



The Vermont Council on Rural Development Summer 2005 Newsletter

From Hal Cohen, VCRD Board Chair

Vermont communities have historically drawn upon their rural heritage to confront hard issues with courage, tenacity, good humor, and ingenuity. Faced with shifting traditions, changing populations, and complex economic and development issues, communities across the state have confronted new challenges with energy and pride. Vermont Council on Rural Development continues to work with Vermont communities to promote dialogue, reinvent opportunities, and facilitate collaborative partnerships that yield concrete solutions.

This summer finds VCRD and its community partners at the Montpelier Statehouse addressing issues of unity and division at the **2005 Rural Summit**, in Woodstock, beginning an intensive **Community Visit** process, and in the Northeast Kingdom, where an exciting new **WiFi Telecom** initiative is underway and statewide with the opportunity of the **Creative Economy**. Additionally, VCRD will spearhead a competitive RFP process to supply funds to non-profits for **Vermont Forest Products** marketing. Take a break from the steamy summer, and enjoy our latest edition!

VCRD Board Developments

The VCRD board welcomes two new members; **Michael Welch**, Town Manager of St. Johnsbury, and from the private sector, **Tony Elliott**, Chairman and CEO of SoVerNet.

2005 Annual Rural Summit

On August 9, 2005, the meeting rooms and chambers of the Statehouse in Montpelier will resound with Vermont voices. Community leaders, concerned citizens, and government officials, as well as members of businesses and non-profits will gather for roundtable discussions exploring issues of division and unity in Vermont communities. The Summit, **“Beyond the Divide; Conflict and Paths to Community Success”** will frame facilitated discussion around key topics that are frequent points of tension and divisiveness, such as housing, forest practices, youth, rural transportation, agricultural practices and more. Participants will pre-register for work team sessions, and will also hear expert presentations. Information about resources available to support community needs will be provided, and a final report will be issued after the conference. Governor James Douglas will be on hand, and will receive priority recommendations from work groups at the conclusion of the day.

If you are interested in participating in the Summit, please contact VCRD at (802) 828-6022 or email VCRD2@sover.net.

Vermont Forest Products Request for Proposals

In 2001 VCRD convened the Vermont Forest Products Council to explore ways to develop the State's crucial forest products sector. Recognizing the potential economic

benefit of systematically promoting the Vermont value-added wood products industry – manufacturers of toys, furniture, household items, cabinetry, and other products- the Council created a “Blueprint for Action” designed to revitalize and expand this sector.

Based upon FPC recommendations, VCRD, with the support of Senator Jeffords’ Office, submitted an application to Economic Development Administration for funding to supply resources to Vermont non-profits addressing the Blueprint’s five marketing strategies. The application is under final review, and upon notification of a successful proposal, VCRD will open a competitive RFP process to distribute the funds.

If successful, resources totaling \$450,000 will be awarded to registered non-profit organizations with a record of service to the forest products industry this year. VCRD expects multiple organizations to bid on one or more of the RFP Work Elements, and encourages collaborative proposals. Work Elements that will be open for bid include:

Marketing the Vermont Wood Products Brand - \$100,000

Building Vermont Forest Products Presence at Lodging Facilities - \$50,000

Factory Tours, Open Studios, and Other Demonstration Sites - \$50,000

Trade Show Support - \$125,000

Annual Showcase and Design Competition for Vermont Wood Products - \$125,000

For complete information on proposal guidelines, assessment criteria, and the application process, contact Paul Costello by email at vcrd@sover.net.

Community Visits

Community Visits are designed to provide citizens with the opportunity to speak, to listen, and to build strategic action plans to address the priority issues of community residents. Each visit is an intensive and individualized process that is shaped by a broad mix of community members representing diverse experience and interests.

Chelsea has recently completed the Community Visit process: the result of many months of dedication, thoughtful reflection, and hard work. Among the priority projects identified were schools, open lands, economic development, and community facilities. Chelsea’s final report can now be found on our website.

Woodstock is scheduled for VCRD’s next Community Visit, and has begun selecting steering committee members who will help guide the process from topic selection to action plans.

If your community would benefit from facilitated meetings with our resource teams, contact us at VCRD@sover.net.

WiFi Comes to the Kingdom!

VCRD has begun implementation of a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant to establish a sustainable collection of wireless Internet access points, referred to as WiFi hotspots, across the Northeast Kingdom. Hotspots will be located in area businesses such as cafes and inns, providing short-term access to high speed Internet to both area residents and visiting tourists. These hotspots will allow businesses to attract more customers, while opening communication opportunities to residents. Working in conjunction with Duey Associates and Island Pond Wireless, an assessment of broadband availability and physical readiness of each participating business has been conducted. Hotspot software will be tested in August, and complete installation and training of the first participating business's hotspot will occur in September.

Vermont's Northeast Kingdom has been designated a Rural Economic Area Partnership (*REAP*) zone – a region where each community has a population of less than 10,000, and a median household income below the statewide average. The WiFi project strives to make this corner of the state a more equitable player in an era of global information access.

VCRD is also working with towns throughout Vermont to assess and aggregate broadband demand and negotiate with potential providers for community-wide solutions. Contact **Al and Laura Duey** at (802) 467-1266 if your community is interested in organizing to draw affordable broadband coverage.

Creative Economy Program

In 2004, the Vermont Council on Rural Development produced and sponsored the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI) to define the ways that Vermont's cultural resources can be leveraged to support community development and job creation throughout the state. The final report of VCCI, "Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy" has been eagerly received by towns and cities throughout the state that are looking at ideas and strategies for downtown development, 'branding,' and building economic development momentum. VCRD deeply appreciates the key work of **Liz Stedman** of Kimbell Sherman Ellis in helping to publicize the report and the opportunities it describes for communities.

VCRD has been awarded a two-year grant from the **Jane's Trust** foundation to help seven communities annually develop strategic plans and resource ideas to use their strengths and cultural resources to advance their ability to attract youth, entrepreneurs and jobs.

In the next few months VCRD will be hiring a program director, getting the word out about the opportunity, and developing an application process for communities to register their interest in this strategic planning assistance. Please feel free to contact us by email for more information or for a copy of the VCCI report.

Vermont Council on Planning

The VCRD-sponsored Vermont Council on Planning has met monthly since convening in September of 2004. The Council has 21 members representing state government, private sector planning, business, and related non-profits, and is chaired by **Jolinda LaClair** of USDA Rural Development. Currently, the VCP is working toward consensus on issues such as education for planners, and coordination of local, regional, and statewide planning efforts. A final report will be issued this fall reflecting the Council's recommendations.

Thank You to our Members!

VCRD is a dynamic and growing organization dedicated to enabling all Vermont Communities to create a prosperous future through coordination, collaboration and the effective use of local, state, federal, educational and private resources. The Council holds, as a central value, the integration of the working landscape with the social, economic, cultural, and environmental fabric of Vermont.

The Council is able to facilitate challenging dialogues by creating and mediating community forums that provide a respectful and productive environment where all sides of the issue are presented. The Council is an advocate of the rural perspective, ensuring that Vermonters' voices are heard and reflected in public policy.

We need your support to continue our efforts in Vermont; to advocate for Vermont's natural resource industries, to ensure adequate and fair access to telecommunications throughout rural areas, to coordinate policy development and planning efforts, and to continue direct community outreach. Through its work, VCRD connects members, partners, and resources together to benefit rural communities throughout the state.

We express our gratitude to our current members, and hope that you will join VCRD as a partnering member.

Current 2005 Members

Individuals

Jill Adams
Liz Curry
Robert Justis
Jolinda LaClair
Christine Lilyquist
Scudder Parker
Tim Smith

Rep. Bill Botzow
John Ewing
Louis & Margaret Kannenstine
Michael & Sandra Levine
John McClaughry
Steve Roberts
Susan Spaulding

Vaughn Collins
Robert Gasperetti
Brian Keefe
Stephanie Lahar
Jake Marsh
Christopher Roy

Leadership Gifts

Casella Waste Systems
Barbara Grimes

Community National Bank
Housing Vermont

Chittenden Bank
Passumpsic Savings
Bank

Project Contributors

Bank North	Central VT Public Service Corp.	Citizens Bank
Green Mountain Power	IBM	Jane's Trust
Lyndonville Savings Bank	VT Agency of Commerce	VT Electric Co-op.
VT Housing Conservation	VT Housing Finance Agency	USDA Rural Dev.
US Economic Dev. Admin.		

Organizations

Chelsea Studios	Duey Associates
Green Mountain Coffee Roasters	Kimbell Sherman Ellis
Lamoille County Planning Commission	Merchants Bank
Neighborworks of Western Vermont	Northeastern VT. Development Association
Northfield Savings Bank	Orton Family Foundation
REM Dev. Co. LLC/Real Estate Dev.	Rutland Regional Planning Commission
City of St. Albans	Southeastern VT Community Action, Inc.
Southern Windsor Regional Planning Com.	Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Reg. Com.
Union Bank	University of Vermont
Verizon	VT Alliance Non-Profit Organization
VT Association of Realtors	VT. Development Credit Union
VT Economic Development Authority	VT Office of Economic Opportunity
VT Public Power Supply Authority	Vermont Standard, Inc.
VT State Employees Credit Union	VT Sustainable Jobs Fund
VT Wood Manufacturers Assn.	Washington Co. Mental Health Services
Wells River Savings Bank	Yankee Farm Credit

If you have contributed for 2005 membership, and your name is missing, please let us know. If you would like to become a member of VCRD, please complete and return the form on the back of this newsletter.



VCRD 2005 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!

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VCRD is an equal opportunity employer and provider.