



The Vermont Council on Rural Development

Fall 2005

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

From the Board

Hal Cohen, VCRD Board Chair

For more than a decade, Vermont Council on Rural Development has served as an advocate for Vermonters, developing initiatives that are innovative and competitive in the global economy, while respecting the character and resources of rural Vermont. Programs such as Community Visits, Creative Communities, Governor's Summits and planning councils have advanced agricultural policy, improved the lives of rural youth, and impacted policy decisions in response to pressing local needs. VCRD recently provided testimony in support of the 2007 Farm Bill, urging USDA Rural Development to provide crucial funding that will allow state councils such as VCRD to continue their important work. VCRD cannot, however, rely on federal funding alone. The work of the Council depends on local, state and foundation support, and on the generosity of its members. If you are not a member of VCRD, we encourage you to join now by filling out the membership form found in this newsletter. By doing so, you become part of a dynamic organization dedicated to improving the lives and opportunities of those living in rural Vermont. Thank you!

VCRD Staff

Paul Costello, Executive Director
Bonnie Smoren, Executive Assistant
Helen Labun Jordan, Director, Creative Communities Program

VCRD Board

Roger Albee, VT Farm Service Agency
Brian Keefe, Senator Jeffords' Office
Jolinda LaClair, USDA Rural Development
Jennifer Nelson, Congressman Sanders' Office
Paul Brewster, USDA Forest Service
Chuck Ross, Senator Leahy's Office
Steve Kerr, VT Dept. of Agriculture
Allen Evans, HR Investment Council
Dawn Terrill, VT Agency of Transportation
Jonathan Wood, Forests, Parks and Recreation
Jeffrey Francis, VT Superintendents Association
Catherine Dimitruk, NW Regional Planning Commission
Steve Patterson, Northeastern VT Development Association
Michael Welch, Town of St. Johnsbury
Alex Aldrich, VT Arts Council
Hal Cohen, Central VT Community Action Council
Barbara Grimes, Burlington Electric
Fred Schmidt, UVM Center for Rural Studies
Bob Ackland, Sugarbush Resort
Tony Elliott, Sovernet
Joseph Fusco, Casella Waste Systems
Marie Houghton, IBM –**NEW MEMBER!**
Richard White, Community National Bank

Contact Us:

Vermont Council on Rural Development
89 Main Street PO Box 1384 Montpelier, VT 05601
(802) 828-6024 or (802) 828-6022
vcrd@sover.net www.sover.net/~vcrd

Community Visit Program

A recent early season snowstorm did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm of Woodstock residents during VCRD's Community Visit on October 25. More than one hundred-sixty people ventured out to locations around town to share their thoughts on issues such as community identity, economic development, housing, education and other topics identified by the community as vital to Woodstock's future.

In Woodstock, those concerns included how to reach consensus on downtown amenities, including restrooms and parking, where and how to create affordable housing, the challenge of diversifying an economy beyond the existing service-oriented base, and how to best nurture the living, breathing town beneath the postcard image. Some of these issues are unique to Woodstock, and some are shared by communities around Vermont.

As a first step in the Community Visit process, Woodstock residents met with VCRD's resource team – experts from the public and private sector in housing, technology, the arts, community and economic development, and other fields to explore the challenges and opportunities before the town. The resource team will make recommendations and will be available as the town moves through the process of creating action plans designed to address the most pressing issues.

Community Visit Day is a fun, engaging, highly productive opportunity for every member of a community to have a voice

in a town's future, as well as the ear of those resources who can help.

Woodstock Profile

County: Windsor Chartered: 1761

Population: 3200

An historic community with a strong cultural and recreational environment, Woodstock's natural resources include the Ottaquechee River and Gilbert Hill, home of the first rope ski tow in the United States.

www.woodstockvt.com

A day of hard work, thoughtful listening, and unity, the town celebrated this first step with a free community-wide dinner at the end of the day. VCRD will return to Woodstock at the end of November to facilitate the creation of task forces, and the development of action plans.

The Community Visit Program is a unique process that melds a town's local capacity and vision, VCRD's expert facilitation and resource provision, and vibrant democratic forums to create and implement action plans that respond to a town's individual concerns. VCRD conducts two Community Visits per year in towns and villages throughout Vermont.

"A key component of the process is bringing key players and decision makers to the community. In our case, these people saw a community that was getting its act together and wanted to support those efforts with funding. The Community Visit process is dynamic enough to recognize and adjust for differences in a community, and produce different results."

Duncan Hastings, Town Manager of Johnson

VCRD IS SEEKING TOWNS FOR 2006 COMMUNITY VISITS!!
If your town would like a Community Visit from VCRD, contact us at
(802) 828-6024 or (802) 828-6022 or send an email to vcrd@sover.net.

Updates

2005 Rural Summit

VCRD's 2005 Rural Summit in August brought over 200 Vermonters to the Statehouse in Montpelier to examine divisive issues, advance consensus and share their concerns and experience. The topic, "Beyond the Divide; Conflict and Paths to Community Success," addressed a range of complex problems in Vermont's diverse rural communities that have no simple or single solution. Issues ranging from housing and rural transportation to agriculture and municipal spending provided a broad canvas for ideas. A central element in VCRD's mission was achieved – to provide a forum for dialogue that enables the engagement of community members in a thoughtful, respectful, and democratic discussion, which can be a catalyst for further conversation and positive action. All of the ideas expressed at the Summit have been transcribed into the 2005 Rural Summit Report. To receive a copy of the report, please contact Bonnie Smoren at vcrd2@sover.net, or (802) 828-6022.

Vermont Council on Planning

The Vermont Council on Rural Development founded, produced and facilitated the Vermont Council on Planning to evaluate the structure of the planning system in Vermont and to consider ways to strengthen and coordinate planning efforts and their outcomes to Vermont communities. After hearing testimony from hundreds of Vermonters, carefully evaluating the existing system's challenges and strengths, and meeting for more than one year, a final report is about to be issued. The report will advance recommendations in four key areas:

- ❖ Governance, Authority and Leadership
- ❖ Coordination and Collaboration
- ❖ Education and Training
- ❖ Issues of Growth and Scale

The Council will present its recommendations to the Administration and legislature in the next session, and its findings will be available in a published report expected in mid-December.

Telecommunications

The availability of Internet access has been identified as a crucial element in strengthening the economic vitality of rural regions. About 40% of the state is lacking broadband and the economic opportunities that depend on it. Rather than waiting for the market to deliver solutions, VCRD is committed to working toward the advancement of community-based initiatives that provide affordable Internet access throughout Vermont.

Through the auspices of a USDA Rural Development grant, VCRD is working to establish a sustainable collection of wireless Internet access points across the Northeast Kingdom. Working closely with Duey Associates, the assessment and testing phase of this initiative have been completed, with the first "hotspot" coming online in late October.

Forest Products

VCRD's Forest Products Grant Review Committee is reviewing proposals that will expand and market Vermont's wood products brand in five key areas that will promote sales and contribute to job creation throughout the industry. Decisions are expected in late November.

VCRD Launches Creative Communities Program

Vermont Council on Rural Development is excited to announce the launch of its newest initiative, the **Creative Communities Program**. VCRD has been studying and promoting the idea of the creative economy in Vermont for two years. In 2003, VCRD convened the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation, which examined the potential of the creative economy in Vermont and articulated an action plan for its advancement. That report, *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy*, was released in October 2004.

The creative economy is based on the premise that communities that encourage creative cultural and business development will attract a vibrant workforce, while sustaining a vigorous economic environment. VCRD's new program will offer assistance to towns that are looking for innovative strategies to turn their ideas about the creative economy into tangible economic success in their community. The program will provide facilitated sessions that will help communities build strategic plans to advance the creative economy and establish relationships with entities that can provide crucial resources – both in intellectual capital and funding opportunities – to help them reach their goals.

Building on its successful Community Visit Program model, the Creative Communities Program will utilize public forums, professional facilitation, and an extensive network of resources to build sustainable economic growth compatible with each town's vision.

"The creative economy means jobs for Vermonters. Between 1997 and 2001, Vermont's creative cluster had a growth rate of 5.4% - the fastest of all New England States. These figures are conservative; they do not take into account the multiplier effects that these enterprises have on economic development across the board."

Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation

VCRD will select up to 14 towns in the next two years to participate in this program. Selected towns may be in various stages of planning, and will represent diverse size, resources, locations and needs. All selected communities must display evidence that they can engage a broad range of community members, have enthusiastic local leadership, and garner support from diverse sources.

There will be three application rounds over the next year, with the first application deadline occurring on Friday, December 2nd.

Communities interested in receiving more information or in applying for participation in the Creative Communities Program, should contact Program Director, Helen Labun Jordan at creativeecon@gmail.com or (802)223-3793.



VCRD 2005-2006 Membership

Members join VCRD partners in promoting opportunities in rural communities throughout the State of Vermont. Members receive VCRD program reports, quarterly newsletters, Annual Reports, and may participate as resources to communities and policy dialogues as appropriate. To become a member of VCRD, send contact information and a check for \$25 (Individual), \$100 (Organization), or \$500 (Leadership Contribution) to VCRD, PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development deeply appreciates the partnership of our members in the work of the Council. Annual membership dues help cover the operating expenses of the VCRD.

VCRD is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Our VT State Tax ID number is 125249 and our Federal ID number is 03-0354510.

Organization:	_____
Name/Title:	_____
Address:	_____

Phone:	_____ Fax: _____
Email:	_____

_____ \$25.00 Individual Member Dues
_____ \$100.00 Organization Member Dues
_____ \$500.00 Leadership Contribution

Please make check payable to: Vermont Council on Rural Development. Thank you so much for your support!

Paul Costello, Executive Director
Vermont Council on Rural Development
89 Main Street, PO Box 1384
Montpelier, VT 05601-1384
802-828-6024 802-828-6014 (fax)
Email: vcrd@sover.net
Web Site: www.sover.net/~vcrd

VCRD is an equal opportunity employer and provider.