



front porch forum®

HELPING NEIGHBORS CONNECT

# 2024 ANNUAL BENEFIT CORPORATION REPORT

“Front Porch Forum acted in accordance with its benefit purpose and demonstrated the Benefit Corporation standards during fiscal year 2024. I am pleased with FPF’s **continued commitment and progress**, and I look forward to additional improvements going forward.”

*Susan A. Comerford, Ph.D. FPF Benefit Director*

“The staff at Front Porch Forum continued to deliver on our mission in 2024, **helping neighbors connect and increase community resilience** across all of Vermont, and some towns in adjoining states. This report highlights our goals and accomplishments for 2024, and points toward our future goals.”

*Michael Wood-Lewis, FPF Co-Founder and CEO*



## MISSION: *FPF’s reason for existence*

Front Porch Forum’s mission is to help neighbors connect and build community, thereby increasing local resilience. We do that by hosting a network of online local forums covering all of Vermont, where neighbors share postings and engage about a wide variety of topics. We further our mission by providing other features, such as our local Business Directories, Community Calendars, Search and paid ads. The resulting increase in social capital and community cohesion benefits neighbors, government, local businesses, nonprofits and local journalism.

## VISION: *How communities we serve, and FPF itself, will appear in the future*

FPF’s vision for Vermont is a state full of thriving and resilient communities. These towns and neighborhoods are filled with informed residents who know, support and trust their neighbors without regard to their political affiliation, organize with neighbors in support of community goals, participate in local democratic processes, value and rely on local journalism, support area nonprofits, and favor spending with local businesses. We envision FPF itself as critical civic infrastructure for every community in our coverage area, with an ownership, governance and financial model that supports this work for many generations to come.

# Fulfilling **our public benefit** in 2024

[Front Porch Forum](#) (FPF) hosts a network of local online forums serving every community in Vermont. Here are a few highlights of our model and impact:

Among Vermont's 270,000 households, FPF has **240,000 active members**.

According to a 2023 independent survey of more than 13,000 FPF members:

- **97% find FPF valuable** for their community
- **89% take action multiple times per year** in response to postings
- **85% frequently turn to their Forums for local news** (vs 61% for radio and newspapers, 51% for TV, 37% for Facebook)

FPF's core service is **free of charge**, welcoming Vermonters to participate on any Forum where they live or work.

In addition to neighbors, FPF serves **small businesses, nonprofits, local government, elected officials, and candidates for office**.

**Every Vermont town** has its own [Forum](#), [Business Directory](#), [Community Calendar](#) and [Search](#), and every FPF member also has access to postings, listings, and events from **across their region**.

FPF staff of professional moderators **review every member posting** before publication, guided by our nonpartisan [Terms of Use](#).

FPF receives **no government funding**, relying on privacy-respecting paid ads from local businesses for the majority of its revenue.

FPF is a **mission-driven family-owned small business** and a Vermont public benefit corporation.

FPF's mission is to help neighbors **connect and build community**.

FPF launched in **2006** and has **30 employees**.

*FPF is increasingly recognized for its positive social impact.* In 2024, FPF was featured in the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, and *Seven Days*, among other news publications.



# We made the following **progress** on **FPF's goals** in 2024

These 2024 goals were previously listed in the FPF 2023 Annual Benefit Corporation Report.

## **GOAL:** Achieve better mission results

- ✓ Increased social capital among neighbors, thereby increasing community resilience
- ✓ Contributed to economic viability of local businesses, which supports local economies
- ✓ Helped nonprofits fulfill their social missions, thereby helping to strengthen safety nets
- ✓ Contributed to better informed voters and journalists, supporting local democracies
- ✓ Helped local officials communicate with constituents, improving town governance

## **GOAL:** Improve moderation and accounts functions to handle greater load and challenges

- ✓ Significantly improved accounts and content moderation processes and tools

## **GOAL:** Significantly increase member traction and engagement

- ✓ Grew member count to 240,000
- ✓ Maintained multi-year engagement growth (member content submitted, web traffic, etc.)
- ✓ Maintained and grew public official participation
- ✓ Grew local business and nonprofit listings in FPF Directory to 15,000
- ✓ Received hundreds of FPF community-building success stories from members

## **GOAL:** Significantly increase FPF relevance to Vermonters

- ✓ Launched member engagement staff position, connecting with members and partners
- ✓ Attracted significant media attention: *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Seven Days*, etc.
- ✓ Gave featured-speaker presentations at two OLLI events (Stowe, Montpelier)
- ✓ Served as outreach partner for Vermont Public's Citizens Agenda project
- ✓ Supported *Seven Days* on their Good Citizen Challenge
- ✓ Launched weekly "Best of FPF" feature

## **GOAL:** Complete realignment of local Forum boundaries

- ✓ Merged and split various Forums to more closely align with town boundaries
- ✓ Improved information sharing among nearby towns

## **GOAL:** Prepare for future natural disasters

- ✓ Developed emergency response protocol and activated it during 2024 floods

## **GOAL:** Launch and improve Candidate Custom Access feature

- ✓ Launched and improved Candidate Custom Access feature through three elections

## **GOAL:** Improve advertising system

- ✓ Added town-specific Featured Ads to menu of existing ad products
- ✓ Continued to develop Basic and Premium Ads
- ✓ Produced FPF Media Kit to more clearly explain advertising options

## **GOAL:** Continually improve workplace for all employees

- ✓ Improved health insurance benefit for employees
- ✓ Audited and improved Personnel Policies

## **GOAL:** Strengthen financials

- ✓ Increased revenue across multiple income channels
- ✓ Kept expenses in check



# New feature: “Best of FPF”

In May 2024, we introduced a new feature called “Best of FPF.” Every Thursday, we highlight a posting from a member meant to inspire Vermonters to engage with their own neighbors. These examples are selected for their humor, storytelling, or community-building, and then shared (with the author’s permission) with all 240,000 FPF members. Here are some sample “Best of FPF” postings, followed by selected responses from other members:



## June 20: This Fire Chief’s Journey Could be Yours

Adam, the Fire Chief in Grand Isle, posted this recruiting message in his Forum. We thought it was well worth a share:

***“It is hard for me to believe that twelve years ago today I stepped into the Grand Isle Fire Station for the first time. I told Assistant Chief Wade Lawrence that I thought I might be interested in joining. He showed me around the station, showed me the trucks and the equipment, told me about the other members, and spewed a lot of acronyms, like SCBA, TIC, NFPA, PASS, ICS, LDH, IDLH, SAR. That evening was a scheduled training reviewing marine responses.***

*“From the sidelines, I watched twelve islanders I had never met before. The experience was a bit intimidating, but I came back the next week and kept showing up.*

*“Those acronyms soon became familiar as did the islanders. I attended the Vermont Fire Academy to learn more and get certified; I attended weekly trainings and went on calls. Today, I serve as Chief of Grand Isle Vol. Fire Department. Twelve years ago, that role was unimaginable.*

*“I am writing this note in hopes that you will take the same jump I did and join the Grand Isle Volunteer Fire Department. You will learn new skills, help your community, and meet fellow islanders. Plus, you get to wear a cool hat, ride in a fire truck, and get paid to attend trainings and respond to calls.*

*“To learn more or to join our department, stop by the station or reach out to me with questions. I’ll be happy to give you a tour of the station and our equipment and introduce you to a bunch of islanders who may soon become familiar faces and friends.”*

**“This is fantastic. It is how so many of us get started in a volunteer endeavor that means SO much to a community. Thank you.”**

*Bill, Fairfax Forum*

**“This is a great story that everyone in the fire service can relate to. The saying ‘it’s better to give than receive’ doesn’t ring truer than for those that answer the call when there is an emergency. 75% of the fire service in the USA is made up of volunteers, and the need is even greater than ever before. Joining the fire service is like joining a family. It’s truly a brother/sisterhood like none other. The Castleton and Hubbardton Fire Departments train on Wednesday nights, while Poultney and Fair Haven Departments train on Tuesday nights. If you are even remotely interested, stop by the fire stations on these nights even if it is just to check things out. You’ll be glad you did!”**

*Michael, Castleton Forum*





## August 15: My Cat is Stealing Your Stuff

Steph posted a “Crime Report” in their Burlington Forum last week. We thought it was well worth a share:

*“Hi, has anyone been letting a black cat into their house lately? His name is Indy, he is very friendly and loves people. However, **if you let him inside he will likely steal your stuff.**”*

*“He is particularly fond of toys (either for pets or children) and food. For context, he once stole an entire baguette. I don’t know why he steals, I didn’t teach him to do it, I’m not that smart. If you don’t let him inside, he won’t break in, he’s not that smart.”*

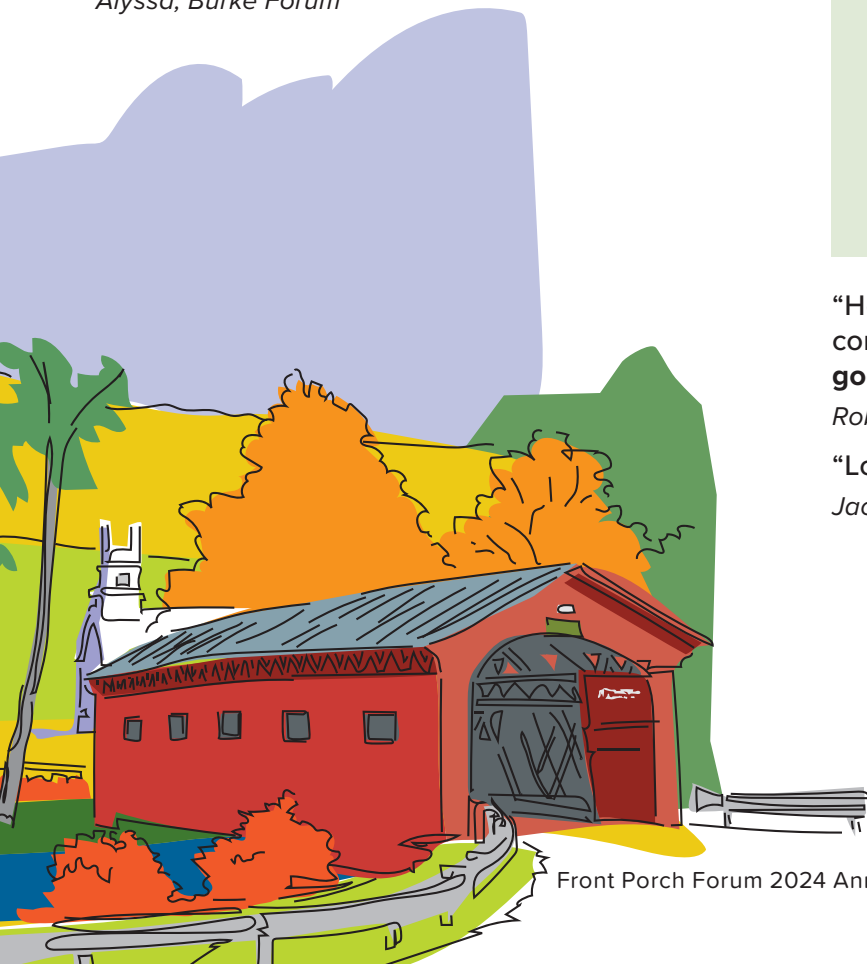
*“And if you’re currently missing a stuffed animal hedgehog and/or a small pillow, please let me know and I can return it.”*

### “Best post of the week!!!”

Cindy, Vergennes Forum

*“Our German Shepard came home with a full frozen haddock fillet that looked like it just came out of a fish market! Most recently he arrived home with a brand new copy of the BFG without even a wrinkle :) **I’m glad we aren’t alone!**”*

Alyssa, Burke Forum



## September 5: Hello, Aloe

Aloe (aka Paul) posted this from their new, albeit shady, spot in Monkton. We thought it was well worth a share:

*“My name is Aloe. I’m a 5-year-old aloe plant, propagated from my mother, Big Mama Aloe. I’ve been living happily in Burlington for several years, but recently my owners moved to Monkton, and they don’t have good lighting in their new home. So I need to move out and find someone to take me in and feel a tender place in your heart for me. **Someone with good lighting and a kind heart would be nice.** I am very quiet, a good listener, and don’t take up too much space. I even come with my own pot and have a bag of succulent soil. I look forward to meeting you, my new best friend!*

*Sincerely,*

*Aloe T. Plant, Esq.”*

Well, it didn’t take long before Janet welcomed Aloe (and Paul) to Monkton with this response:

*“I saw on Front Porch Forum that you are seeking sunnier digs. **I’d be honored to have you join our humble abode and promise to care for you as we do for all our flora family.** You’d be joining spider plants, a sanseveria, a monstera, a phalaenopsis orchid, succulents, herbs, a rex begonia, and a dracaena. You’d be our first aloe plant, but with lots of other adopted greenery to hang-out with.”*

*“How nice to read — not political or an angry complaint story! **Made me smile which is always a good thing these days.** Thanks!”*

Robert, Waterville Forum

*“Love these posts! **Always up for a laugh!**”*

Jacki, Brandon Forum

**Best of  
FPF**

## October 20: Election Night Square Dance

Erik is inviting Townshend neighbors to come together on election night. We thought it was well worth a share:

*"When I feel like I'm being pulled into the eddy of dark fates that swirl around our current election season, my escape comes when I can remember the broader stream that this rock-strewn vortex is only a small part of..*

*"So here's a little idea. Given the intensity of whatever will be on, and after, November 5th, I'd like your help to remember the wide wide river that carries us. And when I cast my ballot, **I'd like nothing more than to step out of the voting booth and into a dance.** Think of it as a gesture to organize the kindnesses we all know to be here - where under one roof we can both disagree and attest that, in spite of our differences, we'll still show up to feed and swing each other.*

*"So will you join me? For a square dance? Election night? Work is already underway. Sally Newton and the Turkey Mountain Window Smashers will be there to keep us in step.*

*"Vote. Bring a dish. Bring a neighbor (especially the one with a different sign in the front yard), bring your civic spirits, battered and beautiful as we are, and prepare to promenade.*

*"I hope you will."*

**"I love this sooooo much! Thank you!!!"**

Hannah, Calais Forum

**"What a wonderful idea! Love the sentiment in your post."**

Kathy, Brookline Forum

**"I am putting together some fundraisers to support the renovations of our dam that was damaged by the flood, and this sounds like a perfect thing to do. I love your idea!!! Good thinking."**

Theresa, Glover Forum

**"How absolutely marvelous!!! And genuinely inclusive."**

Sarah, Putney Forum

**"This is the most awesome post I have seen in ages. Thank you thank you thank you for such a wonderful idea. This is what we need to change the world. I can feel the good vibes reaching us all."**

Kirsten, Charlotte Forum

## October 24: Masked Pear Thieves

Caitlin posted a crime report to their North Hero Forum.

*"I write to you feeling a combination of rage and violation - we're pretty sure **someone stole all but three of our pears!**"*

Neighbors weighed in, and then Caitlin posted an update. We thought it was well worth a share:

*"Several kind neighbors have written to let us know that apparently raccoons are capable of such a thorough fruit heist! I never would have guessed, but many people have said they've experienced similar vanishing fruits without a trace, and later learned it was raccoons, including people with more hidden fruit trees or arbors. Additionally, folks have offered to give us their pears or raise money for a pear basket for us. I have been overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity of spirit of this community, and **my faith in humanity (and an increased suspicion of raccoons) has been restored.** I feel slightly silly that perhaps I filed a police report against a band of raccoons, but am laughing at the fact that maybe the burglars wore masks."*

**"This is a wonderful post! Who knew? Haha. Masked bandits indeed! lol. Thank you for updating. You're an amazing writer."**

Adele, Downtown Burlington Forum

**"Great 'Best of FPF' story about the masked pear thieves! We had bold masked plum thieves at our home in Starksboro this summer who returned to the crime scene until the looting and on-site consumption was complete. Losing those precious ripe plums was the pits!!"**

Sherry, Starksboro Forum



**Best of  
FPF**

# National attention to FPF's impact

FPF's success delivering its public benefit across Vermont attracted major media attention in 2024. See our [FPF in the News](#) page for select articles. These include the following:

- "Talk of the Towns: Neighbors Seek Plumbers, Lost Pets and Community on Front Porch Forum," *Seven Days*, January 2024
- "Building Resilience in Vermont Communities," Lamoille Valley OLLI, February 2024
- "Building Well-Connected Neighborhoods with Front Porch Forum," Tech Can't Save Us podcast, May 2024
- "How did Vermont's favorite civic social network turn into a climate disaster response network overnight?" Initiative for Digital Public Infrastructure at UMass Amherst, June 2024
- "The friendliest social network you've never heard of," *Washington Post*, August 2024
- "The Vermont miracle: How one local platform is rewriting the rules of social media," New\_ Public, August 2024
- "Front Porch Forum: Fostering Civic Engagement and Building Community in Vermont," Center for Media Engagement at The University of Texas at Austin, August 2024
- "Useful Lessons From 'Slow Social Media'," TechDirt Podcast, October 2024
- "The Vermont Conversation with David Goodman," *VTDigger* podcast, October 2024
- "Building Resilience in Vermont Communities," Montpelier OLLI, October 2024
- "Move over, Bluesky: Front Porch Forum is Vermont's most popular social network," front page, *Boston Sunday Globe*, December 2024



## FPF members say it best!

What better way to assess FPF's progress in delivering on its social mission than by listening to Vermonters themselves? We hear thousands of stories from members every year about FPF's public benefit. Here are some samples from 2024:

"FPF is magic! Within an hour I heard from a previously unmet neighbor who had just inherited a lot of pink Depression glass. **I'm grateful for FPF, human kindness, and small town life.**"

*Elizabeth, Northfield Forum*

"Lights are gone. I wish I had more to give. Can't possibly answer so many people. **FPF IS WONDERFUL.**"

*Ruth, Middlebury Forum*

"When one gets old we tend to become more isolated due to a number of age related reasons. FPF is a way to keep in

touch with your neighborhood. **It's comforting to know your neighbors care** and are willing to help."

*Fernand, New North End Forum*

"I had not thought of FPF as a social media platform until recently but that is exactly what it is. The really super thing about it is **its collaborative and cooperative roots**. Want to give something away for free? Go to FPF. Want to buy or sell something? Go to FPF. Want to solicit recommendations for a service? Go to FPF. Want to tell your community about something/anything? FPF is your tool. It is not anonymous either...

your friends, neighbors and community members know it is you who wrote your piece and you have to look them in the eye at the grocery store, so things tend toward civility which is something badly needed in our world today."

*Cliff, Randolph Forum*

"It's 100% refreshing to have a virtual/digital space that is for the most part, **free of negativity and click-bait conversations**. Real connections are made and real conversations take place - I think this is so valuable especially now."

*Hannah, Barre City Forum*

**“Thanks everyone for all the recommendations.** Our trees will be cut soon. FPF is the best!!”

*Bill, Leicester Forum*

“I’m grateful to have this forum to help me help others in the community. **It truly does take a village to lift up one another.**

Thank you. Michael Wood-Lewis & FPF staff for being such an intricate part of our world.”

*Linda, Barre City Forum*

“When we first moved to VT, our realtor recommended FPF. One of the best bits of advice we received. **I use FPF regularly and rely on it for all kinds of things.** Thanks, FPF.”

*Neil, Brandon Forum*

“To all those who created FPF, post about all the happenings going on, and continue to donate to keep FPF vibrant, **THANK YOU!** I moved here 3 1/2 months ago and expected to take far longer to **meet people and feel like part of the community.** This platform made it possible!”

*Linda, Calais Forum*

“Wow! Wow! Wow! Thanks so much to everyone who replied to my query! I got a lot of good recommendations for good body shops. An embarrassment of riches. And **another example of FPF doing what it does best.**”

*John, Old North End Forum*

“I want to thank FPF for **being such a great resource.** Today I was able to re-home several plants that I was running out of space for. In the process, I met a lovely family and was able to help them make their home a little homier.”

*Ginny, Brookfield Forum*

“Welcome to FPF, Betsy. **A great place to meet folks from the greater neighborhood, ask for contractor recommendations and similar conversational topics** we all chatted about in earlier times when we bumped into each other at the post office or general store.”

*Jeff, Whitingham Forum*

“Just want to express my appreciation of FPF for being willing to host a category called “Discussion”, through which **community members can civilly express their opinions** and share a dialog about things that concern them. It’s brave of you!”

*Paula, Enosburgh Forum*

“Wanted to thank the FPF for helping me find a used gas grill for the back porch. Per usual I heard from some folks I had not seen in years and found what I was looking for, **so nice to do business locally.**”

*Bill, Cornwall Forum*

“Within an hour of Argyle Forum issue #2567 hitting the net this morning we got a most welcome call -- Jive the whippet was in a front yard on Goose Island Road. This wonderful family kept him in sight until we got there. He’s home safe now. Thank you FPF, and **thank you to the members who were so concerned and helpful!**”

*Charles, Argyle NY Forum*

“Thank you, FPF, for consolidating the Colchester forums. As a town with diverse population centers, Colchester has a long history of struggling to develop its identity. Your new format, I believe, will **help to strengthen communication** among those various sectors.”

*John, Colchester Forum*

“FPF has helped us learn about local issues, give away things we no longer use and look for those things that we do need, including area professionals. And most importantly, FPF is a **wonderful way to connect with neighbors.**”

*Rebecca, Bristol Forum*

“Hi folks, just a reminder/recommendation/PSA that **you can always search the FPF archives to find previous recommendations.** Plumbers, electricians, chimney sweeps, piano tuners, driveway pavers, etc. If someone previously made a recommendation it will appear in a search.”

*Rob, Waterbury Forum*

“I went to the Stowe Free Library to participate in a class given by Molly which was posted on FPF on December 9. She provided the pine branches, wreath frames, wire and a host of bows & decorations at no cost to us. It was a fun activity with a great group of women where we got to chat, get some ideas from each other and have cookies & eggnog if we wanted some. **Thank you Molly and FPF.**”

*Nancy, Morrisville Forum*





# 2025 plans

In 2025, FPF will focus on the following initiatives. This work is intended to further our public benefit, ensure our financial stability, and invest in our team.

- Build more ways for Vermonters to connect in real life
- Raise awareness of FPF's utility at both the town AND the regional levels
- Better serve Vermont elections and public officials
- Significantly increase member traction and engagement
- Make it easier and more compelling for members to share FPF content with other Vermonters
- Create more value through FPF for small businesses and nonprofits
- Significantly enhance the FPF mobile app and raise awareness of its value
- Improve FPF's advertising products
- Increase leadership team capacity
- Invest in staff wellness and job satisfaction
- Explore moving to an employee ownership model
- Assess and prepare for emerging threats



## Gratitude!

FPF would not be possible without a cast of thousands! Among Vermont's 270,000 households, we are especially grateful for our:

- 240,000 active members
- 15,000 [small business and nonprofit members](#)
- 2,600 local government and public official members
- Thousands of [small donors](#)
- 700 members who sent us heartfelt thank-you notes detailing FPF's community value
- Hundreds of [satisfied local advertisers](#)
- Dozens of Vermont vendors from whom FPF buys services and products
- 30 FPF staff members scattered across the state

### FPF board of directors

**Michael Wood-Lewis**

Board Chair, Co-Founder & CEO

**Valerie Wood-Lewis**

Board Member & Co-Founder

**Susan A. Comerford, PhD**

Benefit Director

### Front Porch Forum

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