



Vermont Climate Economy Initiative Model Communities Program

The Vermont Climate Economy Model Communities Program is designed to help communities build and implement priority actions that increase economic vitality and affordability in a time of climate change. The ultimate goal is to help communities model change by implementing energy efficiency, transportation system transformation, renewable energy generation, working lands development, and entrepreneurship and business incubation to spur economic progress. The Model Communities Program is led by Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) in partnership with Efficiency Vermont (EVT), Vermont utilities, and others.

Process

A competitive process is held to select two towns annually to participate in the Climate Economy Model Communities Program. Interested towns must demonstrate support from the select board and key local stakeholders. These local stakeholders form the core of a planning team that works in partnership with VCRD to launch the local program. The planning team, recruited by VCRD staff and made up of about 20 key citizens, develops the contours of a large community kick-off and implements a robust outreach campaign to ensure all in town are invited to participate. Over the next 3 months, a series of community meetings are held that bring citizens together to brainstorm, prioritize, and plan for climate economy action. Visiting experts from outside the community join the conversation, mostly to listen at the brainstorming phase, and then to provide advice and technical assistance at the action planning phase.

The results of this series of meetings is a set of 3 to 5 key community climate economy priorities with local task forces stepping forward to implement them. The task forces receive concentrated support from VCRD staff and other partners for up to 8 months and ongoing follow-up well beyond then.



Interested?

To learn more about the program and how to apply, e-mail or call Program Director Jon Copans at (802) 225-6393 or jon@vtrural.org or visit the website here: vtrural.org/model-communities.

Vermont Council on Rural Development

Unleashing the power of Vermonters to create a better future



Pownal - Model Community Profile



Empower Pownal attracted over 150 citizens to a series of meetings in the spring and summer of 2017. Locally led task forces have come together to work on four key priorities identified by the community. This effort has a new name – *Discover Pownal*. The group has been sending regular electronic newsletters about events in town and is working to establish a new non-profit to support their ongoing work.

Pownal Priorities

- **Develop a Network of Farm and Food Producers in Pownal to Share Resources, Market Together, and to Connect Unused Land with New or Expanding Farmers, Foresters and Other Producers**
- **Develop More Trails and Rejuvenate the River to Provide Better Outdoor Recreation Opportunities in Pownal**
- **Grow Jobs in Pownal Through Business Incubation and the Redevelopment of Underutilized Properties**
- **Build a community-wide green up process in Pownal to address roadside litter and illegal dumping**

“As a result of our participation in the Model Communities Program, there are now Task Forces focused on economic development and the revitalization of existing buildings, building a local agricultural network, growing recreation and trails, and beautifying Pownal. The process allowed us to come together to grapple with some big questions about the future of our town. The program also gave the many regional and state partners who participated a much deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing Pownal.”

-Shannon Barsotti, a member of the Pownal Planning Commission and the local Chair of *Empower Pownal*.

Case Study: Farm Event Series

Pownal is home to many small farms and food producers with a diverse array of products including meat, fruit and vegetables, hops, and Icelandic yogurt. They also have great access to the nearby markets including Bennington, Williamstown and the Berkshires, and Albany. Supplying more locally grown food to those nearby places can provide important economic activity in Pownal while also taking full advantage of the working landscape. After the community decided that supporting local agriculture would be a priority, a task force came together to build a farm and food network and share resources. A first initiative of the group was the hosting of a series of 5 community events on farms in Pownal this spring, summer, and fall. A grant of \$2,500 was secured from the Vermont Community Foundation to support the event series that in total attracted over 200 citizens to visit area farms and has brought the agricultural community much closer together.

Middlebury - Model Community Profile



Over 150 area residents participated in the Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Initiative (GMCEI) with community meetings happening in the fall of 2017. 70 volunteers joined task forces to implement 4 identified priorities and those task forces have been busy with their work since then. One of those task forces is taking steps to establish the Climate Economy Center, a non-profit that will work to “strengthen Addison County’s economic, environmental, and social resilience to achieve deep carbon reduction and support a thriving ecosystem of people, business, and institutions.” This non-profit will provide support for the ongoing work of the GMCEI Task Forces as well as new “focus projects.”

Middlebury Priorities

- Advance public transportation, facilitate more ridesharing, and make Middlebury and surrounding towns the best possible place for biking and walking
- Increase staff capacity at the local and regional level to coordinate climate change and energy related actions
- Help farmers transition to organic and regenerative practices
- Advance energy efficiency and renewable energy opportunities for homes, businesses and other buildings

Case Study: Neighborhood Energy Project

From the very beginning the planning committee for the Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Initiative identified neighborhood initiatives as a key theme for their work. The task force focused on energy opportunities for homes and businesses worked intensively with utility partners Efficiency Vermont, Vermont Gas, and Green Mountain Power to design something called the Neighborhood Energy Project. The idea was to work with a core group of volunteers from a selected neighborhood to organize a campaign to get as many residents as possible in that neighborhood to have a free home energy visit. The volunteers performed outreach through door-to-door contact, leaflets, lawn signs, and at social events to gather sign-ups. Utility partners then followed up with one hour visits from trained professionals who did home walk-throughs, reviewed the full scope of energy use for a household and made a diverse set of recommendations. The South Street Neighborhood Energy Project was completed over the summer, and a second neighborhood is currently underway with the expectation that more will follow.

Results from the South Street Neighborhood

100 Homes in the neighborhood

43 Home Energy Visits Completed

22 Post-Visit Surveys Completed

91% of those surveyed that found their visit somewhat or very helpful

76% of those surveyed that found the project helpful in growing their connections with neighbors

6 Surveyed Households that took a major action as a result of their visit

17 Surveyed Households that plan to take a major action as a result of their visit

Randolph - Model Community Profile



The Randolph Region Re-Energized (R3) process attracted over 300 area citizens with community meetings in the spring of 2018. 80 volunteers joined task forces to implement 4 identified priorities and have been busy with their work since then.

Randolph Priorities:

- Reduce Municipal and School Costs through Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Projects
- Attract and Support Climate Economy Businesses and Entrepreneurs and Strengthen Downtown Randolph
- Attract More Visitors to the Randolph Region
- Savings Opportunities for Homes and Businesses Through Renewables, Efficiency, and Energy Transformation

“Randolph had a strong record of accomplishments related to renewable energy development and home weatherization before we applied for this program. The R3 initiative has taken our work to the next level. At a time when we are grappling with some major threats to our downtown, the program has helped to unify us and to get things moving in a positive direction. We are achieving immediate results, but also long-lasting change that is so important for the long-term economic and social health of the region”

- Gary Dir, coordinator of Randolph’s application for the Model Communities Program.

Case Study: Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

The robust turnout at the R3 community meetings was motivated in large part by a deep concern for the health of downtown Randolph. A sub-group of the task force working to strengthen downtown has focused on the development of publicly available charging stations downtown and at other locations in the region. The goal is to make downtown and the region more inviting to electric vehicle owners and to address the gap in publicly available charging stations between Montpelier and South Royalton. The group has engaged the Town of Randolph, Vermont Technical College and Gifford Medical Center to pursue grant funding for chargers downtown, at the college, and at the hospital. Most recently the group hosted site visits for potential bidders who would take on the installation of the chargers and is helping each partner with a bid process, permitting, and completing the grant documents. If the effort is successful, Randolph will go from having no available charging stations to 3 in the coming year.

