

# Rochester Area Climate Initiative

Report and Action Plan - February 2022



Vermont Council on Rural Development

# Table of Contents

I. Introduction .....	1
II. The “Rochester Area Climate Initiative” Process .....	3
III. Priorities Chosen and Other Opportunities.....	5
IV. Task Force Action Plans.....	9
Action Steps, Resources, Task Force Members, Resource Team Recommendations	
V. Town Forum Notes .....	18
VI. Community Participants.....	28
VII. Visiting Resource Team Members.....	29



**Vermont Council on Rural Development**  
PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601-1384  
802-223-6091 | [info@vtrural.org](mailto:info@vtrural.org) | [www.vtrural.org](http://www.vtrural.org)

Jon Copans, *Climate Economy Model Communities Program Director*  
Alyssa Johnson, *Community Projects Associate*  
Brian Lowe, *Executive Director*  
Margaret Gibson McCoy, *Operations and Communications Manager*  
Jenna Koloski, *Community and Policy Manager*  
Nick Kramer, *Community and Policy Associate*  
Jessica Savage, *Director of Community Collaboration*

# I. Introduction

The Quintown Region. The Valley. The Rochester Area. This place is made up of some or all of five towns including Pittsfield, Stockbridge, Rochester, Hancock, and Granville. They are bound together and connected by Route 100, the White River, and the valley that it forms. In many ways this place represents the best of what Vermont has to offer. The scenic beauty is unparalleled, and the communities are tightknit and vital. This is a place where neighbors look after each other, and folks step up to help whenever the call goes out. This has always been true, but was best on display when Tropical Storm Irene and the raging White River ravaged the area. Residents know firsthand what extreme weather can do, and appreciate the importance of investing in the infrastructure, both human and physical, that contribute to the resilience of these communities.

In springtime of 2021 at the encouragement of Rochester Energy Coordinator Jeffrey Gephart, the Rochester Selectboard submitted a letter of interest to participate in the Vermont Council on Rural Development's Climate Economy Model Communities Program. The letter identified energy use at towns facilities and the repurposing of the now vacant high school building as key opportunities. Participation in the VCRD program would also build upon the extensive public conversations hosted through *Envision Rochester* that took place right before the onset of the pandemic in 2019. Finally, it would build upon a Town Meeting Resolution passed unanimously in 2020 declaring a climate emergency and calling on the Selectboard to consider Climate Change in all decisions.

VCRD's 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 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.

Modeled on VCRD's Community Visits, the public engagement process for the Model Communities Program is designed to reach into all corners of a community to mobilize a wide mix of participants. Over the course of the initial four-month phase, the community rallies together to brainstorm, prioritize, and develop action plans. Partners take part as visiting and resource teams to inform the action planning process and then provide support to local task forces as they shift into implementation.

After consideration and approval by VCRD's Model Communities Advisory Committee, Rochester was selected for participation in the program in spring of 2021. The name Rochester Area Climate Initiative was established by a local steering committee. The effort was intended to pull in all towns in the Quintown Region for a broader conversation about addressing and preparing for climate change in the Valley.

After four months of public engagement and meetings, the outcome of the process was a focus on three key priorities:

- Establishing an area food hub for farmers and gardeners
- Increasing the availability of affordable housing
- Home, business, & municipal energy opportunities including electric vehicle charging, weatherization, solar siting, and energy retrofits for municipal buildings

The four months of public engagement and outreach that launched RACI required multi-faceted support from many people in Rochester and surrounding towns. A first key step was the convening of a core team responsible for naming the process, planning the kick-off, and broadcasting an invitation far and wide to maximize participation. This planning team formed a backbone for community outreach, spreading the word far-and-wide about the kick-off and using every means available to raise the visibility of the RACI process.



The virtual kick-off on October 7 included 4 different online forums and attracted over 40 community members who contributed ideas for the future of the region. These forums also featured a great mix of Visiting Team members with expertise regarding energy, climate, agriculture and community development.

On November 1 the community came back together, both virtually and in-person at Pierce hall to discuss the best strategies for the future of the Rochester Region. This meeting ended with the selection of priorities and then participants signed up to help carry those priorities forward. At the final large online gathering, a resource team of facilitators and experts joined each of three task forces as they built action plans and identified the resources they would need to achieve success.

As this report is crafted, area residents are stepping forward to lead the task forces focused on the RACI priorities. Conversations are underway with potential partner organizations about how best to coordinate efforts and avoid duplication. While area residents hold the keys to the success of this endeavor, VCRD will continue to provide ongoing support.

At the center of all of this work has been longtime resident and Rochester’s Town Energy Coordinator, Jeffrey Gephart. Not only does he bring deep expertise to this work – he also is deeply committed to the health and resilience of his community. Jeff serves as overall Chair of the Rochester Area Climate Initiative as well as the Valley Energy and Climate Action Committee that will carry forward the energy priorities identified throughout the process. Thanks also go to Vic Ribaud, Kathryn Schenkman, and the entire Envision Rochester Steering Committee for their advice and guidance along the way. Finally, the Rochester Select Board has been an active and supportive participant throughout the process.

The Climate Economy Model Communities Program is made possible thanks to the financial support of VLITE, Jane’s Trust Foundation, and High Meadows Fund. Thank you to each of these funders for making this important work possible.



## II. The Process

The Climate Economy Model Communities Project engages a broad swath of the community in gatherings to brainstorm, prioritize, and plan for local climate economy initiatives.



### Planning Committee Meeting: August 11, 2021

On August 11, 2021, 13 local residents gathered at the Rochester Town Office to plan for the launch of the Model Communities effort. This group came up with a name for the process – Rochester Area Climate Initiative – and helped to plan the kick-off. They decided on forum topics, meeting locations, dinner plans, and an invitation process. Through calls, e-mails, flyers and face-to-face conversations, this team worked hard to promote the kick-off.

The Planning Committee included Carolyn Cruikshank, Jeff Gephart, Doon Hinderyckx, Patty Harvey, Spencer Homick, Kinley Tener, Anni Mackay, Dan McKinley, Vic Ribaud, Mickaela Richardson, Kathryn Schenkman, and Larry Straus.

### Kick-Off Forums: October 7, 2021

Rochester Area Climate Initiative kicked off virtually with a series of four brainstorming forums and another forum held in person on October 12th in an outdoor classroom at the Rochester Elementary School. Over 50 community members shared their ideas and were joined by 7 visiting team members who listened and provided reflections to the community.

Visiting Team members included: Dan Currier, *Public Transit Coordinator*, Vermont Agency of Transportation; Peter Gregory, *Executive Director*, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission; Josh Hanford, *Commissioner*, Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development; Erika Hoffman Keiss, *Executive Director*, Green Mountain Economic Development Corp; Sarah Peery, Green Mountain Power Fellow Supported by DOE's Solar Energy Innovators Program; Alex Tolstoi, *Field Representative*, Preservation Trust of Vermont; Becca White, *Community Engagement Manager*, Efficiency Vermont

### Community Meeting: November 1, 2021

After the kick-off, all of the brainstormed ideas were distilled into key areas of action for community revitalization, and energy and transportation initiatives. About 40 citizens joined either in person at Pierce Hall or online via Zoom to narrow the list of priorities for community action. After lively dialogue and a round of dot-voting, 3 action ideas emerged as the key priorities. Participants then signed up for task forces that would convene to move these priorities forward.

### Resource Meeting and Task Force Launch: December 6, 2021

On December 6<sup>th</sup>, community members, facilitators, and resource team members came together on Zoom to form task forces, develop action plans, and identify resources to implement the new Rochester Area Climate Initiative priorities. After focused 90-minute sessions of each task force, participants came back together to

hear reports from each group about their plans and resources needed to make them a reality. From here forward, all action of Rochester Area Climate Initiative is focused at the task force level.

**Resource Team Members included:** Bob Ackland, Warren Selectboard Member / Mad River Planning District; Lindsey Berk, *Executive Director*, Addison County Relocalization Network; Jon Copans, *Model Communities Program Director*, VT Council on Rural Development; Sarah Danly, *Vermont Farm to Plate Network Manager*, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund; Kevin Geiger, *Senior Planner*, Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission; Shaun Gilpin, *Housing Policy Specialist*, Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development; Alyssa Johnson, *Community Projects Associate*, Vermont Council on Rural Development; Eric Law, *Community Programs Specialist*, USDA Rural Development; Brian Lowe, *Executive Director*, Vermont Council on Rural Development; Sarah Peery, GMP Fellow Supported by DOE's Solar Energy Innovators Program; Becca White, *Community Engagement Manager*, Efficiency Vermont



*On October 7<sup>th</sup>, participants joined in person and online to narrow the list of priorities for community action.*





### III. The Priorities

Determined by community members from Rochester  
at the VCRD Prioritization Meeting, November 1, 2021

*Proving that those who live, work and raise their families in a community are best qualified to understand its needs and potential, community members whittled down a list of community, energy, and transportation ideas through discussion, reasoned arguments, and thoughtful reflection. In the end, voting with colored dots, over 40 participants chose action ideas that offer opportunities to enhance existing resources, and to strengthen the region through exciting new ventures. Residents concluded the meeting by signing up for Task Forces in the selected areas.*

#### Residents formed four task forces for future action:

##### ► **Establish a Quintown Area Food Hub & Facilitate Learning and Sharing Amongst Farmers and Gardeners**

The Quintown area has a wealth of farmers, gardeners, and food producers. There is great potential in bringing them together to share resources and knowledge to improve their economic health and resilience and to create “fertile ground” for the launch of new food and agricultural enterprises. With many farmers shipping their produce and products out of the region, this task force could focus on the establishment of a food hub that would provide shared processing, storage, and distribution (incubator space). This task force could also focus on shared marketing opportunities, establishing local outlets for food such as a coop, and finding ways for local food to meet the needs of those in the region who are food insecure. The task force could also work to cultivate knowledge sharing (school garden) and learning related to successful and sustainable growing practices, as well as creating venues for this collaboration along with establishing community gardens and other programming to help people learn to grow their own food.

##### ► **Address Affordable Housing**

Renting or buying a home in the Quintown region has become increasingly costly, representing a significant hurdle to anyone looking to move to the area and a challenge for area residents who are not homeowners. A new task force could engage the community and undertake research to better understand the gaps in available housing. The group could then develop strategies to address those gaps. Approaches to this challenge may include inventorying existing and available properties, making adjustments to zoning, shared housing options, dedicating municipal resources, and finding balance between short and long-term rentals. To build new housing and/or rehabilitate existing housing stock, a lack of adequate workforce presents a challenge. This task force could design and implement a program that would provide the education and resources for participants to build a “tiny house.” Program participants would gain technical skills and could also have a role in building their own home.

##### ► **Valley Energy and Climate Action Committee**

At the November 1 RACI meeting, those gathered discussed a list of possible actions in the area of energy. Priorities identified for action will be carried forward by the existing Valley Energy and Climate Action Committee. This Committee is open to all who want to contribute to their work.

- **Public Electric Vehicle Charging** - Electric Vehicles represent a significant opportunity for cost savings and carbon reduction. Rochester and surrounding towns could develop publicly available electric vehicle chargers to serve local EV owners and visitors alike.
- **Promote the Weatherization Program** - For those who qualify, the Weatherization Assistance Program is an excellent resource to reduce energy costs and improve the health of homes. The task force should work actively with Capstone to improve local participation in this beneficial program.
- **Lead by Example - Focus on Municipal Energy Opportunities** - Each town in the Quintown region should lead by example and undertake energy retrofits of municipal buildings. Approaches could include insulation, going solar, installing biomass heating or cold climate heat pumps, and more.
- **Evaluate Solar Siting Options** - An evaluation of land in the Quintown region should be undertaken to ascertain the best and most suitable available locations for siting solar projects. (Note: This integrates well with the effort by Green Mountain Power to develop a Resiliency Zone in Rochester.)

## **Other Key Community Revitalization Opportunities identified by the community:**

*The opportunities listed below reflect potential ideas for action that community members shared at the Kick-Off Forums. Community members may find it useful as they look to expand on current projects or take on new ones.*

### **Ideas for Community Revitalization Initiatives**

- **Co-Working and/or Business Incubator Spaces**

With the rising prevalence of remote work and a patchwork of internet connectivity, co-working spaces can serve tremendous value for residents and visitors alike. A task force could evaluate different options for developing co-working space(s) to serve the Quintown region. This group could also consider the potential for a business incubator as an additional economic development strategy.

- **Community Events**

The strength of the Quintown region is built upon the social connections that exist amongst neighbors and friends. These connections are forged and re-invigorated at a mix of events where a broad cross section of the community gather to socialize, celebrate, relax and have fun. A task force could work to support existing community events in the region and to establish new ones that are inclusive and fun. This effort could also incorporate the vibrant arts and performance community, and work to establish a better nightlife in the region.

- **Grow Community Engagement**

While there is already a strong sense of community in each town that makes up the Quintown region, there are always opportunities to improve people's sense of connection to one another and to their town. A task force could devise and implement strategies to increase community engagement in the Quintown region. Possibilities could include active outreach to 2<sup>nd</sup> homeowners and new arrivals, a town-wide read-a-book initiative, and an effort to increase cross-pollination between area schools and the broader community.

- **Economic Development in the Quintown Region**

The 5 towns of the Quintown region could come together to focus collaboratively on economic development opportunities for the area. A task force working on this would engage business owners and the residents of the 5 communities to establish a priority list that could include a



shared economic development staff person, participation in state economic development programs, employer recruitment, shared marketing, broadband coverage and more. This task force should consider impacts to all socio-economic levels in evaluating particular priorities.

- **Welcome New Residents**

Whether because of a global pandemic or the impacts of climate change, Vermont is expected to become an increasingly desirable place to live. At the same time, newcomers, particularly those from other nations and cultures, do not always feel welcome here. A task force could focus on making Rochester and the Quintown Region a more welcoming place for those visiting or moving to Vermont from afar.

- **Increase Volunteerism and Community Service**

The towns that make up the Quintown Region are sustained and supported by a strong collection of volunteers who serve the community in many capacities. Some may serve with a local organization or select board, others may organize youth programming, and others serve as members of a fire department or rescue squad. Given the importance of these volunteers, a task force could focus on creating new avenues and strategies to facilitate more people getting involved in service to the community.

- **Grow the Local Workforce**

As with all other areas in Vermont, employers in the Quintown region are struggling to recruit and retain employees. A task force could collaborate with partners including Vermont Technical College and Hartford Technical Center, along with area businesses and employers to better understand, and then work together to reduce, workforce gaps.

- **Focus on the Flood Plain & Protect Forests and Agricultural Lands**

Climate models predict a greater frequency of high-precipitation events in Vermont, a phenomenon very familiar to those living in the Quintowns. A Task Force could develop and deploy strategies to mitigate the erosion and other impacts that result from these weather trends. Approaches could include encouraging abutting property owners to embrace mitigation efforts including vegetated riparian zones and livestock and agriculture free zones, and floodplain easements that accommodate floodwater dispersion. The Quintown Region is renowned for its glorious landscape include mountains, forests, agricultural lands, and a beautiful river valley. This natural environment provides many benefits to area residents, and will become increasingly important in a time of climate change. A task force could inventory the natural resources of the region and then work to ensure that area forests and agricultural lands are protected.

- **Promote Transportation Alternatives**

Transportation presents a challenge in rural places like the Quintown region. Owning and operating a car is a significant expense, and alternatives to cars are sparse at best. A task force could survey the community to better understand the potential for alternatives to cars. The group could then devise strategies possibly including shared vehicles, shared rides, improved transit, and safer conditions for walking and biking in an effort to provide alternatives to privately owned vehicles.

## Other Key Energy Opportunities identified by the community:

---

- **Promote Thermal Efficiency for all**

Reducing heat loss in homes represents a major opportunity for financial and energy savings. The committee should deploy a variety of strategies to encourage and assist area residents with insulation and air sealing projects for their homes.

- **Share Energy Transformation Success Stories**

Many in the Quintown area have taken the lead in implementing energy transformation projects including going solar, driving electric, heating with heat pumps and/or biomass, and utilizing batteries for electric back-up. The committee could use a variety of strategies to share these success stories with those interested in learning more. The committee could also work to provide recognition to those who are taking steps to reduce climate impacts.

- **Support Electric Bikes**

Electric bikes can be an accessible alternative for those looking for a healthier and less impactful way to get around. The committee should deploy different strategies to promote the greater adoption and utilization of e-bikes.

- **Energy Savings Contest**

Changing individual behaviors can add up to significant energy savings. A community contest could be organized to encourage greater energy savings and provide a vehicle for energy efficiency education. The Park House and the elementary school could both be foundational partners in this effort.

- **Support a Resiliency Zone**

Green Mountain Power has identified Rochester as the possible location of a new resiliency zone that could improve grid durability in times of disaster and disruption. The committee should work with the Town of Rochester and Green Mountain Power to maximize the environmental and resilience benefits of this potential project.

- **Address Waste**

The generation of waste has implications for the environment and climate change. The committee could work with area residents and businesses to reduce the amount of waste generated and to implement strategies to ensure that all discarded materials are handled in the most environmentally sensitive way.

- **Unleash the Power of Creativity**

Artists and musicians have the power to inspire change. The Committee could work with the area arts and performing arts communities to implement creative approaches to inspire climate action.

- **Establish a Revolving Loan Fund**

Municipalities can play a role in assisting residents with the deployment of a variety of energy savings strategies. The committee could work with area towns to establish a revolving loan fund to be used on municipal environmental projects or to support residents who take on projects.

## IV. Task Force Action Plans

Resource Meeting, December 6, 2021

*Rochester Area Climate Initiative Task Forces are comprised of community members and an appointed chairperson. At the Resource Meeting, committee members worked closely with a facilitator and small visiting resource teams to develop step-by-step action plans and a list of human and financial resources to help achieve their goals. This phase of the program marks the time when residents truly take ownership of the work, and begin the exciting process of turning ideas into action.*

### ► Establish a Quintown Area Food Hub & Facilitate Learning and Sharing Amongst Farmers and Gardeners

The Quintown area has a wealth of farmers, gardeners, and food producers. There is great potential in bringing them together to share resources and knowledge to improve their economic health and resilience and to create “fertile ground” for the launch of new food and agricultural enterprises. With many farmers shipping their produce and products out of the region, this task force could focus on the establishment of a food hub that would provide shared **processing, storage, and distribution (incubator space)**. This task force could also focus on shared **marketing opportunities**, establishing **local outlets for food such as a coop**, and finding ways for local food to meet the needs of those in the region who are **food insecure**. The task force could also work to cultivate **knowledge sharing (school garden)** and learning related to successful and **sustainable growing practices**, as well as creating venues for this collaboration along with establishing **community gardens** and other programming to help people learn to grow their own food.

Community Co-Chairs: **Kevin Dougherty** and **Anna Isaacson**

Facilitator: **Brian Lowe**, Executive Director, Vermont Council on Rural Development

Resource Team Members: **Lindsey Berk**, Executive Director, Addison County Relocalization Network

**Sarah Danly**, VT Farm to Plate Network Manager, VT Sustainable Jobs Fund

**Eric Law**, Community Programs Specialist, USDA Rural Development

#### Summary of Discussion

Strong group, with about 5 different farms represented. The food hub concept is a coherent but complex set of inter-related goals. Group seemed open to making choices to take on some concepts initially and to then follow with others in a more linear (read: realistic) way. Great conversation; group has an emerging mission that is clear around using local resources to feed local people + looking to producers first and then subsequently shifting to the educational components of this mission. Also already a farm and retail assessment done in the area. Consensus that in terms of financial viability, project would need to expand marketing region beyond the Quintown region in any/all direction. Consistent emphasis on equity, access, and supporting those with food insecurity.

#### **Prioritized Action Steps**

- 1. Gathering Producers as a first step ... what are their needs, could they increase production, equipment or land use implications, what are the hurdles to do so, would folks be willing to increase production?** As part of this first step, identify non-producer partners (who can engage others at different times of the year and to expand awareness of what the producer needs are); identify someone with marketing skills to join. Pull in local experts – Vic, Monica, Bill Cavanagh of NOFA, etc.
- 2. Engaging local organizations (whether one that already exists or something new)** Some Federal grants to local organizations, and also a possible partner in Feeding the Valley, which has food security as a goal but flexible organizational development opportunity...established organization with demonstrated capacity and a 501c3 status



- 3. Ag educational component for the community** (schools, community gardens, seedlings and starters) ... how do we engage this element and when to engage that element? Maybe meet first among producers and non-producer experts, then move to this element of the hub second.

Other steps included researching different models and legal implications, engaging other experts, reviewing other templates or successful hubs elsewhere in VT, reviewing the ag/retail assessment, and building out local capacity within a specific organization.

## Resources

- USDA: Local food networks, climate change, workforce development // TA grants – rural business dev grant (what Hardwick used at the beginning as a group of producers thinking about how to work together...much flowed from that)
- VT Community Garden Network
- VT FEED – Farm to School Equitable piece
- Consider institutional partners – regional Dept of Health offices (retail markets, retail access) and Libraries – there is a state funded program around local food provision with an educational component
- Willy's convenience store in Bennington

## Potential Models to consider

Researching different models for what different retail channels are (beyond farmers markets, beyond coops, what else is available as a model to consider.

1. supporting a farm to open a shop and carry other products as well, Chelsea is an example of grant-funded store front for local producers;
2. Sweetland Farm in Norwich as partnership of multiple farms coming together to open a store;
3. Reko Ring Model online ordering system/farmers market hybrid Poultney as model;
4. help existing retailers to source more local food
5. prescription CSA with healthcare providers referring patients to CSAs paid for in different ways
6. microfood hubs (farmers buying from each other for farmstand)
7. Collaborative CSA (multiple farms contributing what they grow well to local CSAs)
  - Potential to have some CSA members cover others costs
8. Options avoid the costs of physical infrastructure – unprecedented grant equity/funding flowing through Federal government architecture re: food insecurity, food education can help defray that
  - Separate non-profit created by multiple farms to help each other sell crops + emphasis on food education and food insecurity and could include community gardens (Tap Root example, Retreat Farm)

## Other notes

- Incubator space (as it relates to processing; Hardwick model Center for Ag Economy, Retreat Farm in Brattleboro, TapRoot in Lancaster NH...there is precedent potentially for the effort)
- A lot of potential priorities within this synopsis – group will need to prioritize, set multi-year goals over time
- Q: Integrate youth engagement as part of the process (as a consistent goal in the process)
- Q: Farm to School as retail channel, health care as retail channel//institutional purchaser + area of operation + marketing
- Major Initiatives Underway
- Food access // food insecurity
- Addressing food insecurity in the valley as a way to create advantage for local farmers...sustaining people in the valley with food from the valley (value added services)

- North Hollow has poultry processing but no USDA inspection (up to 1000 birds) some cold storage and a good farm stand
- Granville (Henry and Gabby) have created a small market taking local produce – something related to build on
- Need some volume of products to make this work, “local” needs to be fairly broadly defined
- Marketing has to be outside of area in order to work financially – Quintown area is too small ... agreement on this
- Farm assessment has been done in 2020
- Food coop interest – but from South Royalton experience, that is a hard, multi-year challenge
- Vacant High School building



© Jerry LeBlond

## ► Address Affordable Housing

Renting or buying a home in the Quintown region has become increasingly costly, representing a significant hurdle to anyone looking to move to the area and a challenge for area residents who are not homeowners. A new task force could engage the community and undertake research to better understand the gaps in available housing. The group could then develop strategies to address those gaps. Approaches to this challenge may include inventorying existing and available properties, making adjustments to zoning, shared housing options, dedicating municipal resources, and finding balance between short and long-term rentals. To build new housing and/or rehabilitate existing housing stock, a lack of adequate workforce presents a challenge. This task force could design and implement a program that would provide the education and resources for participants to build a “tiny house.” Program participants would gain technical skills and could also have a role in building their own home.

Community Coordinator: **Sandy Haas**

Facilitator: **Alyssa Johnson**, Vermont Council on Rural Development

Resource Team Members: **Bob Ackland**, Warren Selectboard, Mad River Valley Housing Coalition, Mad River Valley Planning District

**Kevin Geiger**, *Director of Planning*, Two-Rivers Ottaquechee Regional Commission

**Shaun Gilpin**, *Housing Policy Specialist*, Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development

Community Participants: Chad, Linda Anderson, Pat Harvey, Carolyn Cruikshank, Deb Matthews, Jeannette

### Current Status of Housing in the Rochester Region

- The region has long had a number of second homes
- There is a lack of starter homes available
- Concerns about limited property tax base, particularly as a tuitioning school district
- Concerns about short term rentals, and related impacts
- Lack of affordability
- Geographic and demographic challenges
- TRORC is working on a potential grant from VDHCD that would look at Zoning in Rochester to improve it and “adjust the dial” for housing
- There’s often no easy answer for housing – it is a complex problem
- Linda is working with others in Bradford, Woodstock, Hartford on housing through Capstone, the Randolph Executive Committee Council – Blueprint for Gifford, and the Upper Valley Continuum of Care. The group has a Housing Work Group particularly focused on the lack of resources for homeless folks in the region- Randolph is a resource in the central area, and they looking at what could be developed elsewhere
  - Some of the initiatives are focused on churches as temporary emergency space, as there are no hotels in the area
  - They currently have funding to reach out to currently unhoused population to understand what homelessness actually looks like in the community – it is much easier to work to address the problem when you understand the specific need (three one-bedroom, five two-bedroom, and three three-bedroom apartments, for example)
- How many short term rentals – taking away from apartments – what is not in the flood plain
- Funding is often an essential component of housing work
- Folks have observed a large amount of campers in area, and while it is not always clear if they are seasonal or not, some are serving as year round homes for folks
- Landlords selling out right now, and some residences are becoming private homes
- Some folks are jumping between houses, and not doing a lot of repair work.



- Apartments for rent – quicker side of things to develop is the apartments, but 2 bedroom max for the most part, so they are not really appropriate for families.
- “Affordable” is many blades on the same hilt. Rochester has a lot going for it - grocery store, walkability, etc. Can live here and don’t need to go anywhere else – BUT, it is missing a lot of infrastructure that families need such as childcare and things to do. Without this, there is not something that would draw folks to stay. Rochester has become a bedroom community – folks are drawn to the surrounding areas (Randolph, Bethel) because they have those things in place- Recreation department, summer camps, etc.
- Rochester has a sewer system, and infrastructure can be key to making housing development work .
- Some apartment owners in the Village that are going with AirBnB, which the legislature is looking at – competition with BnB and motel rooms. Less concern about renting entire homes – understand rentals are important to the recreation and tourism, which is the area’s growth sector.

## Potential Action Steps:

- In the Mad River Valley, the housing conversation started with anecdotal information in 2016. It was not really saleable. So they paid for an \$6,000 for a market analysis study of the three towns, which each contributed to it. The study was very worthwhile, and provided real data about the existing market and how it has shifted. It also included Granville and Hancock as secondary areas. It provided a lot of data, and opened the door to ask more questions. When the group then tried to go to town select board for support/money, there was a lot of questions about if the group wanted to build houses, where, etc.
- Survey with ANR Atlas to look at what is potentially developable – easy way to do research
- The study also looked at short term rentals (STR) – vital, need them to support the resorts. The challenge is people selling homes, and turning them into STR and can make more money there than short term lease.
- The market is not going to solve the housing problem, and public, private and nonprofit organizations can all step in. Just waiting for it to happen isn’t going to work .
- In some communities in Vermont, businesses and towns are buying and building houses – they don’t need to go to the Feds for funding or support.
- Could look at the floodplain issue and regulations and there may be some potential options
- Community engagement is crucial to this work– the select board(s) needs to be on board with initiatives, and community engagement is highly important.
- Dependency on the labor force in the community – 50% of workforce commutes in
- Not all gloom and doom – just need to look at how to lay it out to the town to have multiple units
- Look at the town plan – could lean towards revised zoning to have 3 and 5 acre zoning – sometimes increase sprawl
- “Not a dismal picture” to have an influx of people moving to their second homes
- Key to affordability is density. Doesn’t pencil on a one acre lot. New construction is SO expensive to build single family and not the answer.
- The older population in the community is an important consideration in all housing work and conversations.
- Can send a mailer out to everyone with information about housing resources!!
- Housing shortage – if you want to participate – angle everyone could take
- This group can be an ENABLER the finds out what the information is, make sure the zoning is the right place to bring in a private developer
- Research all the housing trusts – partner for some of these houses to be taken over
- Network of people may know before folks hit the market – have to be ready for the consequence of folks who can buy the property
- It is important to stay involved and work with the HS repurposing committee, which is also tackling some of these issues

- Hancock – Weyerhaeuser building, falling apart, privately owned. Is there a way to have the building taken down and repurposed working with that landowner. TRORC has done some work about potential brownfield concerns — Formaldehyde is an issue on the property. But it is not in the floodplain
- It was very useful to have a point person – they had a “housing Czar” in the Valley – someone who worked for 20 hours a week and had a background in development. Without someone who is willing to lead and be focused on the issue, a group can’t get as much done.
- Zoning is a huge piece – go through the zoning in each town to note pieces that are problematic or can change is very important.

## Resources

- AirDNA.com shows all of the short-term rentals (STR) in a community, which can be a useful way to identify what type of STR base does a community have, and how has it grown
- Community Profiles at housingdata.org (which is a Vermont-specific website)
- There is the potential for infill and assessment through various sources, including TRORC. The Keys to the Valley initiative shows what this looks like in other communities, and could be modified for Rochester. There is a wealth of different data sources – the group can gather additional data and modify as folks need it
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board has feasibility funding, and the potential to hire a consultant to do an assessment.
- Brownfields program at TRORC provides resources to local developers to consider developing in areas where things are already developed
- TRORC ran a rental rehab program in conjunction with Windham Windsor housing (WHIP)
- Mad River Valley Housing group
- Zoning for Great Neighborhoods guide from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development: <https://accd.vermont.gov/content/zoning-for-great-neighborhoods>
- Important to understand the capacity of the water and sewer system, and if there is potential for growth. It seems there is capacity in Rochester, but land for municipal services is a constraint
- While technical resources are important, creating a mental shift is huge – have to get community members over the hump about “those people” served by affordable housing, and understand that they are neighbors and friends and community members



## ► Valley Energy and Climate Action Committee

At the November 1 RACI meeting, those gathered discussed a list of possible actions in the area of energy. Priorities identified for action will be carried forward by the existing Valley Energy and Climate Action Committee. This Committee is open to all who want to contribute to their work.

- **Public Electric Vehicle Charging** - Electric Vehicles represent a significant opportunity for cost savings and carbon reduction. Rochester and surrounding towns could develop publicly available electric vehicle chargers to serve local EV owners and visitors alike.
- **Promote the Weatherization Program** - For those who qualify, the Weatherization Assistance Program is an excellent resource to reduce energy costs and improve the health of homes. The task force should work actively with Capstone to improve local participation in this beneficial program.
- **Lead by Example** - Focus on Municipal Energy Opportunities - Each town in the Quintown region should lead by example and undertake energy retrofits of municipal buildings. Approaches could include insulation, going solar, installing biomass heating or cold climate heat pumps, and more.
- **Evaluate Solar Siting Options** - An evaluation of land in the Quintown region should be undertaken to ascertain the best and most suitable available locations for siting solar projects. (Note: This integrates well with the effort by Green Mountain Power to develop a Resiliency Zone in Rochester.)

Community Chair: **Jeff Gephart**

Facilitator: **Jon Copans**, *Program Director*, VT Council on Rural Development

Resource Team Members: **Bronwyn Cooke**, *Community Planning and Policy Manager*, VT Department of Housing and Community Development

**Sarah Peery**, *DOE's Solar Energy Innovation Program*, Green Mountain Power

**Becca White**, *Community Engagement Manager*, Efficiency Vermont

### **Electric Vehicle Charging**

#### **Current Status**

- Some investigative work done in 2019 – location identified on the North side of town at the Park and Ride. Also discussions with the Bethel Energy Committee.
- Ted Green Ford – installing two fixed chargers and one portable. Also expecting a large number of electric F-150's.
- Maureen Gannon has agreed to work on the vehicle charger.
- If and when it comes online, the GMP Resilience Project would include EV charging.

#### **Action Steps**

1. Begin by evaluating the following:
  - What is the need in the community? Different types of chargers (SAE J1772, CHAdeMO, CCS, Tesla Supercharger), and level 2 or level 3
  - Possible locations: Publicly available vs. various lodging establishments in the region. Could homeowners participate?
  - Include an evaluation of grid issues and issues around plowing
  - Partnership, including with GMP around their Resilience Zone
2. Coordinate closely with GMP in relation to the Resiliency Zone
3. Evaluate funding options/models for:
  - Municipal/publicly available charger
  - Chargers for lodging establishments
  - Chargers accessible to multi-family/rental housing
4. Engage the business community in Rochester – they stand to benefit from having publicly available charging in downtown



5. Once one or more charger is available to the public, develop and implement a plan to market the area as “EV Friendly” to the traveling public
6. Get community members involved as a way to drive EV adoption rates.
7. Consider zoning initiatives and/or building permits. Require that conduit is run for new EV charging with new buildings. Running conduit represents significant expense.

## Resources

- New grant funding coming from ACCD/DHCD - \$1 million that will serve multi-family/rental housing
- GMP provides a \$750 incentive for publicly available charging stations
- EV charging loans are available through VEDA
- Drive Electric Vermont and Dave Roberts are a great resource
- Tesla
- Electrify America
- Suncommon or other partners

## Promote the Weatherization Program

### Current Status

- No wait time for weatherization in the majority of Vermont. Those services are available quickly for those who are eligible
- More resources are coming for middle-income families.
- More contractors are coming online
- Last summer members of the committee worked 7 - 8 of the farmers markets. Not hitting the full demographic in the 3 towns. We want to do more of those resource tables - at recycling and trash pick-up.
- Clarification around Home Performance with EnergyStar – incentive is based on the projects selected by the homeowner.

### Action Steps

1. Work in coordination with CAPSTONE – Materials, messaging, and a smooth/seamless hand off
2. Implement on-the-ground outreach including:
  - Promotion/outreach at trash and recycling days
  - Reach out to oil companies to identify customers who might need the services
  - Local Foodbanks and cashiers at the local grocery store
  - Establish a weatherization ambassador program - people willing to answer questions about the process and result
  - Develop and share local case studies of success to spread the word.
  - Host open houses to serve as examples and inspiration for the value of weatherization
3. Connect to other economic services programs. Make people aware of other programs they are eligible for.
4. Consider options outside the weatherization program specifically. It is somewhat rigid. Can't pick and choose, so that is a non-starter for some folks. Consider and promote other options
5. For those not working through the Weatherization Assistance Program - identify area contractors and suppliers - have a list available to people who are interested
6. Increase awareness and adherence to the current energy codes
7. Identify financing options for weatherization projects

### Resources

- Efficiency Vermont programs
- CAPSTONE Community Action – Collaborate on materials and messaging
- Efficiency Vermont's Efficiency Excellence Network – to help identify contractors
- New Climate Action Plan, both in terms of incentives and people on the ground - humans who can help get the word out and the work done.
- TRORC - Bring Municipalities and contractors together.

## Municipal Buildings

### Current Status

- A light energy audit of municipal buildings was recently completed
- High School is the largest energy user at this time
- Other buildings include the town offices, town garage, library, pump house
- Vermont Preservation Trust and VT Historic Preservation are considering the library. Cladding is unusual.
- How do we establish a budget for this? Doon - Looking at the bills for the next year. Motivated to keep it to a minimum increase. \$10k annually is put into the building fund. Not enough to deal with any massive undertaking. Any significant projects - grants and low cost loans are found. Timeline around Town Meeting Day, but a decision around funding can happen outside that calendar as well.

### Action Steps

1. Convene a local group with construction experience to review the audit report
2. Identify criteria to prioritize projects. Are we prioritizing based on what we can afford at the moment, severity of the issue, how much benefit will be in the long term?
3. Seek funding for a more detailed audit
4. Have a plan. Review the audit. Consider payback. Emissions reduction. Look at revolving funds, and then use those to fund next round of improvements.
5. Also consider ESCO's who can do this work with their own capital, as a 3rd party.
6. Make decisions for how far to go and how fast
7. Think about it outside the silo of energy. Housing and farms. Job creation. What are the other benefits we can layer on?
8. Restart multi-town energy committee
9. Take the recommendations from the summary - library as an example. Could EV do an assessment?

### Resources

- Ventilation needs at the schools. A way to utilize ARPA funds
- USDA RD – Community Facilities and other programs
- Energy Savings Performance Contracting and ESCO's
- Revolving Loan Funds
- VECAN website for examples
- Vital Communities
- EAN Energy Atlas
- Efficiency Vermont
- Green Mountain Power

## Solar Siting

### Current Status

- The Murray family is working to site as 50kw project on their land
- TRORC has provided some mapping of potential solar sites in town
- For the GMP Resiliency Zone, there are proposals including a couple where solar would be sited at a gravel pit not too distant from the village center. There is a positive sense that some of the proposals may have a path forward.
- ACORN Energy in Addison County was contacted and provided some advice for the development of a community solar project

### Action Steps

1. First step – Identify possible sites
2. Establish criteria for ranking possible sites
  - Proximity to the grid
  - Aesthetic impacts
  - Other possible uses for the land
3. Complete a systematic review to make sure we aren't missing any locations

### Resources

- Dori Wolfe
- ACORN Energy
- Solar Developers (Suncommon, Catamount, Norwich Technologies)

# V. Rochester Area Climate Initiative Launch Event Notes

Compiled from focus group discussions held virtually with over 50 Rochester Area community members and the VCRD Visiting Team on August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, and through a paper and online survey.

*Although the prioritization work of the Rochester Area Climate Initiative Model Community Visit Program requires a town to decide what is most important as it moves forward with Task Forces, nothing is lost in the process from the long list of concerns and ideas expressed in early community focus sessions. Many interesting and diverse thoughts are represented here, and are presented as a reminder of issues explored, and a possible foundation for future projects.*

---

## Economic Development, Job Creation & Transportation

Visiting Team: Jenna Koloski (facilitator), Nick Kramer (scribe), Dan Currier (Agency of Transportation), Josh Hanford (VT Dept. of Housing and Community Development), Ericka Hoffman-Kiess (Green Mountain Economic Development Corp)

---

### What are the Assets in this Area?

- EC Fiber.
- Ridgeline outdoor collective (formerly RASTA).
- Downtown businesses, bakery etc.
- Number of engaged community members.
- Numerous cultural and artistic assets.
- The natural beauty of the surrounding area.
- Small town feel.
- The interconnectedness of all the local communities – glad that this effort extends beyond Rochester.
- Real potential in the “Quintown” framing, how are we realizing that potential moving forward?
- Neighborly support network.
- Elementary school has broken 100 kids for the first time in a while—school is a huge asset.
- Recovery from Irene was remarkable, very resilient community. Rebuild Rochester Committee.
- Strong culture of volunteerism.
- The Park House allows folks to gracefully age and stay integrated with the broader community.

---

### What are the Challenges?

- Shortage of people working in the trades.
- Shortage of day care and adult day care.
- Lack of affordable housing—gentrification of the valley.
- Imbalanced demographic—more older residents than young families.
- Ongoing question about re-purposing the high school building.
- Limited public transportation options: Tri-Valley Transit provides limited service.
- Fewer people work in town than used to. Long commutes.
- Community communications, opportunities for connection are slim. More of a bedroom community.
- Tax base stagnant – need to find ways to expand.
- Lots of seasonal / gig work opportunities which are less reliable, more vulnerable to upsets like COVID.
- Difficult to know where to start sometimes, re. economic development. What to tackle first? All problems interconnected.
- Pandemic-induced shortage of workers across all fields, especially elder care.
- De-localization of distribution and trade makes the town more vulnerable to disruptions.
- Lack of really high-paying professional jobs.
- Training opportunities for good careers few and far between.
- Loss of the high school, which was the biggest employer in the valley. Snowball effect: lose young families, teenagers, youth energy.
- Quintown area is spread over 3 counties, which complexifies a lot of things.

---

### Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Finishing last-mile fiber is key to enabling a number of different businesses. Just opened a one-room school house predicated on the possibilities of remote work for job training.
- Soon launching proposals from feasibility studies for re-imagining of the high school space. Could be a community space, coworking, all based on an extensive community engagement process.
- Local businesses could offer apprenticeship programs and actively recruit students and young adults.
- Library always open to creative ideas—just established a library of things.
- How can we engage second homeowners better in the community?
- Could we pull from the Remote Worker Relocation Program? Help to promote it?
- In addition to more training in the trades, we need more support to attract companies that offer more professional positions. Use fiber as a selling point.
- Partner with VTC or CCV to create an incubator space, but lack the next step space that companies can move into once they’re beyond the incubator space stage.

- Ridesharing, carpooling, changing up of commuting habits are going to be critical. Create a transportation collective.
- Conduct a survey to gather more data on transportation patterns.
- Hartford Technical Center / VTC can be huge resources.
- There are a number of successful local businesses—can we engage some of those business leaders in supporting economic development?
- There are a lot of resources available, but hard to know which ones to go to. Representatives from those resources could be more proactive in approaching business owners.
- The Quintown region support a joint economic development staff position.
- More electric vehicle charging stations around the valley.
- More ongoing training and professional development for existing business leaders, in addition to new ones.
- Need more affordable housing.

### Visiting Team Reflections

- I'm excited by what I'm hearing. Some great ideas.
- You do have some great potential for business engagement. There are a number of really successful and dynamic businesses that could be leveraged.
- GMEDC can help support a collective economic development position, if that's the direction the community wants to head in. These positions can be super helpful in directing the flow of information.
- Hearing loud and clear the asset of community connection in the Valley. Rt 100 can be a big asset.

## Energy Opportunities for Towns, Homes, and Businesses

Visiting Team: Jon Copans (facilitator); Alyssa Johnson (scribe); Peter Gregory, (Two-Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission) Sarah Peery (Green Mountain Power), Alex Tolstoi (Preservation Trust of Vermont), Becca White (Efficiency Vermont)

### What are the assets in this area?

- Substation in town- asset for potential targeting transportation and add chargers.
- Scenic byway.
- Defined town center – place where people can gather.
- Places for folks to go while a vehicle is charging.
- 3 phase power going toward Granville – capacity to add solar.
- Served by GMP – efforts and willingness to move into the future – incentives.
- Walkable services – don't need to have a vehicle to get around.
- Farming community – can follow the 100-mile diet.
- River running through the Valley – in the past has been a power source (even if not popular and easy now).
- Wind resource that is underutilized. Vergennes scale is a nice size.
- Technological breakthroughs leading to efficiency.
- Forest collection – beautiful natural collection – helps to clean the air.
- Good models and examples from individuals – folks with solar or who are already living off grid.
- Forest service community – interested in healthy forests and contributing to healthy communities through forests.
- Bike shop in town.
- High speed internet/fiber to the home is an ASSET – don't need to travel as much.

### What are the challenges?

- Older buildings – both municipally and privately owned. Difficult and expensive to bring up to speed.
- Regulatory challenges.
- Transportation and getting off fossil fuels – need to look at not only folks that are homeowners but also renters (residents and businesses).
- Older buildings that may not have the weight of the solar array.
- Not enough option for folks who can't put solar on their roof to do that locally in the community.
- Idea to transform substation and gas station.
- More people that are trained and could do work in a fast fashion!!! Waiting to have level 2 chargers installed.
- Walkability – challenge with no sidewalks or poor condition sidewalks. Difficult to maintain safely and treacherous in winter > Solar power sidewalk that would allow more walking.
- Climate is challenging for maintaining roads vehicles.
- Outside of the village in not walkable.
- COST of making all of these changes.



---

## Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Expand the idea of what a gas station is – transform to include electrical charging.
- Solar electric and solar hot water initially was an outlier – didn't shar with family unless we were asked.
- Have the town of Rochester lead by example – Town owned properties leading by example – solar on the roof, low flow toilets, heat pumps, appliances on power strips, weatherization.
- Town office could then be a hub of information and referrals. Seeing things in action is really important.
- Need to look at where solar sites are successful – valleys challenging – do it right.
- Tesla battery packs, solar roof – share if neighbors are doing this and how it is working.
- Roads can be dangerous – doing something about the roads.
- Electric bikes can be a great opportunity.
- Large older population – don't have the funds and resources to purchase things. Contest - see what you save, share with the neighborhood. Have a contest, prizes, work with the school – there is something everyone can do.
- Think of the future – getting enough food to feed everyone is important – can't lose ag land now that might be needed later. Forests, ag land, quality of soil are all important to maintain.
- "Many grains of sand on the beach."
- Resiliency zone – a system designed to keep the lights on and things running during severe events. Project in Panton which combines solar with storage.
- Substation location in the flood plain is not in a great spot – something long term to think about – relocating to higher ground.
- Waste management – look at the terra cycle options – some are product specific – manufacturer will pay for them to send it back (Bic pens) or Colgate toothpaste tubes. Some you buy the box. Look at the options on their website. Involve the town in setting up the boxes somewhere folks can access them. Cost shifting – carve out a pieces of the taxes paid as an environmental tax to be used for environmental projects. Perhaps the Montpelier revolving loan fund.
- Coordination and cooperation between town structures and private individuals.
- Movement toward installing solar on town lands – barriers on available land (Resiliency Zone)- open up the options of private owned land housing something might expand the likelihood of something coming into fruition.
- Musician and artist – further the cause through art and music. Rochester and Valley alliance looking at ways to cooperate and look at ways to add to value of communities through arts and music.
- Laud and uplift folks that have moved toward solar – write an article for the Herald, honor at the harvest fair – shine light on those moving in that direction.
- Weekend where folks have an open house for solar homes and/or vehicles.
- Tables at town meeting – have environmental questionnaire – what would you like to see done in the community – more buy in if there are responses from folks. Get the temperature of folks.
- Vermont Energy Atlas – can see the locations in the region where there is a grid-connected wind of solar installation- high percentage in Rochester.
- Filling out the poll as another opportunity.
- Music is a real motivator in the Valley – lived through the 2nd world war. Compose a song or two to influence parents and all- lift spirits, not just a heavy chore.

---

## Visiting Team Reflections

- You have a lot of expertise in the room. A lot of deep knowledge about energy. Already taken some time to consider energy in the room.
- A lot of creativity in the room with brining community into the conversation- very interesting angle.
- Great group, wonderful ideas. Assets the group mentioned- expensive and wonderful assets to have (defined center, good internet, 3 phase power)- hard to obtain in the near term. Challenges are ones that a lot of communities have – transportation, age of buildings. Places where government might be able to help.
- Love the idea to invest in itself to celebrate work on the right track and invest in itself is very wise.
- GMP is happy to be an asset, and looks forward to continuing the conversation and staying involved
- Never let down by how invested Vermonters are in the community. Surrounds – cultural and natural environmental is a challenge and an opportunity. Self-sufficiency. Using cultural and natural environment for the common good is a big theme. Look at the past and how we have created energy for common good.

---

## Housing

Visiting Team: Alyssa Johnson (facilitator), Jenna Koloski (scribe), Josh Hanford (VT Department of Housing and Community Development), Erika Hoffman Keiss (Green Mountain Economic Development Corp.), Alex Tolstoi (Preservation Trust of Vermont).

---

### What are the Assets in this area

- Beautiful historic housing stock. Especially in Rochester Village.
- The Park House in Rochester is a location for Section 8 vouchers – has made a huge difference for people to be able to afford the park house.
- There are multiple apartment complexes for low income affordable housing in Rochester (some but not enough).
- Beautiful old large houses and many of them in a clustered downtown which is what many towns long for. A walking community that is vibrant. Could be an asset for future projects and reuse.
- There is a small affordable housing development behind the green in Hancock. Seems to be a pretty good setup for affordable housing.
- There is demand – we have opportunity here for those that are willing to invest/develop.
- Our community itself is an asset. We have a caring community – people who will and have come together for each other.
- High speed internet is a nice draw for people who may want to come and live here permanently.
- Rochester Village has infrastructure. Village water and sewer to actually build the housing needed. That is a huge asset.
- Capstone is an asset.

---

### What are the Challenges?

- Apartments that are turning into Airbnb's.
- People that were previously rented decided to see and the people who were renting there became homeless.
- There are houses at Great Hawk that are not being occupied full time and are being turned into Airbnb's – have very little rental opportunity.
- Capstone is struggling to find housing units for people when they don't exist – lack of units.
- We don't have an emergency shelter option.
- A lot of land is forest or flood plain. Would be good to find out where there is viable land. What is available to build on?
- Zoning regulations restrict the development of multiple residences on one lot. Requires subdivision.
- Cost of construction is a huge barrier right now - in part impacted by something Midge brought up in the last session around the need for more trades.
- 40% of the land mass is public land and not open for development. Limited in that respect.
- Large Chesapeake building that is rotting into the ground in Hancock. It is in a prime location and a lot of land right on Rt. 100. Across the street from that is a quasi-park that is not developed in any way. I don't know who owns it or the story behind it. There is a lot of land there for some affordable housing.
- The age of many of the buildings in the area is a challenge – in many cases they have not had efficiency improvements. Maintaining those going forward is going to be a challenge.
- Environmental concerns can be a barrier to development.
- Deficit of people in the construction field that are available. Not enough people in the trades.
- We have an elderly population that is getting older and a lot of people living in big old houses and can no longer take care of them.
- RACDC has had a waiting list of over 90 individuals for 1-bedroom apartments within the last year and the Coordinated Entry List in Hartford has a lot of individuals on it.

---

### Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Relocate the town offices from their present location (which was an old school) and repurpose that land for a housing development for low income housing.
- Revisit zoning to make it easier to develop a secondary dwelling without having to split their property up.
- Boarding houses are potential options for some folks - are there any zoning regulations that would get in the way of that?
- Co-housing for elderly people who are willing to have younger people living with them.
- Town develop resources and a plan to develop housing like a revolving loan fund.
- Connect resources to people interested in developing or redeveloping housing in the downtown. Make resources available to people that may be interested so they know where they can go for help. How to convert a building into housing.

- People were moving from Lebanon area because there was no “night life.” Important to think about what is available to people to enrich their life. What are the fun things people will want to engage in outside of work? And that could be another employment opportunity.
- I rented a boarding house for 20 years – people staying for a night up to 4 or 5 years. We shared common living space and rented the bedroom. It worked out very well and was a good model to keep a large old home.
- There are buildings here in Rochester that are large and empty that could be potential housing.
- Community dialogue to identify housing needs and build consensus and energy.
- Inventory available property in 5 towns where housing can be built and, where there are zoning restrictions, what could open up if those restrictions were relaxed.
- Economic incentives or disincentives to rebalance apartments vs. Airbnb – more fairness in competition between Airbnb’s and hotels/apartments.
- Laws are heavily favored towards tenants so people who have been burned by tenants have been afraid to rent anymore. We should look at greater equity that considers what the landlord’s risks are.
- Landlord risk pool.
- We need to keep the clustered development so that we’re within walking distance. Not all communities are in walking distance so need to address transportation within the valley.
- We need to find a way to connect low income home owners with the Capstone programs and weatherization program. We need more participation.
- Figure out ways to make upgrades more accessible to moderate income residents.
- Revolving municipal loan that would offer low rate loans to homeowners to do efficiency upgrades or construct and/or renovate for units for low income housing.
- There was a revolving fund. Not sure of current state.
- Weatherizing has to happen locally. We should be looking at housing from the standpoint not just of housing itself but the income and good jobs that could be created by getting a lot of homes upgraded – a real campaign.

### Visiting Team Reflections

- The assets are really related to the isolation of the valley. You have done so much to be sustainable and resilient. But a lot of the challenges are that same thing. Common theme – because the area covers 3 counties you are often flipping between different service providers. For example – affordable housing covered by 3 providers. You lack a consistent go to developer partner because of that. When we talked about jobs and opportunities, we didn’t talk about recreation and outdoors. There are economic opportunities there. There are jobs there. There is opportunity for those jobs to serve the local community. 5-town economic coordinator could be a great. There is an opportunity with pooling ARPA money.
- Have to look at where infrastructure is – small in fill developments in the village are the opportunities rather than more dispersed housing.
- Short term rentals aren’t always short term. Be careful about saying that those are all here for a weekend – many rent for months at a time.
- The town could explore incentives to help people make these small apartments viable. Examples exist.
- A housing committee or housing study – there are templates available.
- I heard a lot of willingness for innovation and change and new ideas to solve common challenges. With that smart growth in the downtown you are tackling a lot of the issues we’re talking about and reducing footprint.
- A lot of the challenges are local challenges – local zoning challenges, need for local investment/funding, need for contractors – could work with tech program to bring more young people in the trades. You are all up for the task and that is something to take stock of and appreciate.
- Transportation – ridership is way down. That current schedule is a resource but not ideal. If that public transit line is the hub – is there a way to bring community members into that center to access transit.
- Land use and transportation go hand in hand. When there is more clustered development there is more demand. If housing and zoning rises to the top here – think about making it more friendly for transit as well and people that may want to commute from your community. Is there a place to park to make it easier?
- If you’re going to increase the density in the village please consider pedestrian safety.
- Great idea to find out more about the revolving loan fund – that could be a resource.
- Model coming out of the Upper Valley where private sector has come together to establish a housing fund. Working with the NH and VT Community Load Funds – could look at how that model might work for a level of funding that would work for the Quin town area.
- Some of the channels for redevelopment/brownfield improvements have been changed. RDC and RPC can help.
- [www.keystothevalley.com](http://www.keystothevalley.com) A resource guide and action plan that may have some helpful models, action plans around housing issue.

---

## The Land, Resilience, and the Climate Emergency

Visiting Team: Nick Kramer (facilitator), Jon Copans (scribe), Peter Gregory (Two-Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Commission), Sarah Peery (Green Mountain Power), Becca White (Efficiency Vermont)

---

### What are the Assets in this area

- Beautiful River – Runs along Rte. 100. Also here for Tropical Storm Irene. NOAA Maps – we are going to be wetter. Landscape acting as a funnel.
- Access to local growers and local food – many in the area. Sometimes you do have to drive over a mountain to access them.
- Farmers Market has “blown Up” which is awesome.
- Lots of people in need of food. We rose to the challenge. Increased awareness, and stepped up as needed.
- Headwaters in Granville.
- Grange in Granville, food distribution center during covid. Covering multiple towns. “Muscogne” Grange.
- White River Partnership is a real asset. Looks after riparian zone on both sides of the river. Projects those zones from cutting by farmers and others. Opportunities for plants and trees to grow along the river. Provides some resilience to flood events.
- Vermont River Conservancy – an asset. That conservancy provides buy-out easements to prevent development in the flood plain.
- Feeding the valley alliance. 501c3. Expanding what we do and thinking about strengthening our local food system instead of relying on our food systems.
- Surrounded by the GMNF and it is being managed for landscape resiliency.
- Ridgeline Collective providing great opportunities for outdoor recreation and attracting younger families to the area.
- Revitalization in agriculture. Down to one dairy, but a successful. Some beef farms. Produce farms. More importantly we have people who are producing their own food. Backyard cattle, sheep, vegetables. Coming back. Distributed model of providing food rather than relying on big Ag.
- Quality of our soil, diff in valleys than hills, but it is great soil. Some difficulty with chemicals, but the new folks are getting certified organic. Setting an example.

---

### What are the Challenges?

- River, also a challenge.
- Invasive species along the river and in the valley. Asian jumping worms too.
- The river is a double-edged sword. Zoning in our area. We have to be cognizant about building in the flood plain is never a good thing. Need to look at that realistically. Hancock has no zoning. Rochester has it. Unsure about Granville.
- Lose power at Great Hawk housing area. Twice a year. Maybe resilience up there. Could we generate our own power.
- Processing, storage, and distribution of food. Two large veggie farms in Granville. Most goes out of the valley. Same for most of the two beef farms. And the dairy farm. (out of the valley).
- October Flood Resiliency and River Corridors program – Pleased to have 15 people attend. And disappointed to have only one selectperson attend. Trying to engage on flood resiliency – surprised not to have more municipal participation.
- Communication in this whole area. Front Porch Forum is a main way to communicate. Need to overcome – better communication.
- 25 years ago – state owned facility, up toward BTV, for making small batches. Food processing center. Available to small businesses. All up to code. Many small businesses could use it.
- Vermont Veggie Burger – too expensive to travel to and rent a commercial kitchen. We ceased production. Long drive up to Hardwick.
- Communication resiliency – came to the front during Irene. Everything went out for these communities along the White River.

---

### Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- Food hub and a way to process, and a good way to distribute.
- Somewhere local to make value added products.
- Moving to all-electric and charging stations. At least one along the Rte 100 corridor.
- Coop on this side of the mountain – closer than Middlebury or Montpelier. We have the food, but would need to coordinate it.
- Improvements to the local food system – reach out to the Feeding the Valley Alliance. Grew out of the food security issues of the pandemic. Haven’t yet received our 501c3, so haven’t gotten into food programming yet.



- Focus is not on income – make sure everyone has good food. Depending on distributions from the food bank.
- Highland farming is a good piece of the puzzle. Sustainable crops that can then be brought down to the valley. Deciding what will do well there, and then learning techniques.
  - More education and knowledge sharing about how to grow sustainability. Establish a community garden and help people know how to grow their own food.
  - Community education for better nutrition. Growing your own, and supporting a number of farms. Win win – how to grow your own veggies, and supporting our local growers.
  - Bethel University – local people volunteer to teach classes in the month of March. For free. All local based. Could rotate through the 5 towns. Pick a topic. Offer it at the town offices maybe – everyone knows how to get there.
  - The library is always happy to sponsor workshops and talks.
  - I would like Rochester to become the new peach mecca of the northeast. I have a volunteer peach tree - grew from a pit in my compost - and it now produces about five 6-gallon buckets of peaches every two years. I have given seedlings to 11 local folks, and a friend grew out seedlings from some of my pits, and he as give 6 peach seedlings to other people. It would be great if we grew more - a bit of a whimsical idea, but it is happening!
  - Farming and growing – collaboration and shared knowledge. Farmers love to talk about farming and growing. Everyone has good ideas.
  - It is a small town. We know each other, or we want to. Gardens.
  - Climate Crisis – Is there anything we can do as a community to help mitigate climate change?
  - Tax on it – that is the way to reduce it. There is legislation out there now.
  - UVM Extension has the Master Gardener program is an excellent resource and an opportunity for people to communicate. There are also farm to school resources available for our community.
  - We are here – we are really interested in making these changes. There are people who are not here who need to be a part of this conversation. We have to be more inclusive in thinking about solutions and meeting people where they are.
  - The people that aren't here – we are in the middle of a highly (re)forested region. Those forests are under stress. Beeches, Ash, Sugar Maples under stress from insects. They are affecting the quality of our forests. Loggers, truckers, those are the people who aren't here. Dovetails with VT's core value - tourism. Healthy forests are part of this.
  - Planning for these flood plain areas. More riverfront paths in and out of our village. Valley transportation paths for walkers, bikers. Great alternative coming with the Velomont projects – more narrow demographic of adventure cyclists. Wide open stroll in the valley, from LBH to the village.
  - Worked with the WRPartnership to do just that. Could be a real asset to our valley for people of all abilities to enjoy.
  - People who need employees – How do we increase the labor force to help all of this happen. Need places for people to go. Looking for labor force. We need to know how to welcome people, understand them, house them. Big picture. Have to think – how will it impact us, and we have an impact on them.
  - One of the issues – housing. Housing in our valley is egregious. Enormous issues – to have affordable housing in this valley.
  - If people have a place to live, and a job, they'll be here. Same problem in the MRV, just to get a place to rent is very difficult. Particularly with the short-term rental dynamic.
  - Homes have changed over, and they have been put on air bnb, but now it is the weekend thing. I know it is a big thing. It is a topic – yucky thing in the corner we need to talk about.
  - Food Venture Center micro enterprise is worth pursuing

---

### Visiting Team Reflections

- Love the peach mecca idea from the chat. Food and food processing and agriculture. EVT has some programs when it comes to commercial kitchen equipment and agricultural incentives. Inherent values in having those places to provide food access, but also want them to run efficiently and have the up to date. Grid vulnerability piece – there is something to - responding to natural disasters. Efficiency can play a key role the reliability conversation. Lots that Efficiency Vermont can support.
- I love the talk about team work and shared facilities and neighbors helping neighbors. A quick note – heating and transportation are the major emitters. Charging is a great priority and we have programs that can help. I like the idea of being pro-active rather than reactive about getting out there and building infrastructure that will be more resilient and learning from experiences that we had in Irene.
- Pleasantly surprised at the interest in agriculture and growing food locally and resilience. And the connection

with that to flood plains. Safety around rivers and flood plain storage. So much of this really links together. The more that we can take advantage of the great soils and farm more in the highland areas as well, the more we can withstand the more frequent rain events that cause flooding. A lot of linkages - all headed in the right directions. Many nonprofit groups working diligently to help us in this Valley.

- Personally I think a lot about resilience. I think about it very differently after the last two years of the global pandemic. That experience has shifted my thinking. I live in Montpelier with my family, and I look around my community and I think – how do we strengthen our position in the face of what happens elsewhere, and grow our self-sufficiency. In some of the conversations I've had with folks in the Rochester Region in advance of this launch, one of the things that has become clear is that self-sufficiency and resilience is something that brings people together and they are motivated to talk about. Climate sometimes can feel divisive, to “send us to our corners.” When we talk about looking after our communities and neighbors and families in the face of things going on elsewhere, that is something we rally around as Vermonters. My experience in Rochester is that you all have a huge asset in your connection to one another – as Kevin said – either you know your neighbors, or you want to know them and figure out how to get to know them. When you think about

resilience, that inclination is such an asset. The knowing one another and those connections is an asset. Communications as was mentioned is a part of this too. The ability to connect, to communicate, to solve problems together, is so fundamental to all of our work. That has been a thread that has woven through all of this. How do we collaborate together? How do we unleash that sense of commitment to the community and to your neighbors? For us it is a privilege and a pleasure to be a part of this, and we are excited to see where this conversation leads.

- One of the things we hear a lot in this work is around the word equity. Our understanding of what that means is variable, but it is something we are thinking about. As we think about resiliency, and the changing future, and things coming down the pipe as they hit us, do they impact us evenly? And if not, what can we do to share and shift that load. You maybe didn't say those words, but it was implicit in so much of what you are talking about. That sense of community and linkage and systems problems that you all are talking about built around food access and helping neighbors. Ron talking about the watershed. It takes a certain type of altruism to clean up upstream to take care of your downstream neighbors. Maybe that is part of what comes from living in a valley. You are connected in that way. Topographical mandate for connection and communication. Clearly a lot of energy and creative thinking around this.

---

## In-person Forum held October 12, 2021.

Facilitator: Jon Copans, VCRD; Scribe: Alyssa Johnson, VCRD

---

### What are the Assets in this Area?

- Small enough town to know and take care of each other, more than a larger place.
- Wildlife.
- National Forest.
- Natural beauty.
- No fires.
- Food – can local farms still produce the same amount and type of food.
- CSAs and local farms in the Valley.
- Availability of great fresh food in the summer and fall.
- Local restaurants.
- Tourist attractions.
- Grocery store (especially for the size of the town).
- The politics – we can have conversations (mostly) >> Willing to listen.
  - Tradition of civil discourse
- Annual blizzards and storms force/encourage self-reliance within the Valley.
- Resilience, relying on others to solve problems.
- GMP is a progressive power company – doing some good things.
- Statewide energy efficiency utility – Efficiency Vermont.
- Outdoor recreation assets – also great for the local economy.
- Developing new economy of Airbnb's....folks tucked away in someone's house.
- Local little post offices.
- Libraries (Hancock library!).
- People who work here and provide services – roofers, loggers, folks who sell eggs. Town officers – everyone knows each other and builds personal, intimate, community connections.
- Our logger plows our driveway.
- Artists and musicians in the area – art gallery. Theater group, musicians. Folks seem drawn to the area.
- School > Elementary school is present and improving.

---

## What are the Challenges?

- Challenges- dirt roads that get to be impassible.
- Rural safety- emergency services.
- Wildlife/coyotes > taking chickens (foxes, hawks)
- Consumer culture which creates a lot of waste.
- Litter.
- Public transportation – biking and walking > patricianly for older folks. Vehicle is required for getting around at this point.
- Bowl mill, church, school, community center, jobs in 1976. Granville’s population has declined. Schoolhouse resource center – losing population, schools, etc.
- “Drive through” town.
- Rochester and Hancock are bigger – folks are pretty self-conscious and sufficiency.
- Folks who are buying are second home owners.
- Committees, in town, planning etc. >> getting more people involved, especially people who wouldn’t think to come to a meeting like this.
- Population – not enough people
- Housing in general – affordable housing to enable folks to move her and stay here.
- Jobs! Young people moving out because there aren’t jobs here.
- Sustainable housing.
- Helping folks who are already here add energy efficiency.
- Town offices using fossil fuels but don’t have funding to convert to heat pumps.
- First responders and fire fighters are aging out.
- Tuitioning out of kids for school is challenging – lack of baseball games. Etc. Losing the high school matters a lot.
- People move to Vermont in some cases to be isolate – some of this counters the be alone, be away and have solitude. The ideas fight each other.
  - Typical of artists, a lot of artists for a reason. Artists also come here for a feeling.
- What is a viable community? How do we create a viable community?
- Hancock – Seeger camp > could have lived there 20 years and not known they were there.

---

## Opportunities: What Should Be Done / What Action Can Be Taken by the Community?

- More prompts for idea feedback.
- “Environment” potentially a more inclusive term
- 75-85 million displaces people on the planet – be part of inviting that community > housing folks in homes > housing > folks who work and live here.
- Develop a program where people learn how to build under an apprenticeship or mentoring where folks learn how to build tiny home. Can be energy efficient, assist in building future homes. Rochester has water and sewer. Can also build a system with compostable systems – don’t need a special grid to bring in power. People build and earn their own home. Bring an influx of people in – folks learning a trade, being purposeful in action, giving back to the community. Brings in a different demographic and personalities. Habitat for Humanity model.
- (Captone/Yestermorrow as partners.) Similar to weatherization- job efficiency and training.
- Non-profit professional ambulance that serves 10 towns – based in Bethel. Next nearest is Middlebury/Granville.
- First response volunteer program – Hancock, Granville, and Rochester (amazing!). Carry so much in the life in the community.
- Getting folks more involved – Where do these people come from? How do you cultivate that.
  - Event with lots of good food and beer – Harvest Fair?
- Let’s get together and talk about the future – Envisions Rochester.
- Head of the rescue squad saved my husband’s life three times.
- Thinking about replenishing community institutions.
- COIVID issue.
- Develop a training facility – need enough folks to cook for seniors who need meal. Little school for training culinary specialists – bring people to the community and train them to do a service.
- High school question – home ec/classrooms.
- Something in Granville or Hancock – in smaller communities.
- Granville resource center – space where people can gather > opening day and a lot of people came.
- Motivation, food.
- Communication to community, dialogue, desserts all added to Envision Rochester. Opportunity on how folks wanted to see the region develop.
- Folks who don’t want people to change...or busy with 3 and 4 jobs, making ends meet. Will socialize family but not others.
- Community meetings used to be more part of the social fabric and entertainment for folks.
- Build on the summer Sazoki institute – folks from all over the country. Find another group to come here (housing is tough!) Used to be a big rugby tournament in town.

- Chose whatever topic you want > Takes a lot of effort to put together.
- Building community events > coming back slow.
- Workshops that attract folks from all over.
- Janetter Bayer – Book groups.
- Townwide let's read a book.
- Bold mill – something that would become a focus.
- Something that is unique to the business in the area – Create a tourist area.
- Publishing Company – one of the biggest employers. Came from NY and brought a number of people – and people have made nice careers for themselves.
- Have more events for the Elementary School families – cross pollination between the school and the community.
- Midsummer night – like first night. Different avenues all day long – goes all day and into the night. Collection of activities and entertainment – focused at different generations throughout the day.
  - New world festival in Randolph draws a ton of people.
  - Make the most of the school – do we know any parents??
  - Granville tuitions out 32 students.
- Borrowing and lending of tools and equipment and machinery – scheme to connect folks – Jinette has started something library of things – FPF also.
- Jeff Gephart and his agenda!!!
- Calendar dinner – folks took different months.
- Food, music.
- Kickstarting the community back into engagement.
- Bloom in the spring.
- Community harvest day - barn raising.



*Though the kick-off brainstorming forums were held virtually, we also offered a session at the Rochester Elementary School outdoor classroom for community members to share their ideas for community action.*



## VI. Rochester Participants

Linda Anderson  
Jeannette Bair  
Carolyn Cruikshank  
Patty Harvey  
Beth Kennett  
Deb Matthews  
Dan McKinley  
Chad Richardson  
Robin Bebo-Long  
Kathleen Byrne  
Regina Cahill  
Norm Christiansen  
Alison Clarkson  
Louis Cocci  
Monica Collins  
James Dague  
Judith deRancourt  
Kevin Dougherty  
Paula Dougherty  
Janie Feinberg  
Maureen Gannon  
Jeff Gephart  
Rachel Grigorian  
Sandy Haas  
Marvin Harvey  
Kristen & Ethan Hildebrand

Doon Hinderyckx  
Duncan Holaday  
Spencer Homick  
Andrew Hudson  
Anna Isaacson  
Ken Keller  
Tener Kinley  
Ann Kuendig  
Gerard LeBlond  
Sarah LP  
Anni Mackay  
Rich & Debbie Mathiesen  
Bill Matthews  
Chris Mattrick  
Caroline Meagher  
Christine Meagher  
Robert Meagher  
Dean Mendell  
Ron Millard  
Jannah Murray  
Tegan Murray  
Tom Perera  
Garima and Joshua Prasai  
Evelyn Pruiksma  
Mike Reiderer  
Sue Ribaldo

Vic Ribaldo  
Mickaela Richardson  
Alvina Risinger-Harvey  
Richard Robson  
Margi Rogal  
Owen Rogal  
Nancy Sanz  
Dan Sargeant  
Midge Scanlan  
Kathryn Schenkman  
Debby Scherier  
Kate Seeger  
F. Severy  
Barbara Shenton  
Lindy Stetson  
Larry Straus  
Diane Teetsel  
Mike Teetsel  
Kinley Tener  
Gabby Tuite  
Clare Walker Leslie  
Chris Williams  
Nancy Woolley  
Bonnie

## VII. Visiting Resource Team Members

**Bob Ackland**, Warren Selectboard Member, Mad River Planning District, [ackland@gmavt.net](mailto:ackland@gmavt.net), 802-583-1962

**Lindsey Berk**, *Executive Director*, Addison County Relocalization Network, [lindseyberk@gmail.com](mailto:lindseyberk@gmail.com)

**Jon Copans**, *Model Communities Program Director*, Vermont Council on Rural Development, [jon@vtrural.org](mailto:jon@vtrural.org)

**Dan Currier**, *Public Transit Coordinator*, VT Agency of Transportation - GoVermont, [dan.j.currier@vermont.gov](mailto:dan.j.currier@vermont.gov)

**Sarah Danly**, *Vermont Farm to Plate Network Manager*, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, [sarah@vsjf.org](mailto:sarah@vsjf.org)

**Kevin Geiger**, *Senior Planner*, Two Rivers - Ottauquechee Regional Commission, [kgeiger@trorc.org](mailto:kgeiger@trorc.org), 802-457-3188

**Shaun Gilpin**, *Housing Policy Specialist*, VT Dept of Housing and Community Devel., [shaun.gilpin@vermont.gov](mailto:shaun.gilpin@vermont.gov), 802-828-1346

**Peter Gregory**, *Executive Director*, Two Rivers-Ottawuechee Regional Commission, [pgregory@trorc.org](mailto:pgregory@trorc.org), 802-457-3188

**Josh Hanford**, *Commissioner*, VT Dept of Housing and Community Development, [Josh.Hanford@vermont.gov](mailto:Josh.Hanford@vermont.gov)

**Erika Hoffman-Keiss**, *Executive Director*, Green Mountain Economic Development Corp, [erika@gmedc.com](mailto:erika@gmedc.com), 802-295-3710

**Alyssa Johnson**, *Community Projects Associate*, Vermont Council on Rural Development, [alyssa@vtrural.org](mailto:alyssa@vtrural.org), 978-760-1238

**Eric Law**, *Community Programs Specialist*, USDA Rural Development, [eric.law@vt.usda.gov](mailto:eric.law@vt.usda.gov), 802-828-6033

**Brian Lowe**, *Executive Director*, Vermont Council on Rural Development, [brian@vtrural.org](mailto:brian@vtrural.org)

**Sarah Peery**, *GMP Fellow* Supported by DOE's Solar Energy Innovators Program

**Alex Tolstoi**, *Field Representative*, Preservation Trust of VT, [alex@ptvermont.org](mailto:alex@ptvermont.org)

**Becca White**, *Community Engagement Manager*, Efficiency Vermont, [bwhite@efficiencyvermont.com](mailto:bwhite@efficiencyvermont.com), 802-734-3227







Cover painting courtesy of Vermont Artist Peter Huntoon – [www.peterhuntoon.com](http://www.peterhuntoon.com)



**Vermont Council on  
Rural Development**

PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601-1384  
802-223-6091 | [info@vtrural.org](mailto:info@vtrural.org)

<http://vtrural.org>

The Rochester Area Climate Initiative is part of the Vermont Council on Rural Development's (VCRD) Climate Economy Model Communities Program – a community-driven process with local leaders, VCRD, Green Mountain Power, and Efficiency Vermont to cultivate economic development, innovation and affordability in the face of climate change.