

# COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT

## BENNINGTON

### Community Forum Day Notes January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007

The following notes were collected from focus group meetings and forums throughout the day spent in Bennington County. These notes are in raw form – reflecting much of the inflections, quotations and feelings of the attendees at these meetings. Below is a list of the meetings that occurred during January 3rd:

- Bennington District Leadership Council
- Bennington Rutland Opportunity Council
- Bennington Project Independence
- Manchester Dorset Interfaith Council
- Burr and Burton Academy youth-town commission group
- Hildene Foundation staff
- Evening session held at Southern Vermont College

**Local hosts and sponsors include:**

Bennington Area Chamber of Commerce  
Bennington County Industrial Corporation  
Bennington County Regional Commission  
Bennington District Leadership Council  
Bennington– Rutland Opportunity Council  
Bennington Tomorrow  
Better Bennington Corporation  
Manchester and the Mountains Chamber of Commerce  
Vermont Arts Exchange

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**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report**  
**Bennington District Leadership Council**

Scribe: Bonnie Smoren

**I. What does Vermont mean to you? What common values do Vermonters share?**

- Independence (the speaker noted, however, that her job is to work with people who are dependent on State support and services.)
- Strong regard for the environment
- Respect for diversity
- Community, neighborliness, care and concern about the community people live in.
- Recreational opportunities
- No billboards
- There is a romance about the state.
- There is a value of working hard. Many people have more than one job and do multiple jobs well.
- Sprit of community enhanced by the smallness of state and accessibility of government
- Valuing diversity is important in the work done in the Agency of Human Services. In Bennington County there are pockets of populations – impoverished people, middle class, highly professional.
- In the past there has been a sense if safety. I feel less safe now.
- “I’m a newcomer. I’ve only been here eleven years.” We have all, as a United States culture become more wary. Out behavior in general has changed. But I feel safe in Vermont.
- In the delivery of human services, people who work in the field make an effort to be of service. There is a spirit of collaboration.
- Volunteerism is huge in Vermont. People see a need and start to respond.
- Employees in human services know their clients as part of a small community. They are not limited by work hours or buildings, but encounter them in the grocery store and on the street.
- “I have only been here 18 years”, but the speaker values the historical perspective in Vermont. That historical perspective is very important to both residents and tourists.

## II. Looking ahead through our lifetimes, and those of our children, what challenges and opportunities do you see for Vermont?

- The sense of wariness has been escalated by people who have moved from other areas that are not as safe. They come and put gates up and install security systems.
- A road that I drive on used to be hunting camps, and now it is full of homes with fortified gates.
- There are more and more part time residents. In a small community, if 20% of the population is not there a good deal of the time, it is difficult to find people to run the community in an open manner.
- Challenge: There is a large transient population that has brought in drugs.
- I worry about maintaining my lifestyle in retirement. Cost of living – taxes-are high.
- Bennington has one of the oldest populations.
- The cost of living is difficult. Working people seem to be slipping into poverty, unless they have inherited a house, money or land.
- What will the future hold for working people? The speaker noted her taxes are almost half as much as the mortgage.
- There is middle class erosion.
- One person wondered what his eleven year old would do for work. The wages paid in Vermont don't meet necessities. He is also worried about a shrinking school population but set education costs. Another worry is drug use.
- The aging population has negatively impacted volunteer services such as fire and emergency response.
- Retirees are moving back from Florida to die in Vermont. There is a huge influx of old people, and that impacts infrastructure.
- There is an opportunity to get involved in our communities to fix our own problems.
- We need to look at the economic picture in relation to Vermont's needs. Childcare needs to be thought of and paid for as a valuable profession.
- Bennington has been fortunate in the number of manufacturing jobs that have come, but the challenge is finding people who have the skills and education to work. Many people have been unable to pass the required drug test. Jobs go wanting because some of the population is unsuited for them.
- Finding a balance between development and maintaining the way of life that people come to Vermont for is a challenge.
- It is a challenge to keep talented young people in the state.
- An opportunity exists with Vermont entrepreneurial spirit, branding and environmental awareness.
- We need to create affordable housing in a way that doesn't destroy the landscape.
- If we lose the landscape, we lose a crucial element of Vermont's identity.
- It is important to preserve the economy of the open land. Recreation, such as skiing has become very expensive. Lift tickets at Killington are \$80. It is geared toward wealthy tourists, not local people.

### **III. What should our priorities be as we work together to realize your vision and prepare Vermont for the future?**

- Children and families are under more stress than previous generations. It is harder to make ends meet. Our priorities need to be creating communities where resources are available – affordable housing, recreation for Vermonters, not just tourists. “Kids need something to do other than smoke dope and get pregnant.”
- In my work, people are having children with multiple fathers who are not engaged in the kids’ lives. There is heavy reliance on the state because there is not a good family support structure. We need to look for support to come from somewhere other than the state. We need to help people become more self-reliant.
- Income ineligibility becomes a cliff. People reach a level and lose all of their benefits. It needs to be a tunnel, rather than a cliff.
- Good collaboration between agencies, but it is “siloed”. If the civic community, business and government could work cooperatively with human service agencies, the results would be more fruitful.
- It is difficult to get employers involved in programs that are not moneymakers. Some programs such as “Learn to Earn” that provide soft skills have been effective.
- Vocational training program for both youth and adults needs to be a priority. Maybe apprenticeship programs. More education and training could help move people out of poverty.
- Public transportation system is important, especially for people who cannot afford private transportation.
- Low income people have very limited options for recreation. Some families don’t have transportation for even simple recreation like sledding.
- We need to get at root causes – to start in early education. We need technical assistance to connect people to resources.

### **IV. We’ve been talking about Vermont, but how does this discussion concern the future of your community?**

- Education, property tax, and school population are a concern. Public school systems need to make the public more aware of what we are doing in the schools.
- We need to think outside the box with education – night school for example.
- Schools are doing what families used to. Students arrive without core values. This speaks to the breakdown of families. We -need to do more with parenting skills, teaching children how to become parents.
- Teachers can’t teach basic academics because of behavioral and social issues. There has become a need for resource officers in every school – that speaks to the changes that have occurred.
- We have begun looking at our systems of care in Bennington County and are looking to partner and collaborate. Human service leaders need to not just manage departments, but to assess the need for change and to lead. The speaker is concerned about resources for his own department.

## **COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**

### **Bennington Project Independence**

Scribe: Bonnie Smoren

#### **II. What does Vermont mean to you? What common values do Vermonters share?**

- Beautiful clean state, no billboards
- People are friendly-there is a neighborly and community feeling
- “It’s a nice country”
- It is not congested
- Vermonters are friendly and helpful to one another.
- Vermonters look out for each other.
- I came from Montana and because I came from out west people thought I was stupid. After a while they got used to me and were friendly. Vermonters are reserved and take a while to make friends.
- I was born in Vermont, but it has changed a lot. I love the Green Mountains.
- Returning military service people are glad to come back and are so grateful to be returning to Vermont.
- I like the freedom of Vermont. Vermonters are independent thinkers who will make up their own mind.
- I have seen it grow. (The speaker has been a businessman for 60 years).
- It is an excellent state for education. Good schools

#### **II. Looking ahead through our lifetimes, and those of our children, what challenges and opportunities do you see for Vermont?**

- I wish our taxes would go down.
- Young people need a lot of money for student loans and it is hard to get started. They need to live with their parents.
- We want to keep young people in the state to work.
- More employment
- You must have a good education system. I went to work at 16, but now you need a good education to get a job.
- Medicine is very expensive. My husband pays \$125 for one bottle every month. He can’t afford eyeglasses.
- Many people think things will be worse in the future. Costs are high – utilities, taxes, gas. Good jobs are being taken away because wages are lower overseas. There should be a penalty for companies who outsource labor.

- More housing is needed. The speaker knows a family who is homeless - they have no insurance and no place to live.
- What do Vermonters have against wind turbines? If that will help provide electric, why not have them? I've traveled all over and seen much worse than wind towers, strip mining for example.
- If we can reduce the cost of energy, a little inconvenience is nothing.
- Renewable energy should be explored and the state should support it.
- "Of course Vermont will change in the future because nothing stays the same. "
- The cost of housing is very high and it is difficult to even repair a house.
- There are a lot more people here than there used to be. People come here to get away from the big cities.
- We have lost many manufacturing jobs, and there are not many new businesses. They don't get good tax breaks.
- People in Pownal are trying to put in a casino. It would create a lot of new jobs, but the government up north doesn't want it.
- "Us poor fools down south, we don't get nothing".
- Many people felt that decisions are made in Montpelier and that people in the southern part of the state do not have a voice.
- I like it here because of the seasons and it is more peaceful here.
- I hope that things will be better for my children – money wise and with jobs.
- What are our grandchildren going to do for work?
- When our children graduate from high school, why don't we have colleges here for them? We have Bennington College here, but otherwise our kids have to go out of the state.
- A lot of young people go the New York State because they have more manufacturing jobs.
- Bennington College is not a business school – it is for the arts. So kids who want a business school have to go out of state.
- They have trade schools in Albany but nothing in Vermont.
- There are no more busses so the speaker can't go visit her family.
- We are getting to a society where there are just the very rich and the very poor. The divide between rich and poor is greater.
- If you are not educated there are no opportunities.
- Adult day care will double in twenty years. The trend is to de-bed nursing homes, but the challenge is to fund that. There are many services that can be provided in adult day care. Bennington has the oldest population in the state – 16.3% people over 65.
- The major employer is the hospital and most corporations have moved out. There is some growth in higher technology. The Director has taught in the college system and has seen a tremendous lack of preparation. As a professor, she was told not to have high expectations of students – but to remediate. How can we compete with schools who have better standards?
- We don't have the employees to fill technical spots. We do not have the educated people to fill the new jobs.
- One of the hardest thing now is to get people to accept services. There is not a sense of entitlement. The baby boomers that are coming with be demanding and will have higher expectations than current clients.

- It is difficult to find paraprofessionals to fill health care positions. It is a very, very difficult and low-paying job. We provide 100% of health care for our employees, but it cripples us.
- Now paraprofessionals hop from one institution to the others.
- The dependency ratio will change dramatically and it will be hard to find workers. It is a default career – no one comes out of high school wanting a paraprofessional health care job.
- The client’s sense of safety has changed. Now they lock their doors. There used to be a curfew for kids and they used to know the local police. That has changed.
- A large number of people use public assistance to support adult day care services. Adult daycare becomes a hub of care – where many different services can be provided.
- Looking into the future, the social worker sees more private payment – a capitated health care system (built upon the backs of those with greatest need).

### **III. What should our priorities be as we work together to realize your vision and prepare Vermont for the future?**

- Try to get industry. The speaker feels that there needs to be manufacturing jobs. “ It is like the depression.”
- “The health care system is very poor. I have a daughter with Down’s Syndrome, but there is nobody to help her.”
- “We go without in the United States, but send money to Iran where they don’t like us. “
- The economy was cited as the number one priority by many people.
- Health care was the second most commonly cited.
- One speaker noted that the vast majority of clothes in Bennington stores are made overseas.

### **IV. We’ve been talking about Vermont, but how does this discussion concern the future of your community?**

**Note: The clients left for snack before this part of the discussion. Ideas are from the Director and a social worker.**

- About 35% of clients still live in their own home. They are the healthiest and have the best support system.
- People have to work longer now, as determined by the social security system. Benefits are lower for earlier retirement.
- There is “ageism” in the work place, leading to emphasis on young people, even if older people need to work.
- Some people are forced not to contribute in a productive way even if they are willing and able. We are pitting younger against elder and competing for where the dollars are going to go. The funding goes to the young even though the need for elder funding is increasing.
- Vermont is less restrictive than many states, but the bureaucracy is overwhelming for people trying to get elder services. You need to be an expert to navigate the system.

## **COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**

### **Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council**

Scribe: Bonnie Smoren

#### **III. What does Vermont mean to you? What common values do Vermonters share?**

- Mountains and Skiing. These help the economy
- Vermont is a safe place for children
- Very family oriented. People have lived here for generations, but for people who do not have family it is difficult – almost a stigma.
- Family is the most important. The speaker is a volunteer at her church who visits the elderly and those without families. There is a sense of neighborliness
- Outdoor recreation, camping. “I don’t want to see Vermont overgrown.”
- It is elitist to say that Vermont’s values are any different than anyone else’s. People everywhere have fundamental values.
- Vermont used to be more distinct. The culture has changed because other people have moved here. It is not the same rural culture with working farms.
- There is a mystique about Vermont that is a myth. The speaker was told when she came to Vermont that it is a paradise – no poverty, no need. Vermont is promoted as an idyllic place in order to support tourism.
- “Promoting the Vermont myth is a marketing ploy and is supported by the state budget. That money should be going to help poor children, not businesses.”

#### **II. Looking ahead through our lifetimes, and those of our children, what challenges and opportunities do you see for Vermont?**

- People are alone and isolated. There is an economic and social stigma for people who are alone. If someone needs surgery and has nobody to go home to, they can be denied care
- “There is a whole secret society of people who are not attached.”
- If you don’t have money it is hard to get visiting nurses to come.
- The marketing of Vermont products is genuine – not a marketing myth – and that produces jobs.
- More family farms and organic farms should be developed and marketed. Who could be more important than the family farmer?
- A speaker said she hopes her children are able to go to college. “I cannot put my children through college, but there are scholarships and state support to help. They will not go to an Ivy League school, but maybe somewhere. That support is a positive thing.”

- Being without family is more difficult for older men than women, who tend to be more social. “If someone is old and without money and family, there are in a hard spot.”
- A solution is to try to match old people with those who can help. There is a program in Dorset called Neighbor to Neighbor through a church that does that.
- “If you are old, poor and alone, there is just nothing.”
- Some communities have a chore program that will match volunteers with the needy.
- “Bennington is an every man for himself place to live.”
- Lack of transportation for those without a car is a challenge. There is some public transportation, but it is fraught with problems.
- Albany is forty miles away and you can’t get there from here.
- Food insecurity is widespread. The Foodshelf demand has increased sharply. Other costs such as fuel and housing have risen, so people have less money. The Vermont Foodbank has not had as many donations, so local organizations are impacted.
- It’s not just the lack of food, but the lack of quality and fresh food. People donate the cheapest stuff. Sometimes you are just providing calories.
- Speaker recognizes the quality of farmers markets and wants to shop there, but the prices are very high. She knows that farmers need to make a living, but not everyone can afford it. Only the rich can afford to eat local food.
- “Wouldn’t it be wonderful to subsidize local farmers rather than the ski industry. “
- Local food should be the cheapest food, but instead it is the most expensive. An infrastructure for production of local food is essential.
- The high cost of housing is a problem.
- Bennington was a totally different place 21 years ago. The big social change is due to the economic changes. Companies moving out have had an influence on the culture. Bennington used to be a thriving place with people out and about. Now it appears to be a depressed culture.
- Both the people and the economy are depressed.
- It used to be quieter. The speaker remembered that she used to sit at her grandparent’s house and listen to stories. The grocery store was 3 miles away and it was typical to walk there. Now there are more homes, more cars, and it doesn’t feel as safe to walk. Plus, people have no inclination to walk. “ I think that 20 years from now it will be worse – with many more houses. People will be less connected with nature and the rural environment. “
- Manufacturing used to be the entry level job that brought people in. Now entry level is a convenience store. People don’t have skills for top jobs, but there is not a lot in the middle. Manufacturing and blue collar jobs used to enable local people to work for many years and improve their situation. There is no middle level of employment which is the stabilizer.
- Where would you get a job in Bennington even with a college degree?
- The speaker hopes her kids will stay here because family is important, but understands that pay is higher elsewhere and housing costs are high in Vermont.

- The speaker notes that someone with the same job she has in CT gets paid much more. She could leave the state and advance herself within the company, which has branches out of state, but doesn't want to uproot her family.

### **III. What should our priorities be as we work together to realize your vision and prepare Vermont for the future?**

- “People first –especially family and organic farmers, before propping up a recreational opportunity for the elite. Poor people should come first – then the middle class. “
- There has to be a place for everyone. It seems that Vermont used to manage the diverse population better than it does now. Although there are different economic layers, people need to be unified. “There is sense that every community will be a Stratton.”
- “Is it fair for people to have second homes while others can't get into homeless shelters because there is no room?”
- “Tax second homes out of existence and give them to the poor people.”
- It is hard for low and middle income people to even get a first home. Why do mortgages have to be so high and so hard to get? Why are houses selling for so much?
- Years ago I was a single mother with a child and a job. I asked for help and was refused. The state said to quit my job and they would help me. There are not a lot of incentives for people to work. The system should help people who are trying to help themselves.
- People feel they lose more than they gain by working.
- Someone has a co-worker is a single person with an old family farmhouse with serious structural damage that lets the cold in. She was refused weatherization help because she doesn't have children. They have land but no money. Where can they get help?
- Why can other countries have health care for everyone? Health care is a huge cause of bankruptcy.
- Poor people should be able to get eyeglasses, dental care, and home repairs.

### **IV. We've been talking about Vermont, but how does this discussion concern the future of your community?**

- Other communities have a better sense of people's needs and are more compassionate.
- There needs to be more Neighbor helping Neighbor type programs.
- There is a role for government. But they are more interested in supporting the middle class and industry than the poor.
- What does it say about our country that we are accepting fuel aid from Hugo Chavez? (Individuals can get 100 gallons free.)
- I am in future shock. The thought of getting foreign aid from Venezuela would once have been shocking – but that is where we are now.
- I wonder about the people who write the regulations. They seem out of touch with the reality of people in need.

- I wish some advocates of the poor could remove the stigma of being poor. Blame is placed on the victims. The housing foreclosures are an example. People say those who signed onto those sub-prime mortgages are stupid. But If you need housing for your family, you will sign anything. Blame should be on the bankers who made money off the needs of the poor.

## **COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**

### **Manchester Dorset Interfaith Council**

Scribe: Brian Keefe

#### **I. What does Vermont mean to you? What common values do Vermonters share?**

- The atmosphere and peace of Vermont is something I can feel as I drive across the border.
- It's a peaceful, beautiful and safe.
- We have a stubbornness, a civility and independence.
- VT is a place where I can be myself. We 'live and let live', and our lives are based on common respect.
- VT means community – caring for each other, sharing of what we give.
- Vermont welcomes diversity; it's open to strange people and strange ideas. Vermonter is willing to listen to different views.
- Vermonters are set in their ways but also somewhat open (even to odd people).
- There is a sense of privacy here, but people are there if you need help. "I'm here but I don't intrude". We look after each other.
- Vermont is open to the arts. As an artist, it is a great place to be and artists are not lost, but are a part of the community.
- There is a devotion and a connectedness to nature. There is a toughness and resilience here.
- People come here expecting a challenge and that challenge somehow feeds what they are.
- There is a sense of community – even neighborliness – you can walk into the local store and stop and chat about things.
- There is a distinction between towns of different size, border towns, and in-and – out of town residents.
- There is a negative side: it's an expensive state to live in and the taxes are really high. "I see it in people who are moving out."
- Vermonters are independent and this manifests itself in being less likely to seek help. They 'don't take charity'.

#### **II. Looking ahead through our lifetimes, and those of our children, what challenges and opportunities do you see for Vermont?**

Challenges:

- The challenge is that it's expensive. (the taxes have doubled and triple in the past few years).
- Transportation is a challenge. It's very difficult to live in rural areas without reliable transportation.
  - The Interfaith Council runs Auto Angels; the clients most often need these cars for work or medical reasons.

- The high costs of living are a challenge to our diversity in the state. The poor can't afford to live here anymore, so we have an influx of new residents who are largely second-home.
- Second home owners themselves are a challenge – they are often disinterested in issues that affect others around them.
- There is a challenge in the lack of employment. A few attendees really emphasized this.
- Vermont does the best to drive entrepreneurs out of the state. The VT solution is always 'tax, tax, tax'. We have "a prince's palette for charity on a pauper's resources."
- Ideology can be challenge – because we often think that to produce equality we have to tax those who have resources to help those who don't. But it's a problem when those who have resources get taxed out.
- "I'm proud to pay taxes because I know it's going to be shared."
- The opportunity is to give people the tools to be able to support themselves.
- Vermonters are disconnected from the poverty that exists.
- The high cost of energy is a challenge.
- Provincialism and insistence on local control is a challenge. Vermont needs to become much more efficient in how it provides services. We need to think about a consolidation of resources.
- "I'm not sure the state knows that there is a southern Vermont."
- Education is a challenge and to provide support for it we need to make it a more desirable acquisition. There are many who do not see a connection between their level of education and their level of standard of living.

#### Opportunities:

- Vermont has a small learning environment which is an asset. Education is also more accountable.
- The desire within Vermont to be green is an opportunity.
- Vermont has opportunities in that it should keep its farms:
  - We should keep local gardens
  - Artisan cheeses are an opportunity for farmers
  - Organic produce works here
  - The Vermont label in food means a lot.
- Educating people to value and therefore shop/frequent local businesses is an opportunity.
- Local businesses can then support local charities and communities.
- Accessibility in government is a great thing – different and hopeful.

### **III. What should our priorities be as we work together to realize your vision and prepare Vermont for the future?**

- Educating people about the importance of local economy.
- Managing the Fish and Game Dept to sustain wildlife species; supporting the value and sacredness of land.

- Examining the Welfare Structure; especially the loss of the overseer of the poor. A priority should be working for aid rather than relying on federal government.
- Vermont should focus on a tripodal system (it used to work this way and was successful): education, family and church.
- Vermont should focus on understanding its history and past community values.

#### **IV. We've been talking about Vermont, but how does this discussion concern the future of your community?**

- In some cases, local people are being priced out of their houses.
- Younger people also can't afford to live here.
- Younger people also cannot find good jobs. (Jobs are the number 1 issue here!)
- There is a challenge here; how can we protect the housing stock most importantly for those who need primary housing, not second homes? Especially in face of the prices and land values.
- When people lose their connectiveness to the land they become disconnected from their communities and their sense of self.
- Volunteerism here is high – it's about cooperation (rather than competition) and we should keep it that way.
- Lack of connection to churches is troubling.
- What's unique about Vermont is that although some of the concerns may be the same as neighboring states (speaker from Massachusetts), here it was possible to do more, and to feel like you could make a difference. There is a more of a sense of community here.

## **COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**

### **Burr and Burton Academy youth town commission group**

Scribe: Brian Keefe

#### **II. What does Vermont mean to you? What common values do Vermonters share?**

- Vermont has a strong sense of community. It's small, and BBA in particular.
- "I know most people and am friendly towards those I don't know"
- "I feel like most people will accept you"
- "Vermont is it's own deal." We're independent, even from other New England states.
- "People are intense about being Vermonters."
- There's a strong sense of tradition and strong family ties.
- Vermont is also very innovative, especially on the Green Front.
- Vermonters realize that we have fix things.
- Vermont is its own little bubble; we have a low crime rate, and we're very focused on history. We value preserving historic building, for example.
- Vermonters are open minded and accepting (or at the least will be sympathetic). "They'd rather be on your side than antagonistic."
- Vermonters have hard work and dedication in their bones. It's not the easiest place to live.

#### **II. Looking ahead through our lifetimes, and those of our children, what challenges and opportunities do you see for Vermont?**

- **(Challenge)** Keeping the younger generation in Vermont.
- **(Challenge)** Keeping the money flowing when it comes to the winter season (ski season, for example, is changing – due to global warming.) And even other changes – not as many people go skiing.
- **(Challenge)** When Vermont is compared with other places – and it's hard to compete with places with more activities.
- **(Opportunity)** We will probably need to 'give in' to some of the other attractions to give people a reason to come here and to stay here.
- It's a challenge to keep our natural beauty.
- Un-equality is a challenge: a lot of people can't afford to live here. It would make sense for wealthier communities to help out those people who can't afford to live here.
- **UNITY** is the biggest issue in Vermont. There are clashes between those who move here and those who have lived here forever.
  - There's also a rivalry between northern and southern Vermont. "Even the referees are different!"
- **(Challenge)** The economy of Vermont is such that the out-of-staters are all more wealthy than other Vermonters.

- “There’s the whole *my dad works in New York* thing!”
- (Opportunity) There’s the green movement and working on that for Vermont.
- Small communities also provide meaningful involvement and a chance to make a difference. This is Vermont’s opportunity.
- (Opp) Focusing on other economic sectors besides tourism.
- (Challenge) We need to get past being stubborn and resentful attitudes
  - Eg. Bumper stickers that say: Don’t Manchester the Mountains or Don’t Jersey Vermont

### **III. What should our priorities be as we work together to realize your vision and prepare Vermont for the future?**

- Fixing the Economy! It needs to be less tourism dependent.
- We need to reach out to kids. Having faith in youth is important, and giving them opportunities to get involved prior to their leaving for college.
- Strengthen the ‘going green’ thing. Take advantage of Vermont being known as the Green State.
- “I don’t want Vermont to turn into a concrete jungle, but we have to move in that direction. You’re not going to get a bunch of youth to stay in Vermont just because the leaves change colors. I may be the only young person who is happy to ride my bike around and look at the leaves.”
- We need to focus on getting rid of stereotypes of Vermont that don’t help outside Vermont (ie. Hillbillies, crazy cow-tipping hippies, etc)
- We need better public transport.
- We need well-paying jobs for youth.

### **IV. We’ve been talking about Vermont, but how does this discussion concern the future of your community?**

*These students are all members of town boards – such as the Development Review Board, or the Planning Commission- therefore we tailored the question to ask about their community and also about how the discussion might affect the issues they talk about in their board work.*

- We should be using the recreation programs here to build community with younger kids, especially those that are non-competitive in the sports areas.
- We should be focusing on protecting wildlife in town planning and protecting views. It’s an important part of the discussion here.
- My involvement on the town board helps make me appreciate the amount of work that goes into guiding development in Manchester.
- The small community leads to more involvement in decision making, and that’s good.
- Burr and Burton has a community service element that “teaches you to help out in the community”.
- Being involved in community helps us to understand each other – while at school we know each other, it’s nice to be in a small place.
- We need more opportunities in the Arts at Burr and Burton.

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Staff and Administration at Hildene – Lincoln Family Home**

**Scribe: Brian Keefe**

**I. What does Vermont mean to you? What common values do Vermonters share?**

- VT means a love of the land.
- It means a fierce independence.
- Vermont means cooperation.
- It means tolerance of different opinions, ideas, beliefs. This general history of tolerance will be challenged in coming years with the changing ethnicities. “Since the hippies came here there’s been an acceptance of differences.”
- Vermont means traditions, cultures. “My daughter, whose 11, wants to celebrate Hanukah because she heard about it at school.”
- Some traditions are not being passed along (example given was deer hunting). There’s a loss of some things that saddens us.
- Vermonters are looking for ways to respect their traditions. They want to hold onto what makes us Vermont.
- One participant expresses regret in the division over tradition; he saw a bumper sticker that really disturbed him that read “I’m a Vermonter. I do what I want.” It showed a lack of tolerance.
- Tolerance has traditionally been a two way street in Vermont. But with discussions around cutting back on town meetings there are fewer places to share views with neighbors. We need those places to maintain our understanding of each other.
- Vermont means silence. There are places where you can only hear the wind and the rain (many of which are threatened).

**II. Looking ahead through our lifetimes, and those of our children, what challenges and opportunities do you see for Vermont?**

- **Challenges:** Vermont has become a service oriented state. There’s a bigger demand but a smaller workforce. There’s also a loss of people coming through the ranks of the service industries, so we cannot supply/respond to that demand here in state.
- “I’m concerned that Vermont, because of its small size, becomes a state of very old people”. There is a lack of opportunities for young people. E.G. ski areas are importing employees.
- Another respondent was not worried about the changing demographics. The phenomenon of youth not having adequate reason to live here has been “going on since the Civil War.”
- Wages were are challenge. It was suggested that the state put some effort into defining benchmarks for a ‘livable wage’, especially as it would concern a single parent.

- A challenge for Vermont is the balance between tourism and industry. While people visit or move to Vermont because of the idyllic setting (tourism related), the state will need to have jobs here for youth (industry) so there needs to be a balance between the two.
- Medicine and health care are challenges to Vermont. There are ‘closed practices’ and it’s harder to get doctors to stay here because they can earn more money elsewhere.
- **Opportunities:** “We need to figure out what our strengths are, and play to those strengths. It’s not about balance, it’s about making choices.” Our strengths include: working landscapes, natural beauty, a sense of community.
- We have an opportunity to develop high speed internet. This is “critical for writers, publishers, and knowledge based” industries.
- Energy is an opportunity; Vermont should develop a statewide energy plan instead of having each town decide on a case by case basis.
- Our aesthetics are a strength – especially air quality – including the possibility to still have silence in the state. Vermont should control emissions from cars, set tough standards for ourselves.
- The transportation system in general in Vermont inhibits commerce (Challenge) and we need to make sure that we have distribution access to markets for the future.
  - Another respondent mentioned that this is a Vermont strength – and the old adage of “You can’t get there from here” is a part of our identity.
- Challenge: Our infrastructure needs attention. Before we invest in new initiatives, we need to maintain what we have.
- Opportunity: there is a high level of engagement and community support here.
- Opportunity: there is also a good level of accessibility here in Vermont, locally and at the state level to decision makers.

### **III. What should our priorities be as we work together to realize your vision and prepare Vermont for the future?**

- High speed internet is a priority. “Or else our land value in rural Vermont will be gone.” This effort should have some state backing/federal help and private contribution. It could be treated like the Rural Electrification Act – but it MUST be a state priority.
- Energy education is a priority – right now “people aren’t sure what they should do or how they should do it.” But we need to change the bigger attitude and make it “the Vermont way to not create waste.”
  - People are willing to take the next step on energy issues, and it would build a sense of community to do this. Good examples of this were given, like Cow Power by CVPS, the volume charges on trash, the refund when you bring your own bags to the supermarket; all methods of education around energy and cost/affordability.
- Solid Waste Disposal is priority and how it relates to energy.
- Affordable Housing is a priority. This group especially seemed to think that to be able to maintain our traditional socio-economic strata in small towns in Vermont, this should be a major priority. They also mentioned VHCF and others doing good work.
- Health Insurance is a priority. “The same people who need affordable housing will need health insurance.”

- JOBS are the underlying basis for these other issues; and we need to focus on the provision of jobs for people in Vermont.
- Compact Communities are a priority – no sprawl.
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**IV. We've been talking about Vermont, but how does this discussion concern the future of your community?**

- Community is important to people here, but whether it is as valuable is a question – it's there when you need it or when there is a crisis. It used to be more automatic; now you have to find it or you have to create it.
- Vermont is small, but there is still a division between north and south. Once you get out of certain geographic areas, there's no concept of that place. This is challenge for our region in particular.
- The biggest challenge here is finding time to create or work on community and public good issues. When Vermont was an agricultural culture, there were set times that worked together as communities, but now we all work too much and are too busy to do so.
- Having access to high speed internet affects us here. Many of us won't see a time when that happens in Manchester and the rural areas around Manchester.
- The preservation of the rural communities is the MOST important thing for this region. Hildene itself does a really good job of this. "My son has a big dream to someday come home and live in a part of Vermont that is still Vermont."
- "I don't care how broke I am, I want to be here."
- We are tourism dependent here in Manchester and we need to protect the landscape to protect that income source.
- Hildene is a model for this region: 'Progressive, yet preserving tradition'. We can use this as a teaching tool and example for the region. We can lead by example and imagine ourselves as a part of a broader community.
- The Shires of Vermont initiative is an opportunity for this region.
- High speed internet is the least impactful way that we can improve Vermont for the future.
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## **COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**

### **Evening Forum**

**GROUP LOCATION: Southern Vermont College**

**Scribe: Bonnie Smoren**

#### **IV. What does Vermont mean to you? What common values do Vermonters share?**

- Vermont is an oasis of possibility of the best things in America. It is surrounded by orientations to bigness, militarism, consumerism. It can be a beacon to the rest of the United States.
- Love of the land, love of country, teamwork and partnerships with others – like a family. Caring for each other and the land.
- Vermonters have an inner core of strength.
- Numerous people stated that Vermont can be a beacon and an example. One speaker expressed the hope that we don't lose these core values due to an influx of people.
- Strong willed, strong minded, hardworking. An ingenuity that goes back generations due to Vermont's location and geography. With that comes a desire for protection and preservation of resources. Stewardship
- The desire to preserve Vermont crosses the political spectrum. In other states the conservative element wants develop and to exploit the land. The speaker noted that this is the most predominant value he has observed.
- The smallness and accessibility of the government.
- Respect for natural resources is profound here. People are attuned to sustainable systems. It is a place where we can have a real dialogue.
- Vermont has a unique place in the history of the country. Vermont's position historically – its role in the revolution and the independence of Vermonters is still here. It serves as an example. We should protect and market and teach that in a positive way. We need to exploit without destroying Vermont.
- The mountains of North Carolina have buildings on the top of them – something Vermont does not have.
- The word "brand" turns me off when used about the geography, history and people of the state. For people outside of Vermont, it strikes a chord as an idyllic or special place. I feel an unwillingness to commoditize Vermont.
- There is a mythological understanding of Vermont including a toughness of character.
- There is a romanticism about the state.. The reality is there are people who are struggling like crazy to pay fuel bills. The speaker noted that he is a teacher and sees students struggling with the idea of college. Some Vermonters have not had a successful experience at college or are not able to pay for a second semester. There is a different perspective from people who are at the bottom looking up. The real view is not what the outsiders want to see.
- Many people stated that the branding of Vermont is a bad idea.
- Vermont is a place of beauty, gardens and, recreation, but we need to be mindful of the Vermonters who are struggling – who cannot pay \$3.00/ gallon for gas.

- Many common values are not shared. It is difficult to find a value that is shared.

## **II. Looking ahead through our lifetimes, and those of our children, what challenges and opportunities do you see for Vermont?**

- People look toward their immediate past – their own professional lifetime to project into the future. The speaker believes that the economic picture is much grimmer than some of the data that is presented. People are experiencing a truth that is not being reflected in the media.
- We need realistic economic predictions and the best case scenario is tough times.
- Most Vermonters will face a major economic collapse.
- The topic of affordable housing has become a popular trend. Affordable housing has always been needed. It is not something new or something that exists only in Vermont.
- Property taxes are unacceptably high. The speaker's taxes on a modest house are over \$8,000.
- Another speaker noted that his property taxes are \$10,00, but declared that he is willing to pay the price for the quality of life here in Vermont.
- Having people move in who are willing and able to pay high taxes pushes out Vermonters who do not have that option. We need not just affordable housing, but low income housing and rentals.
- Homelessness in Vermont is increasing every year. In Bennington alone last year 265 people were identified as homeless.
- Vermont Life- the magazine- is not the reality of Vermont. However, it is a wonderful image and we need to retain some of that.
- Young people are leaving in droves. Old people are getting older and staying here. You cannot have a vibrant state with those demographics. Old people are able to work productively much longer and need to be paid appropriately. Young people also need jobs.
- The speaker has heard that Vermont is hostile to jobs. He doesn't believe that but thinks that it is harder for businesses, even clean ones, to become established in Vermont.
- The price of oil is a tremendous challenge and we need to have an eye to the future outside of an oil based economy.
- The cost of doing business internationally has risen, and many jobs are now outsourced to Nova Scotia or other Canadian provinces. What can we do to draw some of those clean jobs to Vermont?
- We were one of the first with Efficiency Vermont, but now other states are passing us by. Vermont needs incentives beyond conservation to address energy issues.
- If we are going to offer benefits and incentives for renewable energy – how will it be paid for? There is a balance between costs to the consumer and benefits.
- People need correct information and clarity in order to decide how to act. The speaker doubts the integrity of information provided.
- One opportunity is for Vermont to produce replicable models. We are small enough to try things. Of the 24 colleges in Vermont 18 are private and many are very small. Small colleges can be the farmers markets of education. – personalized and affordable. We should be looking at those schools as potential models of innovative education. SVC offers profound service learning opportunities.

- Service opportunities can be offered through every grade of school. That will promote a spirit of community and worth in young people. Many young people are self-focused, or absorbed in electronic distractions and disconnected from community and the outdoors.
- Focus on our strengths. We sometimes create problems by focusing on them. We need to create incubators and celebrate success in small, entrepreneurial businesses.
- In Manchester, many businesses are struggling and failing. We need to develop collaborative opportunities with the non-profit sector.
- We don't have the workforce to support the businesses that we want to come here.
- Vermont is a commodity and responsible growth and entrepreneurialism is critical. Tourism and related industries are essential here.
- Vermont's scale allows community connections.

### **III. What should our priorities be as we work together to realize your vision and prepare Vermont for the future?**

- Vermont needs to improve the quality of the currently available low income housing. In Pownal for example, some "affordable" housing has been described as having third world conditions. Repair what exists before putting more in.
- The legislature and business people need to figure out how to maintain a clean environment while cutting through the red tape that new businesses face. We need a way to promote clean industry in the state – and tourism won't do it.
- We can be at the forefront of developing renewable energy.
- Balance human activities, such as ATV use, with preservation of natural resources in Vermont.
- Social cohesion, because the future is about survival.
- Workforce development. Education, particularly career education, needs to be a priority. The technical centers in Vermont are a huge untapped resource for workforce development and have insufficient funding to stay open late- after traditional school hours. There needs to be more funding to develop and deliver educational programs to all students – high school, college and adult.
- The flip side to smallness is the risk of parochialism. We can think bigger than our own immediate community.
- We really are looking at survival. Low income Vermonters relying on social security will not be able to survive. How will Vermonters who have worked at low income jobs all their lives survive?
- A speaker (age 29) reminisced about traditional childhood activities he was exposed to while growing – fishing, his mother knitting at town meeting, maple syrup. "There is no greater thing than tradition." What will today's children have? We need to expose young people to traditions – and get them away from video games.
- Job opportunities for youth have to be a priority.
- Vermont cannot become a retirement community, like Arizona or Florida. Older people should come to Vermont for second or third careers, not to retire.
- We need to focus on some select areas for priorities – technology for example. We can't try to take on too much. Work to develop pools of entrepreneurs.
- Look at the turnaround in Ireland as an economic example.

- Energy independence should be a priority.

#### **IV. We've been talking about Vermont, but how does this discussion concern the future of your community?**

- Bennington could try to attract retired or older people here. There are volunteer and recreation opportunities. Elder communities could be focused downtown. We would need younger people to provide services for those retirees.
- Bennington is in the southwest corner. We need to make the most of our location by reaching out to neighbors, rather than fearing them.
- We need to acknowledge that each community is unique and should not be expected to develop in the same way.
- We need to bring in not only entrepreneurial businesses, which have a failure rate of 70%, but established businesses.
- A Pownal resident sees the need for increased police protection. Pownal is being infiltrated by people from other areas who are selling drugs and engaging in other undesirable or illegal activities.
- "I hope that we have the courage to agree with each other and move toward action". Vermont depends so much on citizens in Vermont. Leadership development and capacity building needs to be promoted and nurtured from an early age to maintain those citizen leaders.
- Low wage jobs create multiple problems. The speaker works with whole families who live on less than \$800/month. We need to make sure that everyone's basic needs are met.
- Government officials need to be kept apprised and linked to citizen activities such as this.
- "Uphillers and downhillers"- the dichotomy between traditional rural cultures and more urban citizens is pronounced.
- Sometimes there is divisiveness between communities. Whatever eventually happens in Pownal will affect surrounding communities. It is better for all the towns to work together. There should be a united effort to make the southern section of Vermont vibrant.