housing. Protect existing farmers from having to sell.*
- *Town government polling people about their need for housing and need for farm land.*
- *Go to meetings to help with deciding budget. Expanding budget.*
- *Build more houses in town centers. More funding for affordable housing.*
- *We could reconsider zoning requirements to allow for affordable housing and enforce APR rules to encourage farming.*
- *Community meeting to decide budget on farm land and housing. Spend money on more relevant things, decide which is most important.*
- *Build up, not out, higher houses to protect and keep farmland.*
- *Put focus on farmland for locals, pay farmers. Affordable for the public. Put locally sourced crops in grocery stores like big y. Stop landlords from buying all the property and upping the living cost. More shelters.*

- Lowering costs of housing and increasing opportunities for financial help
- Encourage building up instead of out to preserve more land for farming and wildlife
- Help people who can't afford housing
- Maintain a balance it can't be all or nothing situation. We NEED wilderness, farmland and protected areas just as much as we need affordable housing. We as a community and a society cannot survive if we only focus on one or the other.
- Split the cost

What else would you like to see help the future of your town?

- I would like to see more funding go towards educating rural students.
- I don't know.
- I think we should get more snowplows, that way people don't need to use studded tires that mess up our roads.
- I'm not sure.
- I like the trails around here, and I think those need to be removed, and i think that we have some cultural things and community building things, but we need more of them.
- I hope that all of our towns continue to keep all of the schools open, because i think that our small town schools are a great asset.
- I think getting more support to people filling out the somewhat complicated Chapter 61 applications would be helpful to reduce tax burdens on open spaces. I think to whatever extent the town is able to take on some of the burden of the cost of fiber/internet bills. Finally I think the future moves of the school district will have a huge impact on the town. Moving kids out of the local community elementary school will have a huge impact on the town (though there of course could be many benefits). But I think the tax burden is high, the return has its tradeoffs, but moving to a model where the school isn't even in the town will make it seem like people are getting less for the same or more cost.
- Keeping stores open longer
- Less trash around. Pay people to pick it up. Show people animals that live near them.
- The whole world
- We need help to set affordable solar and resources to have a better living for my family due to the increase of our economy
- More understanding of differences
- Increased funding for rural schools

- *Affordable housing*
- *Things to do, a Target, a Dunkin, a McDonalds*
- *More art!*
- *More senior services!*
- *Affordable housing so young families can move here*
- *Jobs and industry*
- *Town board members need to be paid a stipend because almost all of our members are volunteers which most people don't have the time/ money to be doing that.*
- *Eliminate school choice and federalize public education – that would help every town in America*
- *To make housing more affordable “is the big picture”. Accessory dwelling units. Teach climate stuff in public school. Being more careful about short-term rentals. Energy sustainability. Prioritize public schools.*
- *An aquarium (tourist attraction). Trampoline park. More to do in the area.*
- *Some towns like Colrain need better funding. Take better care of roads/ pave them. Less pollution in rivers.*
- *Continue to modernize and bring in essential services like high-speed internet and cell services. Improve local school district to attract young families. Support local artists and artisans.*
- *Ban school choice*
- *More community involvement (dif. Groups and ages)*
- *Promote town meetings and get people involved (posters and signs). Online forms for discussing issues with scrit on keeping it positive.*
- *Bring younger people to Ashfield.*
- *More advertising for how nice this area is.*
- *Make the town more known/ public. → more people helps to increase funding; →brings in new people/ boost immigration; → balances immigration/ immigration*
- *Invest money into snow control →plowing / means of getting rid of snow; →current assets are old. More communal engagement*
- *Need more public and affordable transportation*
- *More volunteerism and engagement from the younger generations - in town government and committees; -older people have many roles in their town government. -younger generation feels unheard, yet is inactive in local government*
- *No additional notes*
- *No additional notes*

- *More garbage control – more recycling bins, more trash bins, more consideration about the wilderness from the general public, including but not limited to decreased littering*
- *There needs to be more (young) people actively involved in their community. → more volunteerism (preferably from younger folks). → increased community service/ volunteerism, littering crews, etc.... → increased attendance to local government (town meetings, local elections, etc...)*
- *Less road rage*
- *Nothing additional*
- *More people planting other than just farmers.*
- *More clean energy. Electricity systems more robust. More food systems.*
- *With them helping know your neighbors. Being friendly*
- *More young people wanting to live in Ashfield – more inviting towards families.*
- *No other comments*
- *No other comments*
- *More community events to build community (exercise club, recreational events/ clubs, etc)*
- *Having Sanderson stay open to encourage young families to live here. Support for farmers to allow them to keep farming since it can be tough.*
- *Improve energy efficiency of town buildings. Reducing use of fossil fuels as much as possible.*
- *Add a pool to swim in. Keep the lake cleaner*
- *More houses*
- *More populated in town, with stores.*
- *A play structure at the baseball field for kids and more funding for the Ashfield lake and baseball field*
- *Less floods*
- *Better community*
- *Keeping gas stations open longer*
- *Have deals and sell solar panel to help the town.*
- *More people*
- *More activities and events*
- *Increase involvement and community in local government and organizations like the fire department.*
- *More community events for young residents.*
- *More kids and families*
- *Good school system with enough students. Healthy ecosystem. Positive community environment.*

- *More youth hangout spots. More access to meeting and transportation. Public meeting/ information about them.*
- *Positive attitude towards schools. Better school system. More funding for environment restoration*
- *He wants to see more community events to bring people together. More community participation.*
- *Bigger fire department, more money towards fire department. She wants signs that say horse riding so people are more protected and safe, people more aware of surroundings.*
- *Lobby for more equity in east of our state. No private education, more public education.*
- *Town should have its own government to make its own rules*
- *Littering awareness*
- *More efforts to increase tourist areas.*
- *Government*
- *Listen to the voices in your community, big and small. We need to respect voices and opinions as much as possible otherwise we are not a community.*
- *Get rid of neighbor's barking dog*