



The Vermont Council on Rural Development Summer 2004 Newsletter

What an interesting framework of economic opportunity we have in Vermont! **Buy Local** has become a watchword for farm products. **Adding Value** is a key to progress for the forest and agricultural sector. **Marketing the Vermont Brand** has become a unifying strategy for capturing sales and premiums in the global economy for everything from technologies to cheeses to crafts. Who can doubt that we face a time of economic transition where **Creativity and Innovation** will be at a premium and where **Planning** for new infrastructure, be it broadband or energy, will be increasingly imperative? But even as Vermonters are challenged to create, adapt, and respond, part of our economic success is and will be in the preservation of Vermont's uniqueness, authentic communities, and landscape—for their own sake, for the quality of life they support, but also for the foundation they play in our economic future. Vermont *is* special; it has an economic identity, a sense of place, and a human scale that are tremendous assets. VCRD is proud to be a partner in economic development planning in Vermont, a supporter of the efforts of Vermont communities, the producer of the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation, and the designer of the nascent Vermont Council on Planning—an effort to improve the structure of the planning system in the state...so that we get it right.

VCRD Board Development

VCRD welcomes newly elected board members, **Bob Ackland**, President of Sugarbush Resort, and **Brian Keefe**, Community Liaison from Senator Jeffords Office.

At the VCRD Board Retreat in June three directors were re-elected to four year terms: **Paul Brewster**, Forest Supervisor of the USDA Forest Service, **Joe Fusco**, Vice President of Casella Waste Systems, and **Steven Patterson**, Director of the Northeastern VT Development Association. Two board members were re-elected to terms concurrent with VCRD leadership functions: **Barb Grimes**, Manager of Burlington Electric, for two years as Chair Emeritus, and **Chip Evans**, Director of the Human Resources Investment Council, in recognition of his national leadership role as a member of the National Partnership for Rural America. The VCRD Board also elected **Jolinda LaClair**, State Director of USDA RD, to serve as the chair of the "Vermont Council on Planning" to be instituted in September.

The VCRD Board selected its officers and Executive Committee for the next year:

Chair: **Hal Cohen**, Executive Director of Central Vermont Community Action Council

Vice Chair: **Catherine Dimitruk**, Executive Director, Northwest Regional Planning Commission

Treasurer: **Alex Aldrich**, Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council

Chair Emeritus: **Barb Grimes**, Manager, Burlington Electric Department

At the completion of her term as Chair, VCRD recognized the outstanding service of **Barb Grimes**. She has truly been *electric*, a *spark* to VCRD activities, and a *bright light* for the Council in each stage of Vermont's participation in National Rural Development Partnership efforts over the past several years.

2004 Summit on the Structure of Planning in Vermont

The Vermont Council on Rural Development VCRD has been charged by the Vermont Legislature to build a policy council to evaluate the structure of the planning system in Vermont and produce a set of strategic recommendations to improve this system.

To start this process, VCRD is inviting leadership from the business community, the Douglas Administration, local, regional, and state planners, and concerned citizens to participate in a day-long dialogue on the goals of the planning system, its challenges in meeting those goals, and possible structural solutions.

“Planning for Vermont’s Future: Building a System that Works”

This Summit on the Structure of Planning in Vermont will take place at the Vermont Statehouse on August 11, 2004.

The Summit will feature open roundtable discussions of key issues in the Vermont system of town, regional and state planning. The Summit will inform the “charge” of the new **Vermont Council on Planning** and gather input for its analysis from members of the public, leadership in the Administration, and customers of the planning system. From this input, the Council will build a set of recommendations for consideration by the Gubernatorial Administration, Legislature, and planning community in Vermont.

Planning issues have confronted the Vermont Council on Rural Development in policy work on agriculture, economic development, telecom deployment, water and sewer system development, and in all the local communities the Council serves. According to Paul Costello, Executive Director of the VCRD, “Our work over the last few years with rural communities and state policy makers has continually pointed out the challenges to towns, regions and the state as a whole—challenges of making planning real, of using planning as a local decision-making tool (rather than leaving development decisions to the state regulatory system by default), of building systematic bridges between statewide transportation, telecom, and economic development infrastructure needs and the interests of community residents. Over the next year VCRD looks to bring people with a variety of positions and ideas together, build consensus, and help Vermont improve its current system.”

Registrants to the Summit will receive an advance mailing with copies of a history of the planning system in Vermont and a status report on planning 15 years after the enactment of Vermont’s Act 200.

Participants will pre-register to participate on Work Teams for Summit sessions on:

1. The Planning Structure in Statute
2. Vermont Goals and Vision for the Planning System
3. Not in My Backyard! Public Engagement and Commitment to Plans
4. Municipal Planning
5. Regional Planning
6. State Cross Agency Planning
7. State, Regional, and Municipal Development and Infrastructure Planning
8. The Implementation of Plans

The recommendations and priority action steps identified by work teams will be reported to **Governor James Douglas** during the closing session of the Summit and will contribute to a final report which will be distributed to each participant after the conference. That report will then be a starting point for the deliberations of the Vermont Council on Planning in September.

The VCRD Summit on Planning will be a working conference, where the vision and leadership of each participant will count. Space at the Statehouse will be limited, so it will be important to register early! For more information, or to be included on the invitation list to the Summit, email VCRD2@sover.net, or contact VCRD Executive Director Paul Costello at 828-6024.

Community Visits

Over the last 5 months **Johnson** residents have explored opportunities before the community through a VCRD Community Visit process. In March VCRD brought a team of 26 state, federal, and non-profit leaders to attend 9 different Community Visit Day forums on issues identified by residents for exploration. Later meetings considered lists of challenges before the town and gave community members the opportunity to deliberate on the most important issues ahead. In the end they formed or reinvigorated task forces to address five community priorities: Economic Development, Communications and Events Coordination, Housing, Zoning, and Implementing the Main Street Plan. The leadership of Johnson

residents, along with their strong sense of direction, makes us confident in their future progress. The Johnson Visit Final Report can be viewed on the VCRD website.

VCRD has scheduled Community Visits with two additional communities over the next year. The Council will work with **Bristol** residents beginning in September to map out the opportunities ahead and build plans to address their consensus priorities. Then in early 2005, VCRD will be working with **Chelsea** through the program. VCRD is always interested in discussing the role that a Community Visit may have for additional communities; please contact us for more information.

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

The Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI) was convened in July 2003 by the Vermont Council on Rural Development. VCCI's charge was to evaluate the role of and challenges to the Creative Economy in the state and to build a practical and strategic plan for its advancement.

The VCCI final report will be released in early August. It will encourage collaboration among Vermont's cultural organizations, state and federal government and private partners to use Vermont's cultural resources to spark and leverage community and economic development. It documents 17 steps in the four areas listed below that the Douglas Administration, Legislature, and public and private partners are encouraged to undertake to expand innovation, enhance community life, attract and encourage entrepreneurs, build Vermont's market identity, and stimulate job growth:

I. Support the Growth of Creative Enterprises

- by expanding markets, unifying promotion, enhancing the Vermont brand, producing celebratory events, building a Vermont artists and artisans market identity, and providing technical support and access to capital for culturally-based businesses and creative entrepreneurs.

II. Document and Promote the Role that Creativity, Culture, and Innovation Play in Vermont's Economic Future

- by tracking and reporting this economic sector, reinforcing arts and heritage education, and instituting a statewide public information campaign.

III. Invest in Communities so They May Build on their Past while Adapting for a Vibrant Future

- by making culture and heritage priority community investments, supporting historic town and village centers, expanding cultural facilities funding, and encouraging creative entrepreneurial development in vacant industrial space.

IV. Develop Vermont's Creative Economy through Community-Based Planning and Improved Statewide Collaboration

- by facilitating community-based creative economy projects, building a collaborative umbrella between statewide cultural organizations, and establishing a Governor's Commission to provide leadership for the growth of Vermont's creative economy.

The VCCI found that expanding the Creative Economy is critical to the future competitiveness of Vermont in the global marketplace. Vermont's heritage, arts and culture are integral strengths. They are an economic sector in Vermont today; they also provide a foundation to the sense of place and creative workforce critical to innovation in other sectors, add value to the Vermont Brand, and magnify the attractive power of Vermont as a location to do business. The Creative Economy is a hidden economic driver, one that deserves understanding, recognition, and investment.

Broadband Telecom

Thanks to the Vermont Legislature, Senator Leahy's Office and our partners at the Vermont Broadband Council and the Center for Rural Studies at UVM, VCRD Broadband facilitation services are available to any community in Vermont. In recent months VCRD has been working with residents of Plainfield/Marshfield, Lowell/Troy, Grand Isle, Marlboro, Westford, Island Pond, and several other communities as they seek to identify broadband demand, aggregate it, and negotiate with providers for new services.

The Vermont Legislature has appropriated \$200,000 for competitive grants that will go to four or five towns that lack broadband services. These grants must build systems that provide nearly universal service access. VCRD is ready to work with the Agency of Commerce, the Broadband Council, and providers to help communities build realistic plans based on demand, and produce strong applications toward their implementation. Interested communities can contact Al and Laura Duey at 467-1266.

Based on an initiative of the VCRD Telecom Committee, the Vermont Legislature passed a 2003 statute charging the administration to evaluate ways that the State could use its facilities and purchasing power as leverage to promote the expansion of affordable broadband access to rural communities. Toward this end, VCRD is working with the Administration as it designs the next phase of the state contracts.

VCRD Membership Campaign

In this first year Membership drive, 2003, VCRD has formalized its relationship with over 70 of its individual, business, and non-profit allies. VCRD 2003 Membership extended until the end of June, 2004. We are seeking additional Members and hope that 2003 Members will formally renew their partnership and Membership at this time.

Members will join VCRD to promote opportunities in rural communities throughout the State of Vermont. VCRD Members will be invited to VCRD Rural Roundtables (this year the Summit on Planning) to participate in the 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.

Federal cuts to the National Rural Development Partnership (from 100% of VCRD funding in 2000, to 0% in the next year) make Membership an increasingly crucial resource for VCRD operations.

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.

Vermont Council on Rural Development

89 Main Street, P.O. Box 1384

Montpelier, Vermont 05601

802-828-6024

vcrd@sover.net

www.sover.net/~vcrd