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2008-06-13

For the first time in a generation Vermonters are being asked to help define what the state's future should be.

The Council on the Future of Vermont is nearing the end of a two-year process of inquiry, asking people in each county what challenges lie ahead, and what we should do first. Now it's Chittenden County's turn. There's a free forum on the future next Thursday, June 19 at Burlington's Contois Auditorium at 6:30 p.m.

The Council is an arm of the non-profit Rural Vermont, which has raised \$400,000 in private funds to collect ideas from wherever Vermonters gather. The Burlington forum is to be an open discussion of the challenges Vermont faces, and of the best options for meeting those challenges.

Are we doing enough to discourage urban sprawl, to clean up Lake Champlain, to preserve the dairy industry, the key to our cherished "working landscape"? Are we creating enough jobs to keep our young in-state? Are we reaching out enough to families under stress? Are we providing adequately for our elders? Do we need a clearer vision of how to use the great woodlands that form so much of our legacy?

And where will we find the money to do more in areas we decide are urgent priorities?

The Council on the Future of Vermont will not produce its final report until early next year. But the word is out that each gathering so far, has considered housing, energy, education, medicine and jobs.

The Burlington forum is a chance to make your voice heard on a topic you think is vital in deciding what kind of Vermont we'll have in another ten or twenty years. Where will our energy come from? How will we pay for it? Will we have jobs that can sustain our families?

Will our tourism industry be held hostage to changeable weather and to the enduring idea, widely held elsewhere in this country, that Vermont is only a theme park to an earlier, simpler America, the place created by Norman Rockwell, Grandma Moses and Robert Frost?

How badly do we want to retain the characteristics that make us unique? How much will it cost, in

money and in other measures of value, to keep our mystique a reality.

It's all up for discussion at the Contois Auditorium in Burlington on Thursday, June 19, at 6:30 p.m. It's free, including the refreshments at 6 p.m.

Source URL: <https://www.vtrural.org/programs/policy-councils/future-of-vermont/press/MiltonIndependent-080613>