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Poll says Vermonters value landscape, community

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Colchester, VT

(Host) A new poll confirms some long-held assumptions about Vermonters.

They cherish the state's working landscape ... its sense of community... and its independence.

But the poll also shows that people worry that the state faces some challenges that could threaten those values.

VPR's Ross Sneyd has more.

(Sneyd) Vermonters' image of themselves and the place they call home sounds a lot like a tourism brochure.

(Schmidt) "What came out ... the three main values in Vermont - independence, community ties and a working landscape - are really no surprise to us."

(Sneyd) Fred Schmidt is co-director of UVM's Center for Rural Studies.

He says more than 90 percent of people responding to a survey identified with those values.

The center conducted a telephone survey of Vermonters last winter for the Council on the Future of Vermont.

Many of the results were far from surprising. Of 700 people asked, 97 percent value the state's landscape and heritage; and 93 percent are proud of living in Vermont.

Sarah Waring is project manager of the Council for the Future of Vermont. She says the council wants to give people from every walk of life a voice in the state's civic life by asking them some simple questions.

(Waring) "Are there Vermont values that we have in common? Are there challenges that you see when you look ahead a generation? Are there opportunities that Vermont has when you look ahead? And what should the priorities be for our state?"

(Sneyd) The council has spent months holding forums around the state where people have answered those questions.

People say Vermont's future is bright. But they also worry about things that threaten those values - the cost of living, high tax rates, the difficulty of surviving as a farmer.

Waring says the scientific poll reinforced much of the work the council has done up to now.

(Waring) "We started back in November and these questions have been rolling ever since that time. So it's been 10 months of listening to people. And I think we hear a lot of common concerns across Vermont. We hear a lot of these things about transportation, about affordability."

(Sneyd) Waring says the council's goal over the next six months or so is to take all of this information and use it to tell Vermonters what their neighbors think about the state of affairs here.

She says that should give policymakers and average citizens the perspective that will help them preserve their values and solve future challenges.

For VPR News, I'm Ross Sneyd.

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