



The Vermont Council on Rural Development

Fall 2004 Newsletter

Welcome to the Fall Newsletter! A Message from VCRD Chair, Hal Cohen

This has been a very exciting summer and early fall. At the **National Rural Development Program** conference in Oklahoma City in August it became clear that our core federal funding, which has been significantly reduced, is ultimately going to be phased out. Considering our recent achievements and our ambitious work plan, we are optimistic that we can find the state, foundation, and private funding that we need to continue serving Vermont's rural communities. Our recent **Summit on Planning** brought together Vermont leaders who tackled the various planning issues facing our state and has resulted in the establishment of the **Vermont Council on Planning**, which will build strategic recommendations to improve the structure of the system. Our **telecommunications** efforts have helped 10 rural towns acquire broadband internet access this year, and the **Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation**, founded and produced by VCRD, has submitted its final report and recommendations on "**Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy.**" We continue to facilitate the efforts of local communities as they work to develop their capacity to prosper through our **Community Visit** process, and we have just finished the first phase of this process in Bristol. As we move forward, it is appropriate that we thank you all--friends, members, and colleagues—for your partnership in support of local leadership and in service to rural communities.

VCRD Board Developments

The VCRD Board reluctantly accepted the resignations last month of **Cynthia Gubb** of Chittenden Bank, and **Marcia Merrill** of Montgomery and Merrill. Their contributions have been important to the progress of VCRD's work over the last several years and they will be greatly missed!

In September the Board elected **Peter Mallary** of Fairlee to a private sector position on the Council.

2004 Summit on the Structure of Planning in Vermont

On August 11, 2004, the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) held a Summit on Planning at the Vermont Statehouse in Montpelier: "Planning for Vermont's Future: Building a System that Works." Designed to begin the process of evaluating the challenges before the planning system in Vermont and to propose potential solutions, the Summit featured facilitated roundtable discussions of key issues in the Vermont system of town, regional, and state planning. 180 participants at the Summit enumerated an extensive list of challenges to planning in Vermont and produced a set of recommendations for the Vermont Council on Planning to consider as it develops a strategic plan to improve the system. All major points of testimony are captured in the Summit Report which is available at the VCRD website.

The following list does not reflect VCRD's positions on planning issues but summarizes some of the chief concerns of attendees:

- ❖ Planners and customers have concerns that the system of planning in Vermont is unwieldy and inefficient.
- ❖ Many Vermont towns lack or have vague town plans, making the process of interpretation unclear and future development unpredictable.
- ❖ Town Plans are not well coordinated regionally, and supports to municipalities by various Regional Planning Commissions are inconsistent.

- ❖ Incentives are weak for municipal and regional planning; the incentive program offered to municipalities under Act 200 remains unfulfilled.
- ❖ It is difficult to engage the public in the planning process; many people do not see the incentives for participating or the consequences of not participating; many local planners may lack the skills and training to build engagement in community dialogue in the advance of setting plans. Public engagement often occurs in reaction to projects (NIMBY), rather than earlier in the planning process.
- ❖ Regional Planning Commissions do not have the resources or authority to provide effective coordination between municipal and state planning.
- ❖ Because Regional Planning Commissions receive grants and funds for particular projects, their focus on coordinating effective regional plans can be diluted.
- ❖ The Act 200 statute provisions for state agency planning are not implemented; planning by state agencies isn't systematically coordinated with other agencies, or, in many cases, with regional plans. This can lead to a "crisis management" approach and one in which agencies do not recognize common ownership in plans.
- ❖ Act 200 doesn't directly consider regional differences or the realities of the State's growth and scale issues; one size doesn't fit all.
- ❖ The regulatory aspects of plans can be inconsistent with their role as guiding visions; Vermont's planning process is often focused on regulation rather than emerging opportunities.
- ❖ Land use planning processes are currently disconnected from economic development discussions and planning; economic impacts are not fully represented in municipal and regional plans.
- ❖ Vermont's 2-year gubernatorial term discourages long-term planning commitments at the State level.
- ❖ Vertical (between towns, regions, and the state), and horizontal (between state agencies, or among Regional Planning Commissions) communications are inadequate, and the locus of authority for planning decisions is not always clear. This undermines coordination and leads to inconsistency and undue complexity.

Vermont Council on Planning

With the support of the Legislature and the participation of key leaders in the Douglas Administration, VCRD has instituted the Vermont Council on Planning, a one-year policy council charged to evaluate the issues identified at the Summit on Planning and build strategies for improving the structure of planning in Vermont. Members of the Vermont Council on Planning include:

Bob Ackland, Sugarbush
Stanley Borofsky, Sam's Outdoor Outfitters
Andy Broderick, ED, Housing Vermont
Greg Brown, ED, Chittenden County Planning Commission
Elizabeth Courtney, ED, VT Natural Resources Council
Paul Gillies, Tarrant Marks & Gillies
John Hall, Commissioner, Housing and Community Affairs

Beth Humstone, ED, Forum on Sprawl
Steven Jeffrey, ED, VT League of Cities and Towns
Representative Bill Johnson, Chair, House Natural Resources
Steven Kerr, Secretary, Agency of Agriculture and Marketing
Lee Krohn, Manchester Municipal Planner
Jolinda LaClair, State Director, USDA Rural Development (VCP Chair)
Senator Ginny Lyons, Chair, Senate Natural Resources
Pat McDonald, Secretary, VTrans, Agency of Transportation
Bob Miller, REM Development Company
Sharon Murray, Legislative Coordinator, VT Planners Association
Pat Moulton Powden, Chair, Vermont Environmental Board
Chuck Ross, State Director, Senator Leahy's Office
Brian Searles, St. Albans City Manager
Dawn Terrill, Deputy Secretary, Commerce and Community Affairs
Paul Costello, ED, Vermont Council on Rural Development (Producer)
Brenda Hausauer, Project Manager

Community Visits

The **Johnson** Visit Report and Action Plan can be viewed on the VCRD website.

On October 12 VCRD produced a **Community Visit Day** in **Bristol** where residents participated in nine focus forums to consider issues ranging from water and sewer infrastructure to building a common vision for the town. VCRD will facilitate a **Bristol Community Meeting** on November 16th where we will report on the significant challenges and opportunities before Bristol and work with community members as they decide their priorities for the future and set strategies to reach them.

Early in 2005, VCRD will be working with **Chelsea** through the Community Visit program.

The Council will soon identify a second community to work with in 2005; VCRD is always interested in discussing the role that a Community Visit may have with communities; please contact us for more information.

Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation: *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy*

For the past year the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) has coordinated the efforts of the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI) as it analyzed the connection between cultural, community, and economic development throughout Vermont and worked to build a plan to develop the Creative Economy in the state.

The VCCI came to see the "Creative Economy" in three key ways: as a rapidly growing economic sector in Vermont, as an essential element in major community development projects in the state, and as an essential attribute of a broad range of businesses that are adapting to changes in the global economy with innovative products, designs, and marketing.

After a year of study the VCCI concluded its work with the release of its final report in early October. With the support of **Jane's Trust** and assistance of **Liz Stedman** of Kimball Sherman and Ellis, VCRD will be carrying the ideas, recommendations and models from the report to communities statewide, and to state, federal and non-profit leaders who can support the progress of these communities.

VCRD owes special thanks to **Chip Evans** for his diplomacy as Chair of the VCCI, **Alex Aldrich** for his energy and encouragement, and **Michael Levine**, VCCI Project Director, for his tireless dedication to getting the job done right.

In addition to those recognized in the report's acknowledgements, VCRD deeply appreciates the partnership of **Green Mountain Coffee Roasters** in the printing of the final report. Visit the VCRD website to look at the report or contact us by email for a paper copy.

Broadband Telecom

Following VCRD assessment, aggregation and/or facilitation work with towns and providers, the following towns have accessed new or expanded broadband services: **Barton, Brandon, Burke, Lyndonville, Sutton, Kirby, Newark, St. Johnsbury, Island Pond, East Charleston.** In the last few months VCRD's leaders in the field, **Laura and Al Duey,** have been working with a number of additional communities toward expanded access: **Albany, Greensboro, Lowell, Lunenburg, Stannard, Westmore, Reading, West Windsor, East Montpelier, Westford, Fairlee, Grand Isle, Marlboro, Marshfield/Plainfield, and Stamford.** Several of these communities have completed assessment and aggregation processes and have applied for grants to implement solutions through the Agency of Commerce Broadband Grants program.

Investment in VCRD's efforts has come from the **Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, USDA Rural Development, the VT Legislature, the Vermont Broadband Council, UVM's Center for Rural Studies, and Senator Leahy's Office.** With their support, rural Vermont communities are making rapid progress today!

VCRD Wins National Award

The Office of Community Development in USDA Rural Development has recognized VCRD with a **Rural Impact Award.** One of 4 states to be honored at the National Rural Development Partnership Conference in Oklahoma City in August, Vermont's award cites VCRD's efforts to advance agricultural policy through the foundation and management of the Vermont Agriculture Viability Council in 2002-2003.

Regional State Rural Development Council Retreat in Vermont

Seven State Rural Development Council Executive Directors from the Northeast Region will meet in Montpelier in October to consider common challenges and analyze potentials for regional projects. Member states of the National Rural Development Partnership, New York, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Vermont will be represented.

VCRD Membership Campaign

VCRD's membership campaign has formalized partnerships with over 80 individuals and organizations. To become a member of VCRD, send contact information (form on website) and a check for \$25 (individual), \$100 (organization) or \$500 (leadership) to VCRD, PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601, or call 828-6022.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development

Because of its neutrality and ability to bring diverse interests together, VCRD has a unique public policy role and a responsibility to raise questions that span organizational sectors and have broad import for the future of the state. VCRD welcomes your comments, your suggestions, your membership, and your support. Contact Paul Costello, Executive Director, at vcrd@sover.net or visit www.sover.net/~vcrd. VCRD is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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