



# The Vermont Council on Rural Development

Summer 2007

*Creating a prosperous future for rural Vermont through facilitation, collaboration, and the effective use of local, state, federal, educational, and private resources.*

## From Paul Costello, VCRD Executive Director

### Welcome to the Summer 2007 VCRD Newsletter!

This has been an exciting time as VCRD and our partners work to complete projects to advance the **creative economy** in towns across Vermont, support **broadband** deployment and new applications, continue efforts in the branding and marketing of Vermont **forest products**, bring the “Community Visit Program” to **Hinesburg** and **Richford**, and conduct the concluding sessions of the **Vermont Rural Energy Council**. We are proud of our recent efforts and are looking ahead to address future needs in Vermont’s rural communities. VCRD’s board of directors has been considering the big picture of Vermont rural policy from an historical lens and considering the next phase of the public and policy dialogue that is central to the Council’s efforts. We have reached some dramatic conclusions that have become foundations for an ambitious work plan.

About once a generation Vermonters have paused from their daily concerns and seasonal politics to take part in statewide conversation that considers where we are, where we are going, and the realities and trends that will influence our common future. Such studies have resulted in major findings about who we are as a people and the evolving assumptions and goals we share.

They also have led us, as a state, to articulate a set of values that are embedded in our special Vermont sense of place, dedication to community, and brand identity. From the study by the Commission on Country Life in 1928 to the Commission on Vermont’s Future in 1988, these studies have engaged and united Vermonters, inspired leaders, and launched practical initiatives by state government.

### In This Issue

#### **Council on the Future of Vermont:**

What are the values, concerns and aspirations of Vermonters? VCRD launches an ambitious two-year statewide project to find out.

**Creative Communities:** This program draws to a conclusion with a summer conference celebrating the success of participating communities.

#### **Community Visit Program**

Richford residents begin work and Derby prepares for participation in the fall program.

#### **Vermont Rural Energy Council**

VCRD’s one-year study of conservation, renewable energy development and generation in Vermont concludes with the publication of policy recommendations and an economic analysis.

### News and Updates

- ❖ **Welcome New Board Members**
- ❖ **Staff Updates**
- ❖ **Forest Products Marketing – new program.**
- ❖ **Rural Broadband Project**

At VCRD, we believe that in this era of rapid change Vermonters should take the time to step back together, consider overarching trends, evaluate the opportunities and challenges ahead, and consider common Vermont priorities.

We invite you to learn more about this exciting new project in this issue and look forward to your partnership with us in this venture

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## **Council on the Future of Vermont**

Working on the ground with the people of Vermont, listening to the foundational issues that impact rural life, is at the core of VCRD's work. That association can occur through community based programs, rural summits, or specialized facilitation sessions. Beginning in the fall of 2007, VCRD will undertake a systematic initiative to learn from Vermonters about their perspectives, goals, needs and vision. **The Council on the Future of Vermont** (CFV) will provide a structured opportunity for reflection, and will seek to give voice to Vermonters from every walk of life.

VCRD is uniquely positioned to lead this statewide process, and brings over 15 years of experience in managing public policy processes. Non-partisan and actively neutral in its approach, the Council has earned a reputation for engaging diverse constituents in constructive dialogue and for advancing opportunities that strengthen rural communities. Past policy councils have explored topics of rural import, including renewable energy, the creative economy, the planning system, forest products, and agricultural viability.

The Council on the Future of Vermont is a two-year project that will utilize a multi-faceted approach, including surveys, webtools, radio, print and visual media, community forums and targeted input sessions in order to provide a clear articulation of current Vermont values. VCRD believes that providing a public process, and purposefully engaging as many citizens as possible in that process, will generate a sense of unity and purpose in exploring questions that will inform every Vermonter's future. Although the Council will not offer specific recommendations derived from the findings, the result of the work will be a valuable educational tool that will inform program and policy development in the years ahead.

Council membership will be comprised of Vermont leaders representing a range of demographic backgrounds and professional expertise. This group will receive input gathered by partners and associates throughout the state, and will provide guidance to ensure broad inclusion.

A full membership list and charge document can be found on VCRD's website at [www.vtrural.org](http://www.vtrural.org). Check the website often for updates on this exciting process, and to learn how you can share your ideas on the future of Vermont.

## Creative Communities Program – A Celebration of Innovation

VCRD's Creative Communities Program has gained steady momentum over the last two years as a tool to help Vermont communities develop their creative economy, stimulate entrepreneurship and invigorate downtowns. Twelve communities across the state have participated in the program, and representatives from each of them, plus state and community leaders, business members, artists, and interested citizens gathered at the Vermont Statehouse on July 18 to celebrate the many accomplishments achieved and to look to the future.

The conference, which drew over 200 people, opened with remarks by **Lt. Governor Brian Dubie**, who shared his perspective on Vermont traditions and innovative thinking, drawing on his own family's experience. A morning panel helped illustrate the diverse aspects of the creative economy, and keynote speaker **Bill Schubart** offered a provocative look at ways Vermont could seek to creatively expand economic development. Speaker **Gaye Symington** discussed the economic and cultural role that

*"It is a good thing to revere the past but it cannot support us. We must look squarely at the future and work together to find our place in it."*

- Bill Schubart-

agriculture plays in the state, and all participants shared their ideas in work groups ranging from using the Web to incubating new businesses. One thing was clear – the creative economy is a wide net that Vermonters have filled with projects ranging from intellectual property development to farmer's markets, from studio

tours to Rutland's Friday Night Live. All of the projects celebrated – and there were many – share a common goal of using a community's unique cultural assets and entrepreneurial spirit to bolster the economic vitality of Vermont.

The Creative Communities Program, a two-year project funded by Jane's Trust will draw to a close in August of 2007. Reports from each community participating in the program can be found at [www.vtrural.org](http://www.vtrural.org). Other towns will benefit from their experience when VCRD releases a DVD, made in conjunction with Peregrine Productions and Wayne Fawbush Photography, and full report documenting the program. The documentation is expected to be available in the fall.

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## Community Visit Program

Richford is a town beautifully situated on the Missisquoi River, with a plethora of natural assets supported by an infrastructure that could encourage economic development. It was the first town ever to receive a VCRD Community Visit in 1996, and the townspeople have displayed a sustained interest in the future of their town by inviting VCRD back for a return of the program.

Richford has seen substantial accomplishments since that first program a decade ago, and asked VCRD to work together with them once again to consider next steps to build on their success, refocus their energy, and devise strategies to address remaining concerns.

The program resulted in three task forces. The **Job Creation and Retention Task Force** will work to expand entrepreneurial and business opportunities and promote economic development. The **Law Enforcement Task Force** will address concerns about public safety and appropriate staffing and enforcement issues. Richford will work to promote a positive image, improve downtown and public areas and confront housing concerns through the **Image and Communication Task Force**.

*“The quality of life is here, with a sustainable community and everything that should attract a business, but how do you do that?”*

VCRD’s next Community Visit Program will be conducted in Derby, starting in September 2007. For complete reports of all VCRD programs, please visit [www.vtrural.org/reports](http://www.vtrural.org/reports).

Is your town interested in participating in the Community Visit Program? Contact Bonnie Smoren at [vcrd2@sover.net](mailto:vcrd2@sover.net)

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## **Vermont Rural Energy Council**

The Vermont Rural Energy Council (VREC) was convened in June 2006 to embark on an in-depth examination of the economic opportunities for Vermont in conservation, and renewable fuel development and generation. The 23-member council reviewed the commissioned research that resulted in the “Vermont Energy Digest”, a compendium of existing energy data, listened to extensive testimony, and evaluated an economic model developed by Economic and Policy Resources of Vermont. The findings of their analysis and year-long discussion have produced “Strengthening Vermont’s Energy Economy.” This final report of VREC contains 22 recommendations in categories including Making Energy a Priority, Financial and Policy Recommendations, Education, Training and Research, and Advancing Specific Sectors. The report also contains the complete economic modeling results which details significant economic opportunity in the scenarios analyzed. The model analyzed 14 specific scenarios and will be available for use by those interested in modeling other scenarios and further developing this important research.

VCRD’s policy councils strive to develop ideas achieved through dialogue, information sharing and consensus building. The issues around energy, climate and the economy are important priorities to the people of Vermont, and many efforts are underway to address those concerns. VCRD offers the final report in the spirit of collaboration and respect,

and provides these recommendations as starting points for public policy development and implementation.

The full report will be published in September and will be available along with the companion publication “Vermont Energy Digest” on VCRD’s website, or by contacting [vcrd2@sover.net](mailto:vcrd2@sover.net).

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## **News and Updates**

### **VCRD Welcomes New Board Members**

VCRD is pleased to welcome the following new board members:

- ❖ **Harvey Smith**, Executive Director, Farm Services Agency
- ❖ **Kevin Dorn**, Secretary, Agency of Commerce and Community Development
- ❖ **John Bramley**, Professor, University of Vermont

### **Staffing Updates**

VCRD extends its appreciation to **Helen Labun Jordan**, Director of the Creative Communities Program, which concludes in August of 2007.

Welcome to **Sarah Waring**, new Program Director for the Council on the Future of Vermont. Sarah comes to VCRD from the Sonoran Institute in Montana, where she is a program manager. Sarah is a native of Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom, is a graduate of Haverford College and The University of Maryland, and holds a Master’s degree in Applied Anthropology. Her work out west has included extensive community engagement work, and support to rural towns and counties throughout the region. Sarah will assume her new position in early October.

### **Forest Products Marketing Program**

Under the Forest Products Marketing Program, funded by the Economic Development Administration and administered by VCRD, the Wood Products Marketing Council has announced a new program opportunity.

The new program will deliver technical assistance to members of the industry in the following areas:

- Workshop training and tools such as branding, marketing, maintaining a website, writing a business plan, and developing print material

- New website development assistance
- Technical support in updating existing websites
- Pay per click advertising

The marketing initiative has been underway since January of 2006, and offers many opportunities for Vermont wood manufacturers to expand their market presence through collaborative projects, participation in trade shows, studio tours and festivals, online sites, training, and marketing tools that promote the Vermont brand.



For more information, visit [www.vermontwood.org](http://www.vermontwood.org).

### **Rural Broadband Project**

With leadership from VCRD contractors **Laura and Al Duey**, the Vermont Rural Broadband Project has been providing free consultation and organizational support to community task forces throughout Vermont dedicated to achieving affordable broadband coverage. Over the past few years the program has served more than 50 communities; today many of those communities have services or are working with other towns to aggregate their demand and explore common solutions, such as adding fiber to home systems like the Burlington Telecom model.

VCRD is also working toward to establish public access WiFi centers in businesses throughout the Northeast Kingdom. The Council has been an interested supporter of the development of the new Broadband Authority, which will provide unprecedented leverage and resources to spur broadband deployment in rural Vermont. In advance of the work of the Authority, VCRD has facilitated a Broadband Working Group of key state, federal and non-profit leaders to build communications and collaboration between the significant public efforts underway in Vermont today.

It has been exciting this year to see the programmatic overlap between the Rural Broadband efforts, the Community Visit Program and the Creative Communities Program. Many Vermont communities today have set goals to extend their internal town and resident communications; towns like Pownal, St Johnsbury, and St. Albans are building new community communications on the web as a link between local task forces, town business, visitors, and municipal leaders, and to build community knowledge of news and events.



