



The Vermont Council on Rural Development Summer 2003 Newsletter

What a beautiful place Vermont is in the Summertime! We are so lucky to live and work where communities are real and vital, where we can know our partners statewide, and where each of us, individuals and organizations, has the ability to make a real impact. It is easy to love Vermont—and be optimistic about its future! But, to business! Welcome to VCRD's summer update of news and activities—and thanks for your part in helping to move our common efforts forward!

Telecommunications

“NEK Connect” activities to expand! VCRD is currently working with four Northeast Kingdom towns that have assessed their demand for broadband services and are now in negotiations with potential providers to attract services or creatively design local solutions.

We are organizing to offer assistance to additional towns. VCRD has obtained resources through the VT Legislature (led by the efforts of the Senate Institutions Committee), the Vermont Center for Rural Studies, Senator Leahy's Office, and the Vermont Broadband Council. Thanks to these new resources, VCRD can accept applications from (and nominations on behalf of) communities that lack affordable high-speed internet access, and help them to attract services or build solutions. For more information or an application, please contact the main VCRD office or call Laura and Al Duey at 467-1266 or 467-1273,

After a broad discussion of telecom issues and the Vermont State broadband contracts in the Senate Institutions Committee, the Vermont Legislature passed an Institutions Bill calling for a review of the role of state purchasing and the opportunity to leverage access (and so deployment) in underserved parts of the state. The pertinent part of the bill (H. 457) states that: *“In consultation with the Vermont Council on Rural Development Telecommunications Committee, broadband vendors in Vermont, and the department of public service [sic], the office [of the Chief Information Officer] shall evaluate the potential for and advisability of allowing businesses to purchase limited broadband services through state contracts in areas where such services are currently unavailable or are prohibitively expensive.”* The bill calls for a report to Senate and House Institutions Committees in January.

VCRD believes that organized purchasing pools in local communities can attract or develop services. We also hold that the public interest in the State of Vermont is served by pro-active efforts to bridge the “digital divide” to support economic opportunity and community development in every town in the state.

Community Visits

VCRD conducts two Community Visits annually and has produced visits for towns throughout the state since 1996. In the past two years visits have been held in Northfield, Troy/Westfield/Jay, Poultney, and Enosburg. The process brings a 25-person leadership team to attend day-long focus forums in a selected rural community. Then VCRD conducts a three-month process with the community, reviewing issues, prioritizing challenges, setting goals, establishing task forces and work plans, and, finally, building connections to resources.

Communities are selected for visits based on their readiness to take a hard look at the challenges ahead and their desire to set starting points for full public involvement in actions to move forward. VCRD is currently in the process of identifying the next two communities where it will offer the Community Visit process over the next year. To nominate your community, or to share your suggestions, email or call VCRD!

Vermont Rural Needs Assessment

Two months ago VCRD commissioned Roberta A. Harold Associates to produce a compilation of relevant statistics on eight issue areas that rural communities have identified as their priorities over the last seven years of VCRD "Community Visits".

The recently completed product of this study, the Vermont Rural Needs Assessment, is a 120-page compilation of data concerning some of the fundamental challenges before rural communities today. It includes sections on Creating Rural Jobs, Making Educational Progress, Developing Downtowns, Meeting Rural Housing Needs, Engaging Youth, Improving Public Safety, Municipal Planning and Communications, and Planning for New Infrastructure. VCRD sees the Assessment as a work in progress, essentially a set of starting points for discussions at the Rural Roundtable (scheduled for August 21 at Vermont Technical College) and the Governor's Summit to take place this fall. All Roundtable registrants will receive a copy in advance; others may obtain a copy by sending a check for \$10 payable to VCRD at the address listed at the end of this newsletter.

VCRD's Rural Roundtable: "Beyond the Postcard; Envisioning the Future of Rural Vermont"

The 2003 Roundtable will be held at VTC on August 21st, 2003. Register by August 5th to receive the Rural Needs Assessment in advance.

Produced by VCRD, **hosted by USDA Rural Development and Governor James Douglas**, the work-session will address the eight challenges enumerated in the Vermont Rural Needs Assessment. VCRD will consolidate input taken at the Roundtable into an **Assessment, Vision, and Action Plan for Vermont Rural Development** to be presented to participants in the fall Governor's Summit. The report should also serve as a key policy document for federal, state, non-profit and private review, consideration, and implementation. The Roundtable will be a working rural development conference, a conference without major presentations, where participants' vision and leadership will count!

2003 Governor's Rural Summit

The Governor's Summit is a VCRD-produced retreat where leaders from federal programs and congressional offices work with the Governor's administration to coordinate responses to rural issues. The fall 2003 Governor's Rural Summit, "Strengthening Rural Communities," will address four key areas of concern for rural community development: The Challenge of Youth Engagement, Planning for New Infrastructure; Energy and Telecom, Developing Downtowns, and Rural Economic Development Challenges.

The Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI); *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy*

Over the last few months VCRD has instituted a new policy council with a one-year mission: to analyze the role of and challenges to the Creative Economy in the State of Vermont and build a practical and strategic plan for its advancement. Over the course of the next year, VCCI will evaluate the needs of Vermont communities and the current organizational structure of this economic sector and build a comprehensive set of policy recommendations to deliver to the Governor, Vermont's Legislature and Congressional delegation, businesses and organizations within the sector, and interested parties statewide.

The VCCI is particularly concerned with the role of the arts, culture, history and preservation in Vermont as foundations for our 'sense of place', for community development efforts statewide, and as a basis for attracting and supporting the entrepreneurs and creative developers of innovative enterprises.

Members of the VCCI are: Alex Aldrich, Vermont Arts Council, Andy Broderick, Housing Vermont, Paul Bruhn, Preservation Trust of Vermont, Ann Cummings, Vermont State Senate, David Donath, Woodstock Foundation, Chip Evans, Chair, Vermont Human Resources Investment Council, Peter Gilbert, Vermont Humanities Council, Kevin Graffagnino, Vermont Historical Society, Peggy Kannenstine, Visual Artist, Charles Lief, The Hartland Group, Peter Mallary, Behind the Times/It's

Classified Newspapers, **Richard Marron**, Vermont State House of Representatives, **Bobbe Maynes**, Heart of the Village Inn, **Robert McBride**, Rockingham Arts and Museum Project, **Pat Menduni**, Senator Jeffords Office, **Gretchen Saries**, Senator Leahy Office, **Richard Saunders**, Middlebury College Museum of Art, **Gerianne Smart**, Smart Communications, **Elizabeth Stedman**, Kimball Sherman Ellis, **Paul Costello**, Producer, Vermont Council on Rural Development, **Garrett Kimberly**, New England Council, and **Michael Levine**, Project Director

Forest Products

The **Vermont Forest Products Council (VFPC)** will release its final report in early August. This *Blueprint for Action* is designed to serve as an action plan to promote value-added wood manufacturing in the State of Vermont. As such, it documents 24 Action Steps in four broad areas: Marketing, Economic Development, Education and Training, and Wood Resources. Essentially, the report is a call to leadership—from the Governor’s Office and Statehouse to united leadership within the forest products sector—to work together toward a viable wood products economy that provides jobs and supports rural communities throughout the state. VCRD will be presenting the document to the Douglas Administration and Legislature in the coming months. Contact VCRD for a printed copy of the report, or review the document on the VCRD website.

VCRD deeply appreciates the commitment of time, energy, and perseverance in deliberation of the members of the VFPC: **Susan Bartlett**, State Senator, **Tim Copeland**, Copeland Furniture, **Paul Costello**, VCRD, **Bill Johnson**, State Representative, **Mark Lorenzo**, National Wildlife Federation, **Conrad Motyka** (through 2002) Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, **Mary Jeanne Packer**, VT Wood Manufacturers Assn., **Jeff Parsons** (Chair), Beeken/Parsons, Inc., **Albert Perry**, State Representative, **Charles Shackleton**, Charles Shackleton Furniture, **Richard Smith**, Department of Economic Development, **Jonathan Wood**, Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, and **Brenda Hausauer**, the VFPC Coordinator. It has been a great team!

VCRD Membership Campaign

VCRD is working to formalize its relationships and bring together partners concerned with rural development issues who come from across the spectrum and all corners of the state. Members will join VCRD to promote opportunities in rural communities throughout the State of Vermont. VCRD Members will be invited to the bi-annual VCRD Rural Roundtables to participate in the ‘summit-style’ development of rural issues reports and action plans. Members will also receive VCRD program reports, quarterly newsletters, and listing in future VCRD Annual Reports. Finally, Members may participate as resources to communities and policy dialogues as appropriate.

In the last few months, we have been pleased to welcome the following Individual and Organizational Members:

Individual Member

Vaughn Collins
Barbara Grimes
Robert Justis
Garrett Kimberly
Bill Kurtz
Jolinda LaClair
Stephanie Lahar
Sydney Lea/Robin Barone
Allen Matthews
John McCloughry
Marcia Merrill
Jennifer Nelson

Organizational Members

Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council
Cabot Creamery
Casella Waste Systems
Central VT Community Action Council
Central VT Public Service Corporation
Chittenden Bank
Jay Peak Resort
Lamoille County Regional Planning Commission
National Life
Montgomery & Merrill, CPA
National Wildlife Federation; Northeast Nat.Resource Center
Northwest Regional Planning Commission

Sara Rice
Tim Smith

Orton Family Foundation
Preservation Trust of Vermont
Smugglers' Notch Resort
Snelling Center for Government
UVM Center for Rural Studies
Verizon
Vermont Community Foundation
Vermont Council on the Arts
Vermont Economic Development Authority
Vermont Department of Economic Development
Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
Vermont Human Resources Investment Council
Vermont Land Trust
Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, Inc.
Yankee Farm Credit
Yellow Wood Associates

All of us at VCRD are sincerely grateful for the leadership and commitment of our partners in support of Vermont communities! To become a member of VCRD, send contact information (form attached) and a check for \$25 (individual) or \$100 (organization) 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.

Vermont Council on Rural Development

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