

## Seven Days

CREATIVE ECONOMY (07.25.07)

### Ag and the Arts: Financial Formulas for Vermont?

Can Green Mountain agriculture grow beyond the dairy farm? Can visual artists design a model for filling the collective coffers? Who in Vermont is already thinking outside traditional boxes, and what can be learned from them? The [Vermont Council on Rural Development](#) sought answers to these and other questions last Wednesday, July 18, by convening “Advancing Vermont’s Creative Economy: Celebrating Models of Community Success.”

The daylong conference at the Statehouse attracted several hundred community leaders from across Vermont. It charged them up with inspirational speakers, then dispersed them to eight workshops on topics such as marketing creative economy, envisioning regional models, linking cultural organizations, and incubating new businesses. The goal for each roll-up-your-sleeves group was to arrive at two recommendations to share at the end of the day with the whole assembly — and, eventually, with the legislature and current administration.

But first, introductory remarks by Lt. Gov. **Brian Dubie**, Tourism & Marketing Commissioner **Bruce Hyde** and VCRD Executive Director **Paul Costello** set the tone. “The purpose of this conference is to bring the creative economy into focus,” clarified Dubie. He went on to praise such innovative Vermont companies as the [Bowles Corporation](#) in North Ferrisburgh, whose clean-earth product has been sopping up fuel leaked from underground tanks all over the world.

Wait — what’s that got to do with the arts? Or agriculture?

A central idea advanced at this conference was that “creative economy” is not a narrowly defined rubric; that creative thinking can, and should, exist in every kind of enterprise. “In the global economy,” said Costello, “the jobs will go where the innovation is.”

Some conferees might have been surprised to find this best illustrated in remarks by **John Casella**, head of [Casella Waste Systems](#), who participated in a panel discussion called “The Creative Economy in Vermont Today.” The recycling magnate pointed out that his company applies an “aesthetic sensibility” to problem solving and holds several patents on waste-treatment technologies. “We have an intellectual-property department and reward creativity,” Casella said. “We want to attract smart, creative employees.” Furthermore, he noted in a nod to artsier economies, these individuals will want to live in “cultural communities.”

Casella also touted the state’s trump card, in words echoed by other speakers: “When we

go out into the rest of the world, being from Vermont gives us a huge leg up,” he said. “The world expects innovative, creative solutions from Vermont, and we don’t want to ever, ever see that die.”

If the fabled “Vermont brand” gives local marketing efforts a head start, the day’s workshops made clear that creative solutions to economic success are not exactly paint-by-numbers easy. For example, participants in “Using the Web as a Creative Economy Tool” were somewhat stymied by the harsh reality that many Vermonters are still on dial-up. Without access to high-speed Internet, many would-be entrepreneurs — especially in more rural regions — will remain well behind the curve. The workshop’s first recommendation, then: get a statewide IT infrastructure ASAP. Nothing new about that.

An underlying — and often unspoken — assumption of the “creative economy” can be summed up with that optimistic imperative from the movie *Field of Dreams*: “Build it and they will come.” In this case, “they” are money-bearing tourists, and “it” is a plethora of smart, forward-thinking businesses, farms, arts organizations and individuals who collectively find ways to capitalize on Brand Vermont. The conference’s conclusions? That solutions to economic woes will continue to come from traditional assets — the state’s history, beauty, small-town character, arty entrepreneurship and reputation for integrity. But participants also believe the global economy is not waiting for Vermont to catch up.

“Vermont needs infrastructure,” declared guest speaker **Bill Schubart**, president of [Resolutions Inc.](#) That includes “taxes wisely spent” and “a strategic plan.” The state is only limited by “leadership, imagination and courage,” he suggested. “And dialogue is the first responsibility of leadership.”

It remains to be seen whether the recommendations of this conference will turn into dialogue — and action — under the Golden Dome this fall.

## Brattleboro Reformer

January 13, 2006

Destination: BELLOWS FALLS  
Arts program puts town on map

By [HOWARD WEISS-TISMAN](#)  
[Reformer Staff](#)

Ten years ago, visitors to downtown saw boarded-up storefronts.

Robert McBride saw potential for new businesses.

Ten years ago, some residents looked at the centuries-old brick buildings and saw a crumbling past that called out for removal and renovation.

McBride saw beauty and power in the historic architecture.

And up and down the quiet streets at night, people roamed, looking for something to do.

McBride visualized art galleries and music venues, and a decade later, on a good night, film-goers, music fans and gallery walkers rub elbows and fill the sidewalks.

The Rockingham Arts and Museum Project, the non-profit organization McBride started to develop an awareness of the arts and to promote the role that a vibrant arts community plays in economic development, is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.

Over those 10 years, Bellows Falls has been heralded across Vermont and around New England as a leader in the creative economy, the idea that towns investing in arts and culture draw business and entrepreneurs.

What was once a dying mill town is today a destination spot for tourists. In the past few years, some serious gallery owners and music promoters have decided to plant roots in the area.

The village's fortunes have improved, and while local officials, and McBride himself, say that it was not RAMP alone that brought Bellows Falls back from the brink, McBride's work has been recognized and his model is being used around the state, in New England, and in other parts of the country.

McBride first came to Bellows Falls in the early 1980's to visit a friend. He was living in New York City and he bought a home here in 1982 to use as a retreat from the city life. He moved up here full time in 1995.

"Bellows Falls was pretty low down at the time," McBride said. "The first thing I thought when I moved up here was 'What can I contribute.'"

McBride is a painter. He helped develop studios in a closed public school in New York and when he settled in Bellows Falls he began to talk with arts and historic preservation organizations.

He is not a "10-year-master-plan" kind of guy, he admitted. He had a vision for what the village might look like, but he did not have a clear path laid out on how to get there.

"I started going to meetings. I started talking to people," McBride said about those early days. "When I said I wanted to make Bellows Falls a center for the arts, they looked at me like I was crazy, but it all just coalesced. We've accomplished a lot."

He started by inviting classical musicians to town to put on a concert.

In 1998, he helped renovate a dilapidated apartment, the Exner Block, into affordable housing and studio space.

He won state grants, brought the Bread and Puppet Theater to town and before he knew it, there was a buzz about Bellows Falls.

"Robert saw the connection between the arts and economic development," said Paul Costello, executive director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

Costello is one of the strongest promoters of building art and culture in towns and cities around the state as a way of drawing business and revitalizing downtowns. The catch phrase of the moment is "the creative economy," and Costello said RAMP was one of the first organizations to promote the idea.

"He has been tremendously successful in establishing a new brand identity for a community that was at one time struggling," said Costello. "He got everybody to work together. He connected the dots and built momentum. Bellows Falls is an inspiration point for communities that want to do this."

McBride's work has been noticed beyond the state lines, as well. He is working in Connecticut and Michigan to help communities there use the resources they have to increase the arts.

Later this year, Public Art/Moving Site, a traveling presentation of public art is touching down in three major art centers in New England: Cambridge, Mass., New Haven and Bellows Falls.

"You don't need a university, or a major art market to promote art," McBride said. "That is like saying you need good penmanship to write a great play. The key is realizing what you do have and using that."

From the start, McBride has said that the arts can be an important part of economic development. And while it is difficult to draw a clear, strong line between 10 years of RAMP and filled storefronts in the village, it is hard to argue against the role that a vibrant art community has played in a revitalized Bellows Falls.

"Robert's work definitely made an economic impact on the community as well as gave us a community identity," said Richard Ewald, Rockingham development director. "In this 10- year period, we have made a lot of progress and we are gathering energy for the next curve."

Ewald points to the "bricks and mortar" work that has carried Bellows Falls out of the sour economy of the early 1990's.

In that time, the Waypoint Center was built, the Bellows Falls Opera House was renovated, new lighting, fence work and park benches were put in along the canal, and the Howard Block reopened.

"RAMP promoted art and that was a great way to engage public involvement and energize the community," said Ewald. "Robert was not the first one, or the only one, but he has been a nice infusion of energy."

Just as he was when he began working in Bellows Falls 10 years ago, McBride still does not have a grand vision of the next ten years. He does not pretend to have a master plan.

"There's no formula. You have to sit down and look at what you have," he said. "If you are five feet tall you are not going to be a basketball player. You have to be what you are."

When McBride first started working on his vision in Bellows Falls, he invited a Boston television crew to do a piece on the potential of building an art scene in the gritty, depressed mill town on the Connecticut River.

After the cameras were off, McBride remembered, the cameraman looked at McBride and said, "Good luck."

"We did it. We did it all," McBride said. "We've come together as a community and that is very exciting."

## **Rutland Herald Editorial**

Apr 3, 2006

### City's future previewed

One participant in last week's creative economy meeting in Rutland expressed the hope that the city "won't lose its heritage by trying to be quaint."

She needn't worry, based on the range of people in attendance and on the discussions.

There was a certain amount of daydreaming, but that's to be expected and encouraged in a meeting centered around creative issues, and most of the discussions were the sort of practical, down-to-earth discussions one would expect from a Rutland audience.

Part of the credit goes to Paul Costello from the Vermont Council on Rural Development and the team of analysts and moderators he led. They have had a hand in similar efforts around the state and were able to focus the discussions for the most part.

And the local arts community, especially Whitney Lamy at the Crossroads Arts Council, did a good job getting the project rolling in the first place.

But much of the credit goes to everyday residents who showed up to talk about what they would like to see in their city and county.

That includes entrepreneurs who recognize that the "economy" part of the project is as important as the "creative" part. The evening meal, provided largely by local farmers and food-related businesses, was a reminder that there is more to a successful creative economy than just arts and crafts.

The Chamber of Commerce and several members of the Board of Aldermen were also on hand.

Much of the discussion was on practical issues like how to generate the traffic — pedestrian and vehicular — needed to grow Rutland's economy; what infrastructure improvements might attract businesses and keep young, ambitious people here. As Tom Donahue of the Chamber said in his opening remarks, the effort is reminiscent of the early days of the Downtown Rutland Partnership a few years ago.

A creative economy makes a great deal of sense, as it is less reliant on things like access to an interstate than a manufacturing plant. And it has a strong positive spin-off effect. Recent history shows us that, in the global economy, our success is more likely to come from young entrepreneurs than from luring a major company here. As one participant noted, the recent pattern is to have small companies — for example, Ben & Jerry's and Mad River Canoe — start and grow here, then sell to larger firms.

Those companies started here because it's a great place to live. Having a vibrant creative economy makes it more likely that young people will live here and start the next big success story.

Some of the concrete suggestions that came out included the possibility of having citywide wireless Internet, or fiber optic cable, to encourage high-tech creative ventures. Establishing cooperative work spaces was another, so a food-based business could rent a professional-grade kitchen instead of having to invest in a full, commercial kitchen as a start-up cost. Downtown housing, an arts center and improving communication about the possibilities were also put on the table.

The bad news is that if you weren't among the 140 or so people who turned out to the high school for the first round of talks, you missed an invigorating and exciting meeting. The good news is, it's not too late to get started.

The next step in the process will be to distill down these general discussions into four specific areas the city feels are most important, then to move forward on them. That meeting will be on May 3.

Something concrete is going to come out of these meetings. At this point, it's still too early to say what. But they are a great chance for the citizens to let their voices be heard in where their city goes next.

## Rutland Herald

June 7, 2006

### Rutland's creative center Op-Ed

By *PAUL COSTELLO*

This spring, Rutland area residents have devised four strategies to put the city on the map as a dynamic center of culture, enterprise and innovation. Community members worked through the Vermont Council on Rural Development's Creative Communities Program to set plans for advancing Rutland as a recreation center, arts destination, and sustainable city and for long-term redevelopment of Center Street as a downtown hub for arts, culture and public events.

At our final public forum, I had the honor of facilitating the development of the work plan for the Center Street Project Team. The work that I saw in my group demonstrates the success possible from bringing together diverse partners interested in the city's future. These creative partnerships are the backbone of Rutland's current efforts and set the stage for ongoing progress.

Diverse partners mean diverse opinions. Our planning session began with both passion and chaos: Some people sharing their visions for the future of Center Street as a bustling downtown mall, gathering place, and cultural center, and others expressing their realistic concerns about making a pedestrian mall that could ultimately undermine the viability of businesses along the street.

The turning point in our discussion came when all participants realized that they did share the same essential vision of Center Street and adjacent areas as a vibrant center point for shopping and events — as the true heart of the downtown. What merchants did not want was an idea "done to" them, or established all at once, with inadequate planning and to the detriment of commerce on the street. Others in the group did not want their excitement for ambitious changes to Center Street to hit a wall — they wanted action.

Starting from shared goals and not their divisions, the Project Team rallied together to outline a step-by-step plan for building events and amenities around Center Street. This plan includes increasing pedestrian traffic, experimenting with the "Center Street Mall" on a temporary basis for events and Friday nights, learning about what has worked with successful outdoor malls elsewhere, "branding," and integrated lighting, awnings, and other unifying features.

One real key for the group was evaluation. Take a step and see if it works. This approach is pragmatic and at the same time continually tests the waters for change. The other major point was that the committee needed put itself behind the proposed events, to work together to make this idea real, and do it in a way that benefited commerce at each stage.

Practical steps towards large goals, combined with the dedication of individuals who may be working together for the first time, are themes touched on by all the projects in the Creative Communities Program. Turning those steps into reality while retaining the positive, shared energy will require hard work, but to me the conclusion of the planning phase has been fascinating, even inspiring. Rutland is making a strategic step forward with these plans. Resources will follow local leadership.

Paul Costello is executive director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

## St. Albans Messenger

Friday, 16 March 2007

### Arts center backers taking initial steps, rallying their forces

ST. ALBANS — Thirty people who gathered at the Northwestern Medical Center (NMC) here Thursday night supported the idea that St. Albans needs an arts center, and they seemed on board to help the project build legs. For two hours, Franklin and Grand Isle artists – and those who support the arts – brainstormed in NMC Conference Room A about the possible functions of an arts center, and what it could entail.

“With so much talent in Franklin County, it’s time for this talent to have a home,” said Ann Levy, a local artist, who serves on the year-old steering committee that jumpstarted the arts center project.

Paul Bruhn, executive director of Vermont Historic Preservation, began the session by describing other, flourishing arts centers in the state that began where St. Albans is now – with nothing.

Bruhn mentioned the Latchkiss Theater in Brattleboro, an art-deco theater with a 750-seat auditorium, movie screens, and retail space.

Bruhn also spoke of:

- the Brandon Artists Guild, which has helped boost the town’s pride over the past four to six years;
- the Rockingham Arts and Museum Project, which has resuscitated the town’s once-dying economy;
- Main Street Arts, in Saxon’s River;
- and the Vermont Arts Exchange in North Bennington, which has arts classes, sponsors a Halloween parade and a music series that features world-class performers who pass through the state to larger cities.

“There’s no one-size-fits-all in this process,” Bruhn said. “It’s really about what works best in your community.”

What might St. Albans need, Bruhn asked?

A large performing arts venue, complimented by a smaller one. Gallery and sales space for artists. Children’s performances.

Artist housing. Intergenerational art classes. A speaker series. Film. Summer art camps. And art-related tourist opportunities.

Later in the meeting, attendees chimed in with their own ideas for the local center, which included: a building (as a gathering point), studio space, regular performance and rehearsal space, rentable recording space (or partnerships with existing ones), a sales gallery, and an arts exchange program.

The list could have gone on and on; given the positive energy at last night's meeting, it will.

There was, however, some minor debate about the steering committee's draft mission statement:

"Our mission is to establish artistic expression as the focal point of our community.

"To create and sustain a demand for art and culture, by encouraging and educating artists and the community so that it may enhance and enrich the lives of all."

While some people suggested minor linguistic changes, others questioned why the mission statement was so long – or the need for it at all.

Jeff Young, of St. Albans City, said mission statements tend to change as the mission of its group changes.

"I think it would be a better use of time if we focused more on the priorities we want for the arts center and less on the mission statement," Young said.

Others thought the mission statement served as a proper framework and starting point.

"It gives us a place to go," said Dick Harper, Franklin County All Arts Council chairman.

Harper, Levy and Mike Curtis – who moderates the steering committee meetings – then introduced the group to the committee's proposed functions of an arts center.

There were six: inspire and create a vision, make accessible, make sustainable, create demand, nurture the business of art, and educate and facilitate.

Harper and Curtis emphasized the need for any arts center to run on multiple funding sources and find ways of generating revenue within itself, either through a small store or by renting office space.

Marketing the center and what it offers, on all levels, will also be integral to its success, Harper said.

"It's putting butts in the seats," he said.

The first link in the chain leading to an arts center project began in 2005, with the inaugural class of the Franklin-Grand Isle LEAD Program.

Curtis graduated from that class. His team's project focused on the creative economy in Franklin County, and how to bolster it.

St. Albans City subsequently obtained a state grant to further explore the local creative economy, and during a series of public meetings, the mantra rang again: St. Albans needs an arts center.

Various committees formed out of those meetings, including one about an arts center.

Last night, the steering committee also disseminated an arts center survey. Copies are available by contacting Curtis at [MichaelC@unionbankvt.com](mailto:MichaelC@unionbankvt.com) or visiting [www.ArtCenter.AllArts.org](http://www.ArtCenter.AllArts.org).

The next arts center meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on April 12, back in the NMC conference room. Then, the group will look at preliminary survey results and start discussing a possible summer program.

The steering committee meets on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month. The 5:30 p.m. sessions are held at Union Bank in St. Albans City.

## **WCAX TV Burlington, Vermont**

February 11, 2007

### Nordic Skating Clinic in the Islands – North Hero, Vermon

Nordic skating is becoming more popular in Vermont and businesses in the Champlain Islands couldn't be happier.

These don't look like most skates because they're designed for the outdoors, where the ice is not necessarily glass smooth. They're Nordic skates.

"The blades glide so much farther every time you push off. You glide twice as far," said Jamie Hess, who has been promoting Nordic skating for the last eight years since he discovered this sport on a visit to Sweden. "Where right out of Stockholm they have a one-hundred mile long lake that you can take the subway to. And you can skate all the way to the far end. That kind of lake and these kind of ice conditions are what really get people excited to do Nordic skating. And guess what, right here outside of Burlington, we have a one-hundred mile long lake, called Lake Champlain," Hess said.

All of these people didn't just show up accidentally. Many came specifically to try Nordic skating. It's a bonus for the Lake Champlain Islands, where the winter sees a major drop-off in business. The Vermont Council on Rural Development decided that this might be a good thing to promote. "There are people here today and hopefully they'll realize that this is a fun place to be in the winter and come back on other days," said Helen Jordan, with the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

A study has shown the tourist-based economy in Grand Isle county is thirteen times more busy in the summer than the winter. Hence, this kind of activity and Jordan says they're trying to end that.

It worked. The people came, the local economy got a boost and Nordic skating won some new fans.

[Andy Potter](#) - Channel 3 News

## **Vermont Public Radio Commentary**

*(HOST) Commentator Peter Gilbert says that here in New England at least, today's creative economy approach to community development has a lot in common with traditional Old Home Days - and even a couple of classic children's books.*

(GILBERT) Recently I've traveled to several Vermont towns as part of site visits designed to help communities plan local creative economy projects.

Many Vermont towns are concerned about both prosperity - particularly employment for young people - and preservation - preserving what's best about their community. Alas, that's nothing new.

Northern New England towns have wrestled with precisely those issues for two hundred years. They struggled after the collapse of the wool industry in the early nineteenth century and when California gold, rich Midwestern farmland, and the call of war enticed farmers to leave their hardscrabble hill farms. More recently, they've struggled as dairy farming has become increasingly difficult.

Some towns have turned to wonderful festivals both to draw visitors and dollars, and to draw attention to their community's assets and charm.

That's precisely the origin of Old Home Days - those community celebrations of town heritage, complete with parades and vintage costumes. Old Home Days started about a hundred years ago in New Hampshire, Vermont, and elsewhere. Old Home Days were deliberate attempts by struggling towns to encourage people who had moved away (and presumably made good elsewhere) to come back for a visit and perhaps, even, to stay.

Poet and author Donald Hall's children's book entitled *Old Home Day* tells the story of a New Hampshire village, its founding, its prosperous years, its decline, its annual Old Home Day celebration, and its recent revival - because people like a young couple drawn to the festivities want to live and raise a family in such a beautiful, vibrant place.

Similarly, Robert McCloskey, renowned author of *Make Way for Ducklings*, wrote a kids' book called *Lentil*, about a town's preparation for the return of the great Colonel Carter, who had paid for the town library, park, and monument. Banners and brass band await the great man at the train station. But when the Colonel steps off his train, the town sour puss, Old Sneep, starts sucking on a lemon as loudly as he can. The players in the brass band get all puckered up and can't play a note, and the Colonel's welcome is headed for disaster. But then Lentil, a local boy with a harmonica, starts playing "She'll be Coming Round the Mountain," the Colonel joins in, and the day is saved. The Colonel's homecoming is a success, and sure enough, he builds the town a hospital.

As the story suggests, it's not necessarily brass bands or extravagant fakery that will ensure the future of Vermont towns. It's the harmonicas - it's towns' recognizing who they really are and telling others. That's what will put them in good stead - both economically and as vibrant communities. Towns need to recognize their greatest assets and capitalize on them, being careful not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg in the process. If we're careful, thoughtful, and lucky, Vermont can be both special and prosperous.

*Peter Gilbert is the executive director of the Vermont Humanities Council.*

## Burlington Free Press

Friday, July 13, 2007

Island tour gets people off U.S. 2

By Lauren Ober  
Free Press Staff Writer

Most year-round Vermonters know there are places you just don't go in the summer because of the predictable crush of tourists that will be there: Camels Hump on a beautiful Saturday afternoon, the Ben & Jerry's factory in Waterbury, the village of Stowe, Church Street.

The Champlain Islands fall into that category as well, but folks up there want mainlanders to know there's more to the islands than summer tourists.

Saturday and Sunday mark the first "Discover the Heart of the Islands" open studio and farm tour in Grand Isle County. The initiative is aimed at showing people that there's more to the islands than what is immediately visible off U.S. 2.

The tour is one of three ideas generated by the Creative Communities program of the Vermont Council on Rural Development to spur economic development in Grand Isle County without losing its sense of history and place. Grand Isle County is one of several areas selected for the program. Most recently, St. Albans was selected to participate.

A year ago, Grand Isle residents, working with the Vermont Council on Rural Development, outlined three areas of improvement: promoting the islands in the winter, promoting the farms and artists of the islands, and identifying meeting spaces on the islands with the idea of possibly building something to accommodate musical and theater events and community meetings.

Last winter, the first goal was accomplished with a Nordic skating program on the frozen lake. Two large skating areas were kept open for part of the winter and people had the opportunity to learn how to Nordic skate on the ice.

The open farm and studio tour is an effort to fulfill the second goal of the program.

"The idea is to get people off of Route 2 to see some of the residents and get to know them," event organizer Jim Holzschuh said. "And we're certainly looking to sell some of the items we manufacture and create."

Of those participating in the weekend are vegetable and flower gardeners, potters, painters, weavers, furniture makers and people who raise animals. Nick Durso, a furniture maker from North Hero, was happy to open his studio to visitors.

"The exposure is great," Durso said. "Anything that brings people to the islands is great."

Kay Webb and her husband, Jim, run Webb's Antique Clocks and Art Gallery in Grand Isle. She paints watercolors, and he collects, restores and sells antique clocks. Kay Webb says she's looking forward to showing the wider community all that the islands have to offer in terms of the arts.

"We have a lot of talent in the islands. This is a very artsy area," Webb said.

Pam Perkins has been selling cut flowers at her Island Flower Farm in Grand Isle since 1993. Despite being on U.S. 2, Perkins says people often drive by so quickly, they don't notice she's there. By participating in the tour, she said she hopes people will slow down and stop to pick some of her flowers.

"I really wanted to support the program," Perkins said. "Anything that promotes the islands is wonderful."

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## Addison Independent

July 2, 2007

### Creative Communities Program shows shared vision

By ANGELO LYNN

MIDDLEBURY — More than 100 people turned out to offer ideas and their enthusiasm at the third meeting of the Creative Communities Program in Middlebury last Wednesday, setting the stage for action plans to be developed and volunteers to start formulating steps to make the initiatives become reality.

"There's so much energy and excitement at these meetings," Helen Labun Jordan said after the meeting, noting that the Middlebury area has been unique among the nine towns that have participated in the Vermont Council on Rural Development's program because "most everyone seems to share a common vision" for the area. Jordan, who is the director of the Creative Communities Program, observed that residents who have participated in the discussions haven't been divided over the vision for the area, but rather are more interested in figuring out how to move forward on the ideas.

Middlebury resident Nancy Malcolm, local coordinator of the effort, also told the crowd that a fourth project — developing business incubators — would be part of the effort because of the strong demand for that initiative. The topic was ranked fourth out of

numerous projects initially developed at the first two meetings. Typically, the Creative Communities Program has limited the initial scope to three projects, but strong demand for the project prompted its inclusion, Malcolm said.

The business incubator project wasn't discussed at Wednesday night's meeting, but will be developed within the next couple of weeks.

During the committee meetings Wednesday night, each group was to review on-going efforts in the community, develop potential action steps, set priorities for those action steps, and develop a list of potential resources to help achieve their goals.

After about two hours of committee discussion for each of the three projects, committee chairs presented brief summations of their respective meetings:

#### UTILIZING OTTER CREEK

- Otter Creek development: The mission is to recognize the Otter Creek, and particularly the Middlebury Falls area, as an untapped jewel of the downtown and to enhance its visual appearance as well as pedestrian access to the shoreline. The challenge the committee faced was to winnow down more than 20 prospective projects developed during the meeting to a few concrete and achievable goals that could jump-start the initiatives.

Town Planner Fred Dunnington reviewed previous plans and maps dating back to the early 1970s for a historical perspective of what had been envisioned and what had been accomplished to date, and also why many previous initiatives had been stymied. Lack of funding for the projects was noted as a primary cause of past failures and the committee agreed that a focus on funding should be an early priority for the group with an emphasis on tapping into resources that did not depend on raising local taxes.

Included in the early initiatives, the group agreed that creating a resource map and inventory of public access points up and down the Otter Creek was a necessary first step. Such a map would help the Middlebury-area determine how feasible it might be to create a more extensive path (bicycle and pedestrian) upstream and downstream of the Middlebury Falls for several miles. The group also will determine a project of scale it can readily achieve in the near future, while developing more ambitious long-term projects, such as a boardwalk along the shoreline in the downtown area.

Other long-term projects included improving access and the appearance to what was called the "ice house park" just upstream of the falls (near the trestle); providing a business plan to fund the various projects; investigating river hydraulics to better understand ways to move the debris that gathers in the large eddy below and north of the falls on down the creek; better marketing of the creek's aesthetic and recreation appeal; and better education of the community as to the potential importance of the creek to the community's economy.

Discussion also focused on ways to incorporate the college and business communities into the efforts, as well as the many state and local recourses that could be tapped to help with the various projects.

The next meeting was set for July 11 at 6:30 p.m. at the Ilsley Library meeting room.

#### PIONEER IN ENERGY

- Alternative energy: With the many local organizations and groups already pursuing various initiatives within the energy sector, the group agreed that its first goal was to assess and inventory those efforts and determine what was needed to help carry out their missions. The group would also look at ways to coordinate the various efforts so they can tap into shared resources and strengths.

While no specific projects were discussed in the wrap-up comments by committee chair Rep. Steve Maier, D-Middlebury, he noted that the mission of the group was to help the area become “a pioneer in alternative energy.” Deciding just what that meant and how to accomplish that objective was the subject of much of the evening’s debate, he said.

The next meeting was set for July 18 at 7 p.m. at the Ilsley Library.

#### ARTS ASSOCIATION

- Umbrella association for the arts community: The group noted that there was no equivalent of a Middlebury Area Arts Council and discussed what such a council might do were it established.

Among the goals of the group, the committee agreed to work on staging events during the slow season for area businesses; sponsor courses for the arts community on business strategies; lobby and advocate about the importance of arts for the culture and economy of the area — all with the over-arching vision of “slowing down and enjoying life.”

The next meeting will be set in late July via email.

Area residents who were not at Wednesday’s meeting, or at prior meetings, can still be involved in these efforts by attending the next meetings of the respective committees. More information on those meetings can be found by contacting Jordon, the director of the Creative Communities Program, at 802-223-3793, or going online at [www.vtrural.org](http://www.vtrural.org); go to “contact us” and contact Helen Jordan via email.

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## 'Creative' forum narrows economic focus

By *PATRICK McARDLE Herald Staff*

MANCHESTER — At the second of three public forums dealing with the Creative Economy program on June 14, three areas were chosen to be the focus of the final forum on July 11.

Manchester Planning Director and Zoning Administrator Lee Krohn, who hosted the forums with Beth Meacham, director of the Greater Manchester Arts Council, said he was pleased with the forum results.

"I was intrigued by the nature of the discussion, and by the results of the voting and consensus-building process. I think that the three priorities will be good for the community. Of course, that doesn't mean we discard the rest (of the ideas proposed), but you've got to start somewhere and with a limited subset of ideas, so that you can harness time, energy and resources to begin to build successes small and large," he said.

In an e-mail giving a synopsis of the latest forum, Helen Labun Jordan, director of the Creative Communities Program for the Vermont Council on Rural Development, described the three chosen projects.

The first is creating an infrastructure for faster and improved telecommunications.

"Communications technology is key to many aspects of life in Manchester. Many workers rely on telecommuting; home-based businesses have customers outside of the immediate region; even businesses with traditional storefronts rely on the Internet and other technologies to be in touch with the rest of the world," Jordan wrote.

A state-of-the-art communications structure is also expected to appeal to tourists and the kind of young people the state is attempting to attract to live and work in Vermont.

The second goal is to create a market for selling local foods.

Because of Manchester's accessibility to New York City, Albany and Boston and the lure of its many outlet stores, forum attendees decided the town would make a good home for a store that sells locally grown foods and Vermont wines.

The final goal is to make Manchester a hub for sustainable energy businesses.

Under the leadership of former Town Manager Peter Webster, James Hand, owner of Hand Motors, Hand's son Thomas Hand and town employee Bear Scovil, Manchester has already shown some leadership in the state toward reducing energy use.

Thomas Hand helped begin a successful challenge in Manchester that replaced 30,000

light bulbs with long-lasting, energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs.

Webster and James Hand were instrumental in supporting a ballot item, approved at this year's Town Meeting, to pay for carbon offsets. While the item as passed called for the town to study ways to reduce its carbon waste, the effort was still believed to be a first of its kind for a Vermont town.

Many scientists believe carbon waste contributes significantly to the greenhouse effect that contributes to global warming. At the forum, ideas proposed include developing a "green" energy building that would serve as an arts and business incubator, and trying to attract companies that develop sustainable energy and related products.

Meacham said she was really pleased by the turnout at the most recent forum which she estimated at around 40 people.

"It brought a whole different segment of the community out. It was a rewardingly surprising discussion. It moved in a whole different discussion than you would have thought it would but then it came back to some of the key issues that Manchester residents care about," she said.

Krohn noted the differences between the first and second forums as well.

"The second forum was interesting, in that, not uncommonly, we had a mix of folks who were present for the first event and many who were not. Thus, you end up with a curious mix of old and new issues or new requests for work effort for matters long ago done or worked on or accomplished," Krohn said.

The last forum scheduled for the creative economy discussion is scheduled to begin at 6:30 p.m. July 11. It will be hosted by the Maple Street School.

Jordan said a resource team drawn from around the state will attend the forum to help develop an action plan.

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