

# COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT

## NORTH HERO/GRAND ISLE COUNTY

### Community Forum Day Notes March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008

The following notes were collected from focus group meetings and forums throughout the day spent in Grand Isle 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 on March 6<sup>th</sup>.

- South Hero Land Trust, local farmers and landowners
- Lake Champlain Basin Program staff
- Grand Isle Rotary Club
- Farmer's Watershed Alliance
- Island Arts
- Public evening meeting in North Hero

**Local hosts and sponsors include:**

North Hero United Methodist Church  
Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce  
South Hero Land Trust  
Lake Champlain Basin Partnership Program  
Farmer's Watershed Alliance  
Island Arts  
Grand Isle Rotary Club  
VT Public Television

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**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report**  
**South Hero Land Trust group, March 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Scribe – Elizabeth Ottinger**

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

- Human size community, smallness of the state, connections, you know everyone, we create accessible models
- Simplification of life, “play” outside in the environment
- “Vermont” brand = quality, goes back to the quality people behind the products, and the quality people themselves (hard-working, trusted)
- Vermont = home, safe and secure
- Working and living with people with whom you may not have same values, because of smallness, we work together – exposes us to differences, this is good, commonalities and opportunities that bring us together
- Respect for others, we can have differences but differences are respected, we are civil toward each other even if we disagree
- Understanding that we have to work together to get anywhere, even if we don’t agree
- Decision-making is easier because we have history together, wouldn’t factor in (history) in a larger community
- Education and learning (most libraries per capita)
- Vermont means community, not just S. Hero, but with other communities and the state – how do we information share better (successes)
- Lots of hope here, feels good to be part of a community that is so connected

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

- Economics (c), things getting more expensive, less affordable, cost of living high
- As gap grows, some populations might be left out, don’t have a voice (homeless population)
- Declining school enrollment (c)
- Affordable Housing (c)
- Lack of job opportunities (c)
- Young people leaving the state, not staying because of affordability issues (c)
- Great place to have an agricultural business: climate, land, market for our products, great location for drive-throughs = corridor
- Diversity of agricultural products and people themselves, with a market for the diverse products
- High costs of running agricultural business (energy costs, insurance costs, workman’s comp), wish we could get more of a break on sales tax(c)

- Lots of work can be done with the value of buying local (people don't understand why, lack of knowledge, opportunity for education)
- Labor (c), immigration for labor issues, find a way to make the workers legal
- Energy (challenge and opportunity) – trucking things in from other areas, cost of that, need to focus on growing those things locally
- We need more localized energy sources – opportunity to do some very innovative things here
- Loss of manufacturing jobs, import/export issues
- Transportation (c) – especially on the islands (one way out and one way in)
- Natural and agricultural education (o) – we do lot with kids, we should do more for adults

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

- Figure out ways to make agriculture more profitable and less difficult to make a living
- Expand the markets for agriculture
- Expand the products (beans, cheese, etc)
- Transportation – getting the products in and out of here; also bike paths, how do we get people to stop using cars? Networking cooperatively for trucking, sharing goods
- Keeping farm land affordable through conservation and other programs
- Making sure young people who want to farm have the ability to do that, can afford to buy land – training for the next generations of farmers
- Alternative energy: Methane Digestive (dairy farms) – make fuel or power from it, manure
- Literacy, education, learning knowledge

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

- Didn't do this question – covered in other areas

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report**  
**Lake Champlain Basin Program staff, March 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Scribe – Sarah Waring**

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

- Basin Program: yes, common values are sense of community, sense of appreciation of the commons, VTers have a sense of fair play, and expect to have representation in all levels of government.
- Get Vters, NYers, Quebecois together and get them to appreciate LC in ways that make them understand and steward the resource – grant programs for rec, bike, travel.
- Bolster awareness of cultural heritage in the valley – that said, I believe the Vters share an appreciation for their history. ‘ long conversation with the cabby about lake champlain’.
- VT means a place where people will work together to get consensus around issues of all shapes and sizes in a respectful, meaningful dialogue.
- Vters come together expecting community networks to work to their benefit and they can help facilitate and make that happen – they expect a positive outcome even if it’s not what they desired. Working towards a common goal but not getting what you wanted, it’s still a common goal.
- Neighborhoods – reach out to people around you to get things to happen, to survive.
- You expect players and hope players will come to the table.
- VT is especially good at trying to understand the impacts of the different sectors that are at the table. People are interested into different sectors in the economy, neighborhoods, etc. – this is a common resource and people get it.
- Long history of Basin Program being supported – people expect this in VT; people will reach out to you all the time, and VTers will ask for help when you figure out you need it.
- Personal level – amazed at the amount of volunteerism. Everyone takes a role and they join together- no real discrimination when it comes to people working together for a community

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

- Within this community one of the challenges is employment – we don’t have a tremendous number of businesses out here. VT always has to keep an eye on this – we’re close to markets but removed from the commutable distance.

- Opp – such a dependence upon technology, and while tech won't replace the everyday conversation (there's a one to one communication that won't be replaced by technology).
- As we work to protect lake and work to clean it up for the next generation – part of the challenge is more people and we end up with more waste water and storm water runoff. Creating the pollution prevention techniques and paying for them could easily set us back if we're not careful and we don't do more small areas with incremental steps. These are really critical for the future of lake.
- This next generation knows a heck of a lot more about the lake than this one does. There's an ethics of resource stewardship with the new generation. A lot of this is individual teachers, and a collaborative effort to train teachers on lake and on historic aspects – and a coalition that's cross state to make sure this happens.
- Children are getting much more of an environmental awareness ed than I could ever dream of. Kids actually understand what phosphorus is! This is a wonderful opportunity and needs to be maintained.
  - The health of the environment is important for the future.
  - The envi-ed needs to go hand in hand with the cultural education. People need to understand how that history affects them.
- Opportunity is there – kids and parents are engaged, but we need to enhance them! We always here that they don't have enough money for school trips. The whole state (lake especially) has a plethora of educational opps. BUT if we don't educate our kids we run the risk of them not taking care of what is.
- They don't know the history of a place, of a house; Frost vandalism is outrageous. There's a lot more that needs to be done. You can see it in the acts of vandalism.
- Challenge: envi and cultural movement that is dependent on FUNDING. One of the challenges is facing vt (coming down to enough money to clean up lake) is that we have to provide a work force. We all know that the environmental factor here makes it more expensive to live.
- If we don't provide the jobs and opportunities here for the next generation to live than we won't have the support to do these things.
- Lake is an underutilized tourism resource. Services, manufacturing, knowledge based economy. There should be initiative underway to do start up businesses – adventure, cycling, shipwreck, storm boarding (providing remote operating vehicles to view shipwrecks). We could focus on these resources that people can't usually access – but that said we don't want to corrupt the resource or make it Disney land.
- Challenge of communication and keeping it effective.
- Increase in chloride levels – this may be linked to transport – it would be really great to have a high speed ferry to go from BTV to Plattsburgh. We're fortunate to have the ferry running 24 hours a day, seven days a week – as far as the lake goes that's very important transport infrastructure that we have here. I am encouraged by CCTA's transport – BTV to Montpelier; I would love to see a state parking lot across from the ferry that services hospitals and IBM.
- There's always a bus load from here to Middlebury and it's full. Air transport seems fine – the market can't bear another airport.

- The RIDE SHARE program is very well advertised and we have to get out of our cars. To VT's credit – there are incentive prizes and things to encourage people to do this. RIDE SHARING is a great social time with your colleagues.
- Preliminary goals set on our big pollutant levels – bumped up the timeline – trying to get more people in on the community issues. It impacts everyone, but we need more people – making incremental progress – the outlook is promising in that very positive steps have been made and makes people look at reevaluation all the time, and do we have to re-examine measurement steps? It's favorable with a lot more to do.
- The Quadracentennial – it's a great example of how VTers will get together and do a project – lots of committees and great ideas, movement forward. But like everything in the state there's not enough \$\$ to make the full thing possible. There needs to be more resources available. Pleasantly surprised about how people are working together – like anything you'll have people who come up and want their idea to be a priority. There's a good process for the projects to be vetted. With the Quad we try to bring people together to speak with one voice.
- Basin Program is providing tech assistance and hoping to bring national park service \$\$ to bare. We were recently designated a National Heritage Area – Champlain Valley National Heritage Area – we're one of 37 areas in the nation. Designation in 2006 – end of 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, eligible to receive up to 1 million. That's the next step bringing us beyond the Quad and increase the cultural heritage programming. Marsh-Billings Rockefeller and Rolph Diamant (ag heritage and cultural heritage) lots of opportunities and lots of energy.
- 'Why are there less funds?' There are SO many good ideas and people perceive that they are worthy of following up – people really want to do these things – one basin program and now there's nine all competing for the same dollars.

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

- In terms of lake – NY, VT, Quebec agree on. Reducing phosphorus, reducing toxic substance, reduce and prevent further aquatic species, blue-green algae to protect public drinking supplies. (really devastating especially missiquoi bay) – our scientists are international!
- Fish and Wildlife priorities, education, cultural heritage priorities.
- One of the priorities as we work together is keeping the diverse array of voices at the table. This is the hardest part – effective communication – it's the most important component of any work we do – we need to get the word out and people need to provide feedback.
- ENHANCE communication opportunities; whether it's through conference calling capabilities for programs that are widespread. Communications infrastructure – high speed internet, fiber optic telephone, community service centers. Video conferencing

- Sustainable economic development – we have an opportunity with the energy crisis – we have an opp to be a leader to harvest energy from the wind and sun and other natural resources that are just extractive. We have the brain power here and we need to keep the brain power here as long as we can.
- Some of the work that we do here brings in the QOL – we have to provide a high QOL for professionals; these people could go to other places to make more money, but people are living here because they choose to.
- Working to protect the lake in the future – with lake Champlain biking program – this is a chance to get people out of their cars. Just published the brochures in French. Destination and recreation for residents.
- We work a lot with bi-lingual populations – Qu and Ruth and Gary to ensure that our key pieces are bi-lingual. Feedback is positive.
- Basin Program manages the resource program in ECHO – we’ve translated the plan into French and all exhibits and handouts to French. This design of exhibit materials has been really successful – we provide the service for free and we try to help people do their interpretation.

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

- South Hero – coming from a community surrounded by the lake, the health of the lake is critical to survival – transportation is critical to our survival. The local land trust has done an amazing job on the islands on preventing large blocks of areas from going to development – they’ve worked hard to preserve this.
- Sense of community is strong – without your expectation rising to the top – while I may not know of someone, the neighbors know about the resources. It’s not who you know but whether or not you’re willing to pick up the phone and figure out how to get there.
- Living in Shelburne is COMPLETELY different from my home mill town where there was one economic demographic. But in Shelburne the diversity of economic demographics is amazing (we have some serious poverty and wealthy folks). BUT we need to maintain affordable housing – I’ve always been very appreciative of being able to move into that town and there’s a strong emphasis on education in that town. Affordable housing links to the workforce – if we can’t give them a place to live then they can’t come to these towns. Shelburne mobile home examples – trying to sell, community and state rallied around allowing people to work and live in the community. Channel 17 has done a tremendous job in bringing government to people. This is very important – COMMUNICATION is the hardest thing but the best thing to do. Shelburne’s doing fine, but we have tremendous resources – my taxes are doable, but I’m being subsidized by mansions on the lake. The community is aware of things in Basin Program – natural resource committee, open space bond, etc.
- This is the 5<sup>th</sup> state I’ve lived in – every spring I’ve gotten wanderlust, but for one reason or another I wind up staying here – because of the community here!

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT  
SCRIBE NOTES  
MARCH 6, 2008  
ROTARY CLUB SESSION**

**Scribe- Steve Gold**

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

- The term 'rural development' is an oxymoron
- The land should be used for agriculture rather than "development"
- Common values: strong sense of community, e.g. ice storm response. There is pride in what we have (people move here from away and try to bring the things they had)
  
- Willingness to "pitch in" , if given the opportunity
- Vermonters value the land and desire to be close to it
- Independence
- Vermonters value the water and desire to be close to it
- Simplicity of life is a common value, e.g. you don't have to dress up to go places
- Vermonters value education, good schools, quality teachers
- There are divergent values between those who have lived here and those who move in - "community mindedness is not something recent arrivals know or understand based on their experience elsewhere in America
- Vermonters value family, family togetherness, e.g. sharing meals together daily or regularly
- Self-sufficiency – volunteerism both in and as a group; e.g. fire departments and rescue squads.
- Vermonters are altruistic. Historically, this was a matter of survival and a necessity. This is no longer true.

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

- C- Maintaining membership in volunteer organizations, esp. critical ones like fire depts., rescue squads. We need to reinvigorate volunteerism; this is a crisis.
- C- People have higher expectations of community services but less volunteer involvement. Why: 2 income earner families; commuting off the islands (53%); people closed in as a society - don't "get out". This has an especially adverse effect on rural communities.
- C- There is a crisis of a lack of leadership for voluntary positions
- C- There is a "time poverty" - volunteers are overwhelmingly older and retired
- C- The level of training necessary for many volunteer positions has increased
- C- New folks don't share community values; where they came from there was no functional community - they didn't know their neighbors
- C- Opportunities to mix with folks is limited in the islands - used to do it at the dump
- C- Preservation of family time
- O- Improved phones, roads, internet are generating more cottage industries and more telecommuting
- C- Newcomers are without kids. This make it hard to learn community values. Kids bring people together.

- C- Rotary members are getting older; membership is not supported by employers any more; it's not tax deductible; younger people spend more time working and/or commuting.
- C- Isolation; the fastest growing population is the elderly
- O- The schools provide an opportunity to inculcate volunteerism in children and for involvement of people who live in the community.
- C- Lack of a high school in the islands
- C- Lack of employment opportunities
- C- Social/Economic/Historical differences between So. Hero and Alburgh
- O- New Parent Child Center space will lead to better community involvement through use of the meeting space
- C- Lack of a critical mass (not enough) population
- C- Absence of a place to gather
- C- Traffic moving through the islands - both cars (commuters) and trucks
- C- The islands population distribution - an hourglass
- C- Chamber of Commerce focus on seasonal business only leaves year round businesses unserved

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

- Need better internet service/access
- Need new facilities, i.e. Senior center, community center
- Need senior housing and/or nursing homes on the islands e.g. senior residential care capacity
- Need a method for doing planned residential development given poor soil for septic systems in view of desire to preserve open land
- Need funding for community recreation facilities (State \$) to promote interaction among people who live here
- Need incentives to get the five island towns to work together
- Need representation in the General Assembly just from the islands (pop. 7000)
- Need a crisis like the ice storm to bring services together

**IV. We've been talking about Vermont, but how does this discussion concern the future of your community? *This question was answered above as whole conversation has been particular to this community.***

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report**  
**Farmer's Watershed Alliance, March 6th**

**Scribe- Kara DeLeonardis**

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

- Depends on what Vermonter you're asking – 5 generations or new Vermonter
- Loves the diversity, not cultural, 4 seasons, dramatic changes in weather, Vermonters are “not lightweight”, showing children that
- Traditional VT values, great but can hold small towns like Alburg back, didn't make the transition from a railroad town to now, ie. school budget not passing b/c of older people and lower income and attitude re. not taxes
- Pride in being leaders, opportunity and envy of others; To be close to our delegation – federal level, (NY and others don't have)
- Proud of farmer's watershed group – first of its kind in country – we can do this in VT if we choose to. We work together to keep farms clean and support the “clean and clear” mandate for the lake. Another mentioned that there was a period when “we let it go in terms of leadership.”
- “When the followers start to lead the leaders follow” – change can happen
- People in VT have the ability to speak up, feel empowered b/c of small scale
- More independent here to do things –for example, we met with Leahy and then proved successful to increase support for and prices of Milk in 06, then NY followed suit
- Pride in Vermont, when leave and can compare to other places
- Aren't same incentives here – draining land, gov't investing more \$ in farming, forest land cultivation to be more productive, etc., things that Quebec does (incentives to drain land) or similar to Austria with rolling hills, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of forested land, all forested, Vermont is too focused on regulation and preserving landscapes at all costs, not using them.
- Concern about too much regulation, ex. Got in trouble for a Horse on land
- Value of natural, organic food and life, but needs to be balanced with dairy and other farming, not too much regulation, so farms aren't driven away who can't become organic for example
- “We don't feel like VT is always for us”

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

- We believe VT doesn't want us here, hard when you work 18 hours a day, get up early, work hard, etc.

- \$60 million a month farmers lost a month in 2006, but governor had to be convinced to act
- “I told my daughters I don’t want them to take over the family dairy farm we’ve built over 15 years; I want them to get an education, a great job and not have to get up at 3:30am and work 14 yrs.a day”
- I think that will change over time because of increased costs in fuel, producing food, costs going up so incomes go up, dairy farm income will rise. Energy and food are finite – land is finite.
- Dramatic increase of costs of fuel \$1200 to 5000 /month in last few years, getting more milk money but costs to produce increasing too
- “They drive by and wave but with one finger at you” (neighbors who get mad at manure in the road for example or who don’t like the smells from the farm.)
- Look to other countries as models, Austria mentioned more than once.
- But this is Vermont and it’s what we have
- Criticism of using Mexican laborers but there aren’t kids anymore to help on the farm, even though our forebearers came down from Canada and used to send money home just like Mexicans. We have a different make up with Mexicans because the people are not integrated. You don’t see them at all because many are illegal and want to keep a very low profile.
- Forced to be as economical as possible as farmers.
- High energy and grain prices a challenge. We don’t want to lose dairy, “I’m not dead yet, don’t write my eulogy.”
- We’ve seen changes and we’ve transitioned before, ex. Milk from cans to tank and canola and sunflower oils for biodiesel, and farm in Alburg from 1600 went from sheep to dairy to honey bees, etc. as long as farmers can make it economical
- Biggest fear of too much regulation so the dairy farmer can’t make it work
- 6000 farms in VT; only 1200 dairy farms but are biggest agriculture in VT and don’t want VT to forget to focus on supporting our dairy farms while supporting new developments in farming too
- Issues with water – everyone wants clean water, but it sometimes feels like a conflict between farming and clean water efforts.
- Global warming is an opportunity because buying local will be more important and farms elsewhere may become less competitive. Western dairies are going to starve for water and VT should still have it.
- Trying to be inventive – crop digester, first in US (turning crops into energy) but needs lots of money and grants limited.

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

- Keep as much open land as can without too much regulation (ex. Land trusted land means can’t be developed, farmed, forested, etc.)
- Keep agriculture number ONE in Vermont, we can’t survive without it

- Keep economy/business viable (335 farms in Islands in 1800s now only 7 in Alburg for example) – no farmers to shop, agriculture supports economy
- Problem in communities that don't want land used for farming even though about half of VT land not being used
- Forestry is farming too, there's brush land that could be a forest
- We can't be left with a farm that we can't sell to whomever we want (ex. To sell to kids, or way to keep the farm in ag) but gov't trying to do that – telling farmers what to do but not others because “we're second class citizens”?
- Being paid incentives as farmers to do beneficial things, not by regulating them (could do what they wanted in Austria)
- We should prioritize incentives – we are trying as a coalition to clean up farm effluent as part of of the Clean and Clear Initiative by voluntary action and mutual support.

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

- dairy farms will be small (organic) and very big (6,000) and in the middle will be gone
- It's not just the money it's the lifestyle – trying to survive and live the farming lifestyle with kids not in childcare, etc.
- “wasn't smart enough to be a farmer so became a doctor” – we need to value farming and farmers
- Future issues: Labor issue, Education should be a focus and how we pay for education, Its' harder to run small conventional dairy farms, being run out by large farms or organic
- How could farmers promote the industry more/better to Vermonters so Vermonters value better farmers, helps farmers feel better about doing the hard work
- Clean water vs. viable agriculture – can they go together?
- Discussion about methane digesters pros and cons
- Other alternative energies
- We're survivors, adapting, would go back to small farms if could b/c it's more stressful now with bigger numbers
- We work with neighbors – ex. Free compost and neighborhood lunch at the farm, etc.

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report**  
**Island Arts group, March 6th**

**Scribe- Kara DeLeonardis**

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

- Respect, simple rural life, love of Vermont land
- We're visionary and creative
- Demographic changes – development of South Hero, now as a bedroom community to Burlington
- Strong value and appreciation of arts – many writers and artists in Vermont whether grown here or drawn here
- Look at Chamber survey done
- Beauty of nature and be close to nature, to cultivate natural spaces, clean environment, business development that respects the natural environment, ex. Not dumping in lake
- Fewer children in school in N. Hero and in other places, aging population and younger families can't afford to move to the Islands (property values increasing)
- "After me no one else move here"/ "close the causeway"/ "people from here say you're living in so and so's house even after 20 yrs."
- Independent thinking
- Closeness of representatives, visiting artists, etc. – smallness makes it more accessible, "half degree of separation"
- Closeness but you can be left alone if you want to be and that will be respected
- Democrats
- Artist community perspective: lots of artists and summer buyers but how can artists make a living here from local community – need year round tourism to help with this which means we need more tourism industry and tourism infrastructure (restaurants, year round B&Bs – water and septic issues – composting toilets solution)
- Where to see art year round? Only Merchant bank and Alburg welcome center
- Bathrooms issue on island – only port a lets because of no public septic
- Isle la Motte trying to capitalize on 500 visitors a week from St. Anne's Shrine by bringing efforts together – arts and crafts booths, reef
- Ireland has a way of supporting artists by making artist income tax free
- We're the leaders on peace because we're doing it here
- Clean environment
- Can be an incubator for small projects
- Developing winter tourism (we have opposite of Stowe maybe)

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

- Not enough job opportunities
- Trade off to living in small, rural VT– economic – not as many opportunities
- Poverty and lack of jobs – lots of seasonal jobs but weather dependent
- Alcoholism due to lack of jobs
- Lack of opportunities for aging population who need care services without them having to leave their communities
- Not being able to afford to retire
- Best DSL in state and look forward to having young families coming in who can work from home doing technology/internet work (using town Mechanicsville below Rutland as a model) – (opportunity)
- Example of dropping kids off at school, paying and not being involved, disconnect to community when there's a bedroom community (challenge)
- Need arts community center – north hero community center will help – dances, shows, drew people/community together (school not best option) – Preservation Trust working on this & Champlain 400
- Need more studio, workshop space, barns that could be heated
- Opportunity to capitalize on local resources of islands – ex. Boat making, star gazing, maple sugaring, keep B& Bs open in summer
- Using Grand Marais in Minnesota as model – working with local community to create a vibrant arts and cultural community on the shores of the lake; Minnesota does studies about how the arts contribute to the economy
- Island Line and Allen Point Causeway – unique tourism opportunity in VT, grassroots
- Common VT challenges:
  - farms and making sure we have sustainable farms
- Common VT opportunities: renewable energy like manure to energy and wind energy, etc.
- Challenge of School Budgets with decreasing enrollment – getting them passed
- Challenge of no high school in Islands – the cost is high and pros and cons of kids having to leave the community
- Different groups – newer retired people coming in versus people here a long time

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

- Education – children are future leaders – from early childhood to adults also, since many older people never graduated high school (25% functional illiteracy)
- Need for services for older people – transportation, assisted living, etc.
- Bringing people together – newer moving in and ones been here

- Transportation – ex. Bus to Burlington and back needed – will be more of an issue as fuel costs increased (used to have a bus to IBM only and took hours)
- Developing the work at home area using DSL
- No supermarkets or retail establishments on the Islands so have to drive far

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

- Poverty, alcoholism
- Afterschool programs for working parents
- Need more access to natural food like at coop in Burlington on the islands, no movie theater
- Local libraries can serve as community centers and resources - VT has tons of these, critical for island towns without real town centers
- CIDER org. in Islands helping with poverty issues
- Need better sidewalks for walking around community in North Hero, also more parking and less trucks
- South Street project in South Hero working on safety issues – crossing the street, pedestrian and bikeways
- Need for conflict resolution training for adults trying to work together
- Divide like when the Take Back Vermont signs popped up – was this on class lines?
- Schools should teach foreign language, algebra, etc. in Islands because in other communities they are taught these (curriculum should be the same)
- Young people are in the global economy not national and wondering how this might influence future of VT economy and VT life – will change perspectives and values
- Maybe our values will be spread around the world, Vermont could be the “cauldron of values that boils over into the rest of the world”

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report**  
**Public Evening Forum at North Hero United Methodist Church**

**Scribe- Sarah Waring**

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

- ‘I’m not a native Vter, but I came here for a reason.’ What struck me even as a high school student was the connectedness to nature. It has a very viable small town ethic. There’s a lot of volunteerism that made everything work. It looked like you could do anything you wanted here – anything. 28% are self-employed – most of my friends are self-employed. Being able to live and work on the same piece of property is unique.
- Honesty and trust anywhere in the state. I’m a contractor and I’ve never not been paid. I take people at their word and it’s never hurt me. I think that’s true in VT. I don’t get that sense when I travel.
- Being a foreigner – I came to VT from France. I have been here since! VT what’s really attracted a lot of Europeans – the beauty of VT it’s very important to preserve VT – you see some area like Williston and that’s no longer Vermont.
- Supporting the local economy, craftsmen – something should be done for VTers to be able to afford in VT. I think maybe the railroad should be kept – especially as energy gets more expensive.
- Tenacity – otherwise everyone would be somewhere else in the winter.  
Independence – aging demographics and a very high tax state. Not particularly business friendly.
- Echo the independence – it’s very traditional value VODD – historically VTers have let neighbors be neighbors and be relatively eccentric, but still they would rally and be cooperative. People come together for a cause, even though they value a cause. Having your own opinion and being able to live your own lifestyle and a willingness to let your neighbor be that way too.
- Great generosity. It’s not science that will direct everything – it’s philosophy that directs life – the respect of the past, the tradition. Profit is not directing everything – people in VT say ‘where am I going and how am I going to get there?’ We think about our families, our free time, these things are more important.
- Tolerance – you don’t have to look further than civil unions. I lived in Waterbury when the hospital was disbanded.
- The thing that VT means to me is an oasis, a mecca, that’s befuddled with environmental issues, and development. The biggest challenge to the state today is overdevelopment and people who will kill VT if you let them turn it into Connecticut, Mass.
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## II. Looking ahead through our lifetimes, and those of our children, what challenges and opportunities do you see for Vermont?

- **Energy** – we’re going to have to get used to eating root crops in the winter, to how will we heat without oil. We need to look ahead and see how we can use the biomass that’s here to heat. Whether it’s wood pellet or something we grow as a crop – but the era of extractive fuels is over.
- The people in the industry are saying that a whole bunch of nuclear power plants as the intermediate step. Global warming is a natural cycle – everything that’s being done in panic over global warming, should be done calmly and because it’s good for us. I don’t think we’ll have much influence on it.
- Gas and fuel are so high because demand is growing.
- They say that VTers drive more miles than any other state except WY – that’s going to add up.
- When you go into a plant to cut trees to build houses, you take the stem of the tree. But when you go into the forest to use cellulose for fuel, you have a lot carbon going into the air – nobody yet has found a way to put the ashes back where they came from – which is an opportunity for us to do.
- Clear cutting an area here in Grand Isle for the Burlington wood plant. Mud all over the road, and the wood plant is making an environmental impact. While everyone is complaining, they want to make a change but they don’t make a change. There is always a ‘scientific’ answer to everything: a weed? Use a weed killer! There are alternatives here that you can use – an opportunity to use local labor and alternative methods.
- Clear cutting leads to exposure to the sunlight of the forest floor. Nutrients are there that get lost when you clear cut and then the soil is exposed to bleaching and you lose those nutrients.
- Demographics and aging. There are a lot of VTers being displaced to places where they think it’s less beautiful because of the tax structure. We tax the most beautiful places and force people who can’t afford it out. “Most of my neighbors are timer-switchers”
- Right now where it’s going is less income – and more expensive and people have to move out. Gentrification is happening in neighborhoods and people are moving to Alburgh and Richford because it’s cheaper to live there.
- Alburgh is now a commutable distance to BTV. Not a problem, it’s just the cost of gas. There’s a draw into where the jobs are. That’s always been a problem in VT – the jobs vs. the environment, or the jobs vs. do it yourself. I served on a board of adjustment for a lot of years and people were selling land for inflated prices – but the newcomers didn’t see it as inflated. People come, they use their elbows a little more.
- In North Hero there are a 600 people, but it takes 120 people to run the town. All of these positions are not paid – but all the problems are very sophisticated and so are the developers. “There’s not a developer in VT who doesn’t say ‘Oh, we’ll create jobs’” The biggest pressure is the rush for the open land.

- Population pressure about people wanting to come here. No one's going to come here with kids – it'll change forever, people who want the nice house with a beautiful view. If you look at global demographic numbers and replacement rates – a theory is that a family needs 2.5 kids to maintain a stable population rate. There's nothing to say there'll be a youth migration.
- 120 volunteer positions is a great thing – you get people involved.
- The demands on these positions is getting greater - the level of technical knowledge is great. We can fill the positions, but the challenge is to have the knowledge to actually make some decisions and have input on sophisticated things.
- Everyone wants things better for their kids than they had it. Whether it's a Masters degree or an SUV – the children that are here, the parents will make sure they have more and more. This is a challenge because our resources are more limited than we realize. Whatever the status symbol is the parents will want to give it to their children. The other challenge is how do you keep them on the farm once they've seen Paris. The technology and Too Much Information is a huge draw, a huge pull.
- We have people from other places who want the things they had in other places – water systems and septic systems. No one wants to pump their own – and this need for services is largely pressed from people coming in from elsewhere.
- The skills of local people to deal with things – the librarian has to deal with terrorism online. Fear of terrorism and information that we don't have to deal with.
- We're here, even if we came from other places. The reason I'm here is because I moved from Manitoba to Montreal bcse of the winters. We chose to be here.
- The reason we bring it up is because we often talk about people from out of state that push change that may not be good for the state.
- If we're going to preserve what we have here – we can't have too many other people come. But how do we do this?
- Don't give them jobs! Make it difficult for them to get here. If you come here, just come with an idea. But don't come expecting somebody to give you a job.
- You run into this culture of VT being independent and doing their own thing, but in order to preserve things you have to tell people what to do.
- We're moving from a period of prosperity into a period of recession, which I think people are afraid to say. The wealth of the nation is not business wealth, but the ground, the land, the people, the trees. VT has gone through different phases of things. Today people don't have the gumption to produce the things that they need – but almost everything comes from outside of VT. The only thing we have to sell in VT is the view of the lake and selling the place. We need to preserve the farms that are here on the island – those that can work. And at the same time there's labor issues – importing people to do the daily work because nobody here can do it, wants to do it. We're increasingly an older population. The point is about wealth of the land – we can't have the kids come back and afford to live here – the real wealth isn't the business wealth.
- The challenge is a different approach. That's to do with education. Start in the school, use local produce. “When you buy something you vote.” It's hard to find

- free range chicken here – I have to raise my own. Why not have a small piece of something very good instead of something full of hormones? There are choices we can make for our own better health and when you buy something you vote. VTers don't even look at the milk they are buying. People just don't care and you have to educate yourself and care about what you're doing.
- But not everyone has sufficient funds to make that choice. Walmart is what it is because people need those types of products. Only if you're relatively economically sound can you vote with your wallet.
  - Both the interest and the product comes from China – we can't compete with world on anything. The only reason we have cows here is to keep the land open to attract the tourists who like the open space.
  - OPP – Broadband has opened up markets all over the world for me.
  - OPP – VT has opened up the specialty food market.
  - OPP – there are people with money – quite a few people with quite a lot of money and they are beginning to buy quality things rather than just anything. To me it shows a whole future where VT can become known for high quality specialty items. A family has about 30 cows and are making organic ice cream and they are making a living for the whole family. More and more if people focus on that kind of thing – the branding of VT could be the saving of it.
  - OPP – 100 years ago VT had a producing economy. The service economy has taken over and we need to turn that back. Small business, craft, specialty agriculture, niche farming.
  - The Intervale now produces 8% of the vegetables eaten in BTV.
  - Services are a clean industry – there are a lot of good things you can say about services. The people who are coming in who haven't made fortunes means that you have to enable people to live here – you have to adjust the tax and regulatory structure.
  - Grand Isle County is unique – it's seasonal: most places have summer, skiing, foliage but grand isle doesn't. Tourism is a big deal here but it's only break even sector.
  - OPP – bicycling and eco-tourism are very big here. Hardly a week goes by without a van with 10-12 people coming through.

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

- Broadband as an absolute requirement for people here. Getting people to come here who can work out of their homes.
- Energy – without it we can't exist. We should put up windmills like crazy and put generators on every stream in Vermont. We need to have some way to have electricity. We are in an energy crisis and now, how do you heat your house? I think a lot more people would be building them if there was state or federal dollars to get one.

- Construction has to be different for winter. I envision a house where you have to live below ground and you might have to have a dome above ground.
- It takes a huge amount of energy to build insulation to go into a super efficient house. It's very expensive initial investment.
- Working together is a priority. There are a lot of little towns and communities that are not cooperating and communicating as they should. I went to the Futures forum in St Albans and met people there – we're starting a new group – Franklin and Grand Isle Food Council that will cooperate between food shelves. Probation and parole has people coming out into the community – they need to know where the food is, schools are trying to buy local. In Franklin we consider Grand Isle part of our community, but the challenges are so big, we can't afford to do things from scratch – instead of everyone having 2-3 people working on a food drive – we have to stretch and share our resources our ideas. Lining up and working together in a systematic way. It's discouraging to try to solve these things in one town.
- Taking care of these old folks that come from the population maturing. There is no assisted living facility in the Islands. The number of people going off the Island to go to these places is high and getting higher.
- Quality of the lake – large volunteer group, but the large group doing a lot of work is the Farmer's Watershed Alliance. These guys have had a grant of 75k last year and they've made a hell of difference just by fixing the problem themselves. They have some more flexibility this year to put it back into their infrastructure.
- Local self-sufficiency: energy, food network, in schools tying in with farms, methane digester and crop digesting. In Alburgh they're talking about growing crops right for the digester.
- This only makes sense when you have 4 dollar gas!
- Our cows aren't like they used to be. You didn't have to spread manure bcse the cows did it. You have to add their feed and so there's more energy going into that cow. The phosphorus content via the grain bag than they do through the fertilizer bag. Priority is getting the cows back out in the land.
- A basic priority is to be able to have younger people come into the state and have a competitive wage and be able to afford to live here. Younger people need to be able to have jobs and affordable places to live.
- I don't know anyone that comes to see downtown Burlington. They come to see moose, cows. Preserving the environment and open lands.

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

- This group's had a hard time getting outside of talking about Grand Isle!
- I have an opportunity to have wind turbine here! Should I do it?
- Tourists don't come and look into the islands for the view – the primary visual resource is looking out to other places.
- We'd have to change the town by-laws there's a 30ft height for structures – the rules are set up to have it look a certain way.
- If a wind project is tied into the public system the towns have very little say. Same as agriculture.

- We have to share our school responsibilities. We can't pay 1.7 million for less than 50 students. We've got to consolidate our school systems. It's a terrible challenge.
- We've lost the railroad here in the Islands. Getting back to a public transportation system to getting folks off the road. We need that from here to Essex Junction – there should be more done on public transport to thing into the future.
- Crime rate increase is just tremendous. As long as you increase population you have more people and more crime – people go berserk when they get together. People like space when they get together. Grand Isle needs to control the growth somehow.
- The price of insurance liability in campground is sky high. When you pay over a quarter of your income just for insurance/liability. That's a lot of money wasted that could go back into adding value. The future for the Island is to bring a lot of people from Montreal, Ottawa, etc. Here in Vt it's still just beautiful not totally destroyed (not like Canada). Over there (France) if you go and buy at a Costco or something you won't have any friends because you have to support local. Sometimes less is more.
- For as long as the majority of people who live here have to commute out for work, you'll never have that kind of community here. Even if they don't shop big box stores they're still buying elsewhere. Until there are jobs here where people don't commute off the Island then you won't have a small village like this.
- VT's been very helpful to be able to create a small business. VT Nut-Free Chocolates.
- Having the railroad back again would be good – cycling, tourists, etc.

#### OTHER IDEAS

- Some states have experimented by having education funded by sales tax rather than property tax. Has anyone taken a solid look at Michigan or other states that have done this?
- 2 cents of the sales tax does go into the education fund. Any legislators representing the eastern half of the state get very upset about sales tax because their constituents compete with NH that doesn't have any.
- Education is the absolute building block of what we need.