

# COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT

## WHITE RIVER JUNCTION and WINDSOR COUNTY

### Community Forum Day Notes July 31, 2008

The following notes were collected from focus group meetings and forums throughout the day spent in Windsor County. These notes are in raw form – reflecting much of the inflections, quotations and feelings of the attendees at these meetings. Below is a list of the meetings that occurred during July 31st:

- Council on Aging for Southeastern VT
- Springfield Regional Development
- Black River Produce
- Conservation Study Institute and National Park Service
- Upper Valley Haven
- COVER Home Repair
- Center for Cartoon Studies/Creative Economy group
- Vermont Law School
- Public Evening Forum at Veterans Of Foreign Wars Post 2571

**Facilitators:** Steve Gold, Sarah Waring

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**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report, July 31, 2008**  
**Council on Aging for Southeastern VT, Springfield, VT**

Scribe: Candy Koenemann

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

- Friendly and supportive feeling in the community makes it a great place to live.
- Community is family friendly and is in a beautiful location.
- Not having billboards shows respect for landscape and adds to the beauty.
- It is a great place to raise children.
- Adults who have left “come home to Vermont”.
- Sense of “community” is lost in other parts of the world but not in Vermont.
- Neighbors watch out for each other and look after the aged.
- Community has connectivity.
- There is no superficial pressure to be “dressed up” when out and about like there is in urban areas.
- There is a feeling of total acceptance for persons from diverse cultures.
- People lend a hand to others, whether strangers or community members, without expectation of payment.
- Elders have strong sense of independence and pride themselves on being self sufficient.

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

**CHALLENGES**

- Living in a rural area is highly desirable, but makes transportation a big issue. Commuting to good jobs may not be doable in future. There is a fear that rural setting cannot remain the same and still be sustainable.
- Population is aging; young people are moving away when they are needed most to support economy and aging parents.
- Senior housing is needed for the elderly. Elderly remaining in their homes reduces housing opportunities for young professionals who might move into the area.

- New residents moving into area pay high prices for homes which creates a huge gap in real estate values.
- There is no cell service in the area. Cell towers could help but out of state newcomers don't want them.
- There is a divide between wealthier residents and those with less.
- Some residents don't want tourism and migration to overtake quality of life.
- There needs to be a balance between economic development and preservation.
- Energy audits should be done for all homes; used to be free but now cost \$125 each.
- Wood is plentiful but there are not enough certified dealers.
- Heating costs are exorbitant.
- There are few sustainable food sources.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Senior population brings diverse and abundant experience to community. Need to engage them to utilize their vast knowledge and career contacts in volunteer and employment capacity.
- Develop cell service to create both full time and part time work at home opportunities.
- Find alternative energy solutions and support efforts with tax credits.
- Develop local food production such as growing community gardens to help sustainability.
- Introduce old style food preservation techniques like canning & freezing foods to younger residents.
- People love to visit Vermont; enhance tourism and market it aggressively.

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

- Immediately address basic needs of heating, food, and medications. An interim fix is needed while a long term solution is being developed. People fear having to choose among essential needs because there are not resources to provide all.
- Establish ways to share food (gardens, food shelves, canning).
- Broaden eligibility for current energy audit program and develop tax rebates for improvements.
- Provide elderly housing that includes services.

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

- Newbury resident feels issues apply to her community too.
- Recent fire in Springfield is an indicator that the youth have not bought into the specialness of Vermont. Crime and vandalism are on the rise and in order to reverse the trend, efforts should be made to educate youth to recognize the uniqueness of living in Vermont and build respect and pride in being citizens.
- A strong work ethic appears to be lacking in many younger residents of the community.

- Residents over 60 years or so have lived through really bad times (Depression, World War) and used Yankee ingenuity and values to survive. Younger generation is perceived as not knowing how to cope with serious adversity.

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report, July 31, 2008**  
**Springfield Regional Development, Springfield, VT**

Scribe: Candy Koenemann

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

- Native Vermonters come back because they desire the shared common values.
- Vermont remains unspoiled and residents maintain high quality of life.
- People help care for each other.
- Vermonters are hardworking, have a stubborn sense of independence and much integrity.
- In most areas there is a small town feel and a huge respect for individuality.

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

**CHALLENGES**

- Young people can't find good paying jobs so they leave area which results in an aging population.
- Non-residents buy vacation homes in area but don't get involved with the community, don't understand local issues and take property out of circulation for residents.
- Non-native residents move to Vermont to get away from cities; while attempting to keep Vermont from changing, some get involved in legislation efforts that end up hampering economic and population growth. Conflict is created by long time Vermonters who would like to see more people and growth so that the cost of living here could be more widely shared.
- There is a great need for economic development to support the high cost of living by creating jobs with a livable wage.
- Vermont needs to stay current with technology services.
- Develop a more efficient method than Act 60/Act 68 for school funding. Property taxation is not working in the current situation.
- Border towns like Springfield suffer from loss of retail sales when residents go to NH to shop because of no sales tax and people who go to live and work in NH because there is no state income tax for NH residents.
- Vermont may not be ready for legalization of marijuana and what that may entail.
- Vermont is divided into regions that have different levels of economic resources and Southern Vermont doesn't get the "voice" it needs.
- There are no real higher level education facilities in Southeastern Vermont except for limited CCV.
- Closed industrial properties are unused and difficult to market with costly environmental issues that must be addressed before new businesses can start up in those locations.

- Regulatory process is not user friendly and state legislation needs to focus on changes that would help attract new businesses while still protecting Vermont.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Southern Vermont location is highly desirable. Promote the quality of living in Vermont while still being close to urban opportunities.
- Area is serviced well by Broadband penetration.
- Develop uses for old business properties.
- Upgrade local airport to attract international business.
- Market positive elements of Vermont such as environment and quality lifestyle.

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

- Address agricultural issues associated with single family dairy farms which are currently not self sustaining.
- IT infrastructure needs to stay current.
- Make Act 250 process as user friendly as possible. Problem appears to be more with how the law is communicated to the people than with the law itself.
- Find a method to achieve consensus on issues; seems there are too many agencies duplicating efforts.
- People in the “trenches” need to be listened to, respected and feel included in policy decision making. Reassert commonsense approach to developing policies.
- Develop good partnerships and interconnect with different agencies. Collaboration is the key to success.
- Develop affordable housing and livable wage jobs.

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

- Examine unique needs of varying towns and recognize differences between areas (NEK vs Chittenden County).
- Preservation needs to be weighed intelligently and not given “generic” definition
- Vermont residents want individual opinions to count and be respected.
- Vision for Vermont should be designed by regular residents and not driven by newcomers.
- Downtown areas cannot be “idealistic and cute”; reality must play a part in development and sustainability.

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report, July 31, 2008**  
**Black River Produce, Springfield, VT**

Scribe: Candy Koenemann

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

- Vermonters care about their neighbors and reach out to help each other.
- Natives come back “home” to Vermont. Non-natives move to Vermont for the traditional American small town quality of life “as it should be”.
- Vermont is the “heart of New England” with older Vermonters from whom a lot can be learned.
- People cross the border and “feel the difference”, value the town meeting tradition and come here to slow down.
- People care about buying local; they are aware and want to know where their food comes from.
- Vermonters love the land.

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

**CHALLENGES**

- There are different standards among small farmers; need to work on individual level to provide consistency.
- Natives and non-native newcomers value the land and need to work to maintain rural character.
- Explore eliminating taxes for elderly population.
- Develop jobs for young people.
- Attract new businesses that will create good jobs. The cost of living is high; talented youth leave Vermont to find better jobs and the less talented that don’t leave are not qualified for some the good jobs in Vermont.
- Educate youth to prepare them to want to stay and add value to the community.
- Older Vermonters have strong work ethics and attitudes; youth must adopt similar attitudes for the good of Vermont’s future which will deteriorate if they don’t learn to care.
- Businesses are spread out, fuel costs are high and road conditions slow down travel. Transportation issues must be addressed.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- Vermont can lead the US and world in becoming a “green” state. This is the prime time to incubate businesses to want to come here and help them stay here.

- Solar, wind and green opportunities can help in energy production.
- Telecommuting is growing and we need to push for improved infrastructure.
- Use creativity in delivery and resale of products to be sustainable.
- Expand delivery to Boston and NYC for wider distribution of Vermont products.

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

- Cost of living (heating, energy) is a huge issue. Develop wind power as local energy.
- Prevent “brain drain” by not losing our brightest and best minds.
- Keep the values of Vermont alive.
- Politics get in the way of progress. Legislators are fighting each other and not moving us forward.
- Attract other green businesses.
- Develop jobs with sustainable wages. It costs more to live in the Northeast and we must address energy efficiency;
- Educate our youth with basic living skills. Some cannot even balance a check book.
- Vermont has an aging population (second highest in nation) and we must provide care and establish healthy eating habits for the elderly and all age groups.
- Values filter down to the next generation and it appears that things are just getting worse. We need to engage and educate our youth. Large schools push kids through the system; small schools lose out in the act 60/68 pool of money and school funding is not working as it should be.

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

- Cost of fuel may result in some services being cut back. Will have to be selective and use most efficient way to make deliveries.
- Competition is overlapping into services provided; company can’t be everything to everyone and will need to focus on being “special”.
- Continue to expand delivery areas to Boston and NYC markets.
- Creative environment for small Vermont farms but must also be big enough to be efficient.
- There is still much farmable land, but diversity should be developed so that farms work together and don’t compete with the same crops.
- Look into developing crop sources like corn and grape seeds for energy.
- Regulatory environment is not an issue. Can’t be too careful with health related matters. Act 250 is tough, but better than being too lenient; however process takes too long and needs to be improved. Old factories needing contamination clean-up make it too expensive to operate business here.
- We need to reinvent ourselves by being green as a community and point ourselves in the right direction.

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report, July 31, 2008**  
**Conservation Study Institute & NPS, Woodstock, VT**

Scribe: Candy Koenemann

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

- Vermonters care about small communities, face to face relationships, environment and landscape, both scenic and working.
- People who leave Vermont want to return here and leaving Vermont makes someone appreciate it more.
- There is a strong sense of connectivity and intimacy. Vermont is comfortable in scale; one feels part of the state the same way one feels part of a town. You know people and there is a sense of being generously accepted.
- Vermont's landscape has a beauty that continues to grow.
- People of Vermont have a reputation of shared values, they care about the place they live, protect it and are aware how special Vermont is.
- Community and state groups approach challenges by allowing people to be inclusive in dialogues. This is unusual and it builds commitment for the residents.
- The Vermont "brand" gives people a vision of Vermont characterized as being pristine, having a high quality of life, being an incubator of progress in business ventures. This causes the state to be perceived as an icon in the national imagination.

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

**CHALLENGES**

- There are few job opportunities; many have to leave the state to establish a career path.
- Agriculture and forestry industries are struggling.
- It is a challenge to keep the niche businesses sustainable.
- It is hard work to keep the character of Vermont in the businesses that are in place and continue to be sustainable considering the production scale of artisan products versus the larger scale operations of big companies.
- Must address both global and economic climate changes. It is a fragile global market place due to energy costs.
- Infrastructure that supports Vermont agriculture has disappeared.
- Labor and equipment available in other parts of the country are not readily accessed in Vermont so one must be creative to make certain endeavors happen.
- People worry whether small villages have the capacity to change while still trying to keep values.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- Vermont’s small scale agriculture lends itself well to the farmers’ market movement.
- Vermonters know the advantages of producing food close to home and can work to improve sustainability.
- We have quality teachers who are dedicated to teaching about local places and farms. They are essential to educating the next generation with service projects that will motivate youth to want to stay in Vermont.
- Vermonters can leverage efforts to market the Vermont “brand” .by creating opportunities to attract people and target visitors so that they want to work here.
- Be proactive in promoting citizenship and community in the next generation. Engage the “left behind” youth to create a sense of attachment and caring.

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

- There are currently few job opportunities in Vermont; we need to cultivate the value of Vermont’s “specialness” and engage the young generation regarding citizenship. Use “place based education” to illustrate what is important about Vermont.
- Incubate the Vermont “brand” approach and make it work.
- Find innovative ways to work together. Look beyond village boundaries, think creatively and set up structures to work on issues. Try regional approach and think expansively.
- Politics get in the way of progress. Legislators are fighting each other and not moving us forward.

**IV. We’ve been talking about Vermont, but how does this discussion concern the future of your community? (question covered above)**

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**July 31**  
**Upper Valley Haven**

**Scribe: Sarah Waring**

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

- My family has been residing in the territory that is now VT before it became a state and I am most proud that we have been on the cutting edge. We are often the first to step out and be creative and innovative. We have environmental concerns and make efforts to stay green.
- I am a recent transplant, but I have seen a strength of community here that I have never seen anywhere else. ‘Community’ doesn’t exist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but it still does in Vermont – and this is unique.
- We don’t have billboards! This is certainly unique – please don’t let that change. I think ridgeline zoning is good and I think that we need more housing also. But I am proud of our people in congress and what they do.
- You know how it happens – that “we used to have neighbors but now we have people who live across the road” – that is only somewhat true here in VT.
- I’m a transplant from NH and I think this is God’s Country.
- I have found in Vermont that people help each other. Even everyone in the agencies is helpful when you need assistance.
- Balance – that’s what you find here. There are a lot of start up businesses, rather than chains. We are not as homogenized as the rest of the world is.

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

- The housing piece is very big for Vermont. I understand why it is expensive, but Vermont has the highest percentage of homeless families in New England per capita and we have the highest rent. There are a lot of foreclosures and the landlords will look at foreclosures as a sign of not being able to pay rent.
- I see an opportunity – there should be a strategy to balance green spaces, housing and environment. The rehabilitation of structures like old factories is very important. Not just for low income housing, but also for middle class and also for working folks. There should be a focus on creative rehabilitation.
- There should be a focus on keeping our youth. The Transportation solution right now in the state isn’t handy.
- We have 400 families a month that access the free food shelf – but none of them want to. No one wants to be using these charity services. The seniors are very vulnerable also – and FOOD and lack of access to it will continue to be important.
- Housing, Heating (specifically the cost and the source of the heat), and jobs are all challenges for Vermonters.

- Right now the prices of these things are forcing people out of the state.
- I am afraid that VT is turning into a playground for the rich. With all the 2<sup>nd</sup> homes that we have here – as people want to escape from cities the trend steals the opportunity for permanent housing for others.
- There is an opportunity to develop housing densely – we need to leave open space open for everyone – but unfortunately the market determines this right now.
- Challenge – a lot of towns put a certain number of acres of land as a necessity for building a new home. Zoning regulations try to prevent clusters or lots of population.
- Children that need mental health services – right now schools only have a certain number of spaces. For adults it is also very challenging – there is a system that has been set up that people who need support the most have the most obstacles getting these services.
- OPP – VT has been good about some kind of insurance for most, but we need it also for mental health services.
- OPP – there is a free dental clinic here, but these should be all over the state. There are simply not enough dentists available for the need of people. Bad teeth affect nutrition and overall health – potentially this could be life threatening.
- OPP – we want to try to maintain the rural quality of Vermont. We know the population will expand so we should keep development concentrated, we should keep our green spaces.
- OPP – green spaces should be planned as places where people can meet and congregate. They should be multi-use and where people want to spend time.
- Green spaces need to be enlarged and be only visual. These places should be seen but not damaged by feet. (another respondent added that woodlots, farms and other things should be okay)
- VPR is great – it's a big bonus for a state like this and now it has two services.

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

- HOUSING – creative, well thought through and well balanced so that it maintains open space.
- EDUCATION – we have to get Vermonters on board with a vision for what we want our kids to be learning.
- ENERGY – wind farms or renewables – we have to decide where we want to go.
- YOUTH – finding ways to keep them engaged and on board with the future of the state. Who will invest in wanting to do that?
- BUSINESS – government should encourage and nurture start-up companies, we have some but we need to do a better job.
- TWO STATES – VT is Chittenden county and then ‘the rest’. We need to address the fact that this split exists and figure out the challenge and the opportunity.

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

Covered in conversation above.

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT  
COVER HOME REPAIR  
July 31, 2008**

**Scribe: Cheryl Hanna**

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

- VT is a state of mind. Generally people want to be in a green, healthy place and do what they want to do.
- People chose to be here.
- Freedom and Unity – supporting homeowners in independence. Low income tier of homeowners and on the other about community with independence. Both together
- VTers share and value environment and place that is beautiful
- Vt since late 70's, and raised two kids here – accessibility – town meeting, legislature, people that influence their lives – part of what Cover does is to extend that accessibility to people who are still disenfranchised. Equality principle.
- VT represents hope. As someone in college with people who aren't from here, we have a tremendous amount of hope in humanity. What people see here is what people want in the world.
- People have communities that they all want to be a part of
- Sense of live and let live attitude. People seem to be very accepting. When there was a real backlash around civil union, it seemed shocking. People felt badly that our state seemed unfriendly. People's opinions matter. Negative reaction when there is a conflict. Shocking that Brooke Bennett event and ordeal – feels very personal. Because we do have community and connection. People willing to help your neighbors.
- On our dirt rd in Thetford, we know people but don't interact in the neighborhood. When my mother was in a collision on the road, the neighbors were there. Even when we don't really know each other we really look out for each other. Also a certain independence that I am going to take care of myself. Almost conflicting values!
- Much of our work is premised on the Putnam “bowling alone” concept. Invisible poverty. Invisible on the housing crisis. We live side by side but don't really make the connections in the way that we used to do so. There used to be a sense that we were able to “catch” people who were having problems. That seems much less so now.
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**2. Looking ahead through our lifetimes, and those of our children, what challenges and opportunities do you see for Vermont?**

- I am delighted by the fact that my 20 year old daughter wants to travel and eventually come back and be a dairy farmer. Opportunity to live near farms and surrounded by people who have a real love for the land. I also have a 17 year old daughter who can't wait to get out of here because there is no diversity – no diversity in thought or attitude –

she may not be aware of socio-economic diversity – both opp. and challenge represented in both.

- Challenges – financial challenges. Not a very wealthy state – pressures on VT to adapt certain practices that they cannot afford. Also a feeling among those moving to VT as keeping VT as their “park.” Great deal of pressure for those in business or who want to be in business, making starting and expanding business in the state much more difficult. Acts in education and environment. Interviewed hundreds of business people, almost to a person a great deal of frustration on business owners. Doesn’t need to be industrial growth, but can be growth.
- For my daughter to own a farm, with price of land and taxes, almost impossible.
- Long term challenge, VTers have made their life from the land – a working landscape – a real challenge is how to maintain that tradition. How do we keep forest and agricultural products rolling, eg? In so many places it is hard to make a living.
- For children, working poor, education, home ownership, and job opportunities. Many of the kids won’t have a reason to stay. Really is the cost – there are a lot of opportunities in VT – but education is an issue.
- Public school opportunities, I am much less happy than I was with private Waldorf – I worry about the culture of our public schools which concerns me. Econ. Diversity is good, but not the values. The challenge is how can we, in an aging population, that the connection to schools is more tenuous. Harder for folks to connect the dots. What we choose to pay for is difficult. I used to commute from Norwich to Plymouth, only two working farms as I good see. The sense of that as a working landscape is lost. Same way, in WRJ, many of the buildings no longer support that. Where are the middle class jobs in VT. Woodstock, thriving upper class and service sector, but where is the vibrant middle class.
- But not all negative. Daughter in a camp with other children who were able to maintain a sense of community. So I am optimistic.
- VT has many resources for the poor compared to NH, especially health care.
- Having had to navigate both college funding and child with an illness, people have been incredibly helpful and genuine. It may get worse but experience has been that it is very humane.
- In Upper Valley, border disintegrates, multi-state feel. For the most part, don’t feel competition. For those resources to continue, there has to be a creation of wealth, not redistributing it. Greater likelihood that in the UV, looking to start a business, easier in NH, deflects some of those potential resources from VT to NH. Light industrialization most of those in the NH side – green building, etc. What can we do to address that? Among those starting businesses, too hard to start in VT as opposed to NH. Public perception that VT is hard on business.
- Sometimes it depends on business – cottage type – may want the VT brand. Retail, may prefer NH side preferable taxes and help from the state. VT tends to get its culture from some of that start-up.
- Question is what can Vt do to capitalize on that VT brand? May want VT address to selling around the country, but have to look at the economics.
- Most serious is the loss of the middle class – having those jobs and community – average Vermonter can’t afford the average price in VT
- Our volunteers come from both sides of the river – we have a strong stream. Passionate about their work – come and do a cover job site.

- All of the modernization pressures, we are headed in the same direction of the country unless we reverse the trends. Capitalize and continue to tell the story about community in VT. What is seen is a lot of community engagement trying to heal itself. Yet, Hartford schools, things not going well. How do you attract the kinds of administrators and teachers?
- As someone from a large urban area, I was shocked from the perspective that people didn't realize how hard it was to overcome challenges. Only a few people supporting these schools. Such a resistance to joining and pulling resources. Don't want teachers to be paid more than they make. For example, we have an issue of open schools, but people sort of chickened out – seems silly to me that people won't join forces for a supportive tax base. While we don't want to see communities change, we can't have everything that urban schools have.
- As someone who went through small public school in rural area – most of us feel that the education could have been a whole lot better, but I am glad that I did – because I have a great sense of connection to my community. This area is more connected to the Upper Valley than to our own state. Cover is certainly a community organization but it is also a regional organization.
- Affordable housing and need for mass transportation. With the gentrification of the downtown areas, affordable housing is more remote, but cost of commuting is too high. Not possible to get down RT 14 on a bus. There is a need to expand those resources. Will really change how things happen in the state of VT.

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

- It does not necessarily require sacrifice to achieve our visions. I would not consider the time we spend volunteering a sacrifice. In our store we take in all donated goods. When folks give items to the store, enormous benefit for them –
- We could expand how this organization is run.
- We recycle used material – keep it in the stream out of landfill –
- Having businesses give employees time to volunteer is not a sacrifice. It is about the fullness of what it takes to be a business in a surrounding community. Many places where there are synergies.
- How does VT become stable energy-wise. Involves shifting perspective. Public transport and windmills on ridge-tops. That is not a sacrifice. \Great opportunity for us to think outside the box. Both immediate and long-term.
- Moving ourselves around the state – so much potential with rail, for example.
- Just visiting a friend in NewFane, GMP gives them the choice of where to get their energy. Very innovative. Even from Landfill – why are we letting that methane gas go?
- How do we make low income people more energy efficient is really important.
- Need money for fuel this winter but we also must spend money on basic efficiency. How many mobile homes need a safer efficient heat plants yet can't get loans that would pay off so soon?
- What are the ways we can help. Need to recognize the synergies. Not forget that some of our poorer neighbors need this more than we do. For some of those folks, these

investments pay off in a short period of time. You can do it with a certain amount of knowledge and some resources. Locating those people and providing them the resources.

- Opportunities where investment is low but the payback is big.
- Access to higher education. Student loan debt is outrageous. Why start out in debt when it takes your whole life to pay it off and it makes it so hard to buy a home.
- Health insurance costs are going up so much each year – huge part of our budget. That is operating costs. No matter where you are politically – financial aspects of health care really impacts a \$400+ business like Cover.
- Nothing we have heard isn't universal to the country – which is an opportunity - others will have these same ideas and we can learn from what others are doing.
- Bring these things up to the state and national level. In the spirit of community, we are a community at the national level as well. How much of our work could be about celebrating best practices around the state?
- VT brings some wonderful gifts, to what degree can we be sharing stories about what works. Cover works, but we can't find another one out there. What are the other good stories.
- What is happening well? How do we present those solutions?
- Less civility in government both at the state and the national level. Complete lack of bi-partisanship. Much less common ground than there used to be. We do not like to take govt money because of the strings and the political issues, yet we notice that VT has a stronger safety net. Really impacts places like ours.
- It is very important to be non-partisan and a-political – staking out and could use us. What makes it work is this over-riding goal that we believe in doing this work.

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

- We feel more connected to each other – across the state border in this region – than we do with our own states.

# **COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**

## **Scribe Report**

### **Center for Cartoon Studies and Creative Economy businesses (Northern Stage, Fat Hat Clothing, etc)**

**Scribe: Sarah Waring**

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

- Vermont is a state of mind. To be in a green, healthy place. People do what they want to do here – historically the agricultural department helped them to follow through on these ideas. The state wouldn't sell out to industrial interests. It's about independence and unity – it's a patchwork. But more and more now there are enclaves of the opportunistic who are looking for that different path.
- The cultural life is extraordinary in Vermont. There's New York Theater in a wonderful, beautiful state! There's a challenge in our history about being progressive – in a sane fashion.
- We're trying to hold on and move forward at the same time. Keeping people together while moving forward.
- It's a natural place for creative talent – well situated for this class. People can build and create wherever they go and this is a good place.
- There's a remarkable integration with natural resources – even in our lobby we're doing things that are green! People are interested in the natural landscape and being sustainable.

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

- Making the thing that comes and the long dialogues take place around balance.
- CH – financial strain on VTers. Bringing up kids, having high taxes, etc. Everyone thinks they can just 'go to the country' and live cheaply. People who come just can't stay here.
- CH – infrastructure costs of a dispersed population. The commute for employees in other towns is tough.
- OPP – we used to be much more of a leader in green initiatives, in education. We have an advantage in OUR SCALE – how can we not direct it in a way that we answer the needs in a manageable way? It's required of us!
- CH – protection and historic access to land across the state. There's lots of roads and development. At the local level and at the state level we have a horrendously difficult time 'balancing'. We don't have a broad tax base. We'd love to do great things but there's a cost connected to everything good – even organic farming!
- OPP – put value on our local initiatives. If kids know the balance they will choose to create things here in state – and rising oil and gas costs make this more feasible.

- CH – local government! It's more complex than ever for local folks – especially for rural select boards.
- OPP – there are simple solutions to our issues – there are things we CAN do and DO NOW.
- CH – property taxes right now compared to NH are miserable. The border towns look interesting to families – until they see the cost of living in NH.
- OPP – maybe education is a draw to live here instead – and we have to promote those draws more heavily.
- OPP – Keep the image of Vermont alive – just because it's economically palatable to emulate others we shouldn't do it.
- OPP – LOCATION – the train system seems to be coming back and should be!
- Technology – do it on Vermont's terms, but get it done!
- There's an OPP to keep the image of Vermont alive because it is economically viable but not palatable to emulate what other people have done.

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

- Soft industries. There's tons of companies looking for quality of life amenities. There's technology and software that we could be focusing on that doesn't impact our visual beauty.
- We need to keep an eye on businesses that are looking to move out of state and see what we can do to keep them here.
- We need businesses with distributed workforces – if there are telecommuting options and infrastructure that's what we need.
- The COST of infrastructure should be measured as a challenge. It seems very high – but the COST of NOT putting it in is much much higher. The economic benefits will disappear if you don't invest now.
- Transportation – the costs of driving solo are high. But if we have rotating workdays that would be easier. And if we had green machines that were all electric – these are viable and appealing now.
- We need something that's satisfactory for the employee and the employer. Bus services are expanding or other means for people to get where they need to go.
- The changing demographics are a priority – why aren't we tapping into the elderly group? Life doesn't stop at 65 or 70 any more! They could work 20 hours a week. We could focus on retraining and putting them to work.
- We don't have enough incubators in the state – we need assistance.
- We should be using new technology and a new way to advertise – for example: we used Craig's List, not the Valley News and we got a whole different batch of applicants. We tapped that transient workforce. Our high school kids don't know how to even to interview for job! The people we got from Craig's List were higher, more qualified list of people – the young people love living here and want to stay! This state is perfect to attract the next wave of people to start new businesses here.

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

- There's a dichotomy with Chambers here and who (what regional businesses) get the most attention. For example – they are paying a lot of attention and helping out with White River right now. Then they skip over parts of the county and then help Woodstock. Not QUEechee or the other villages. They see us as the ugly stepchild and there's historically a blue collar mentality that hangs over us.
- There's certainly a 'them and us' mentality. There's a provincialism that prevents us from being regional in scale.
- There's a perception in White River Junction and the Upper Valley that the workforce is lacking – this is because of the 'Help Wanted' signs in all the windows. But in reality we have one of the lowest unemployment regions in the state. There has to be an incentive for people to go get those jobs – how do we empower them to and apply?
- Connecting corridors between downtowns and downtowns – how do we increase opportunity to connecting towns?
- The Hartford Development Commit is very concerned about getting state money. The state is full of volunteers but its only when individuals write checks do we get money. How much gets reinvested and stays in an area (state and federal) is important. There's not a good way to incentivize continued investing.
- There's not a good Vermont vision.
- Transportation and cultural life are intertwined. Can they get to the theater? Can they get to museums? We need marketing! Especially for the Northern Stage – no one knows our story.
- We need to get to know each other better.
- Whatever concerns the state concerns us – we've all got different issues, but there has to be connection and a common denominator. Because we're so small the potential is extraordinary – someone always knows someone here.

Council on the Future of Vermont  
Scribe Report  
Vermont Law School

**Scribe: Cheryl Hanna**

**1. What does VT mean to you? What common values do Vermonters have?**

- Rugged individualism, self sufficiency, tolerance, first state that gave right to vote to all men, just not landowners, underground railroad, passionate attachment to human scale solutions and small is a good idea. Rallying point around a sense of place.
- If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Don't take gov't help – habit forming. There is a whole segment of the population that believes that VT has moved too far to the left politically and socially.
- A place of stunning beauty. Minimally touched and that is a good thing. Place where people are independent, but welcoming and helpful to newcomers.
- Even the big towns are small towns in size or attitude.
- When I came here many years ago from the road from Albany to Bennington, and I had a strange sense of coming home – I don't know why but it always felt like home.
- In Vt, you can live rural and you can live well, and that it is not true for much of the world. In most places, living rural is living badly.
- I grew up in Amish country and see many parallelism from how we used to live there and here. There is almost nothing left of that culture. In Randolph, sidewalks are coming and developments. Coming from the outside in and seeing what transpires, it is a very beautiful culture, but what is very dark is the lack of due process and how the gov't is run. There was talk of ceding from the United States, and now I question whether VT should be part of the US, and those things provided by the gov't.

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

- Infrastructure is really eroding – bridges, roads, capacity to support with a rural tax base – schools – it is a real challenge. I live more than three miles from any pavement and come the spring, it may be hard to get to work. Public transport – if we increase our infrastructure – we may be able to increase our capacity.
- I wonder if people in the legislature have been there a long time – a lack of involvement over the years, if people found that the only way to get things done was just to take the bull by the horns. Will it be more of a community – question of local control

- Climate change that will require some lifestyle changes, and dependence on the automobile. We have an opportunity on green technology and food systems. We have also done a good job in the past with land use. Challenge to weave together a working landscape.
- Resilience – with evolving family, we shouldn't be building homes and cars premised on that model. Social equity – revise drug laws, etc.
- Energy is a major issue. Electricity – we pay low rates currently, but that could get higher. The small rural community is premised on cheap gas – and rising costs post challenges for us. It is interesting and could be sad that we will see a marked increase in deaths because of the inability to heat homes, eg carbon monoxide, etc. how do we address these issues as an opportunity. Opp. to explore other means of energy.
- Issue of affordability of housing and child care – issues that a single income earner with children will face. Gas in a rural area. Affordability with housing – particularly safe rental stock – lead issue – safe housing.
- We price a lot of local residents out of this area. Very expensive for what you get – might have to go to a far reaching community to find something that you could afford.
- Looking at homes to buy, the costs, VLS has made it a high-end town.
- One of the problems that the rural areas here face, if the govt wants to help, here you don't have public transit. Govt can't provide that kind of benefit – these things don't address the needs of rural.
- Education pre-K through university. The poorest people get some state subsidy at the pre-K, and the people just above that barely make it, and at the University, we are the highest
- Health case an issue for the poorest Vermonters
- Old age – how do people enjoy all the things about VT when they don't have transportation, etc.

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

- Continue a lot of the great programs VT has, lack of billboards, buildings, to bring in local jobs – not give in to big box stores
- Better internet connection
- Brain-drain. The really good students leave because there is not the infrastructure to support them. JP Mogran wanted to come to Randolph but couldn't because there wasn't enough bandwidth.

- Trying to keep VT real – not just a playground for the wealthy. The Three E’s – environment, equity, economy. We have a lively democracy here in VT – support decisions being made as locally as possible.
- I think when you are new, it is much harder to break into the state. As you move to more insular communities, it can be hard to break into the communities.
- Energy – both in terms of efficiency – such as efficiency VT program, and other priorities. Will give you loans at low rates to help you assess what you should do.
- Priority to get information out and expand the energy programs. Easier for landlords.
- Incentives for landlords to undertake that share.
- Transportation- trains, buses to Burlington, eg. Trains, if infrastructure was better – better transportation.
- VPTA – had a lot of good programs, problem is getting word out. Along 1 – 89, but those things outside is really hard.
- Education is very difficult – drop in population, more and more difficult and increases everyone’s taxes. It is a real challenge, you want to consolidate schools, but you don’t want kids on a bus, especially with the cost of transportation, but you want to have good schools if you want people to invest in the state.
- Not having big box stores, then your choices are to buy very expensive food locally, grow yourself, or travel a great way to get there.

**4. We’ve been talking about Vermont, but how does this discussion affect your community?**

- I think of VT as my community, not locally.
- Many more people in SR because of VLS than there were 20-30 years ago. Many more people but no more housing, so people are having to commute and travel here. You couldn’t find a place that was realistically priced, there were old rickety houses that had bad heating, etc.
- I worry a lot about folks that are retiring on fixed income and the price of property taxes. I don’t know how they can afford to retire – or they work until they die. At a certain point, someone deserves a rest and it is something that she should be able to do.
- Are there models that exist that are priorities because there are successful models.
- Utilizing town and local forests to help people during an energy crisis. It took five years. We need to take advantage of our creativity.
- But that also speaks to the desperation of the energy crisis.

- What does that say? We have a very serious problem – can't be a long-term solution. It is a band-aid.
- When people are falling off the map – when people just don't have a safety net. Vt has been creative in the past in making sure that people don't fall off the bottom.
- VT is a quiet place and sometime you don't hear about who falls off the bottom. Just don't know.
- VT is loaded with small business. Because they are in the region, they are challenged by lack of infra-structure.
- When we were considering emergency 911 we realized that about 1/3 of students have cells here that don't work. And many don't have cell service where they live. What do you do about that?

**COUNCIL ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT**  
**Scribe Report, July 31, 2008**  
**VFW Post 2571, White River Junction, VT**

Scribe: Candy Koenemann

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

- Neighborliness and respect for other points of view. People look out for each other.
- Open green space. Clean smell in the air. Love of the land.
- Town meetings. Civic mindedness.
- Small scale makes government approachable.
- Generational memories. Sense of continuity, generation to generation connecting.
- Not changing old ways of living to city way of living.
- Rural communities among open land. Social intimacy.
- Hunting and fishing.
- There is a sense of living with the environment/nature, not “conquering” it.
- There is respect for other people and privacy, deep sense of tolerance that celebration of diversity.
- Sense of self identity.
- Sense of finding solutions and forward thinking with a “can do” attitude.
- There is modesty among the people and simple living is the goal.
- Strong work ethic among residents.

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

**CHALLENGES**

- Protect local land when developing use for local energy and food. Don’t deplete resources.
- Fiscal demands for roads, schools, etc. Fear that demand will outweigh resources.
- Concerned with aging population and low retirement savings.
- Lack of good jobs, high cost of living and high taxes are pushing youth out of state because they can’t afford to live in Vermont.
- There are too many non-natives serving in the legislature and people want more native Vermonters (who understand problems better) in the Statehouse to work on Vermont issues.
- There is divisiveness in Vermont.
- Act 60/68 has created mindless bureaucracy and implementation is a waste of time and money.
- Children are going through the school system and the results are many under-skilled graduates. Huge deficiency in levels of public education; schools are failing.

- There is a regional divide in internet access and some towns are getting left behind. The spotty coverage has a wide range effect which impacts retaining youth.
- Younger generation feels disconnected. Concentration on technology access reduces exposure to nature/outdoor activities and could impact preservation of environment and maintaining Vermont quality of life..
- We need to change how we do business; do it smarter by addressing travel and energy concerns.
- Hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation are being pushed out by persons who buy the land and post it as inaccessible. Native Vermonters feel outnumbered and restricted.
- Differentiate between our wants and our needs and prioritize funding our needs.
- Infrastructure maintenance is expensive and rising taxes have crept in; repairs have been deferred and costs are far exceeding resources.
- Determine how to support non-profit agencies.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

- Addressing energy and carbon issues could create employment and help revitalize communities.
- Explore how to improve agriculture, food safety and transportation issues.
- Utilize retired people's abilities and experience and blend into the workforce. They have highly desired work ethics.
- Improve telecom so that more jobs can be created.
- Make better use of land and secure complementary political leadership to make it happen.
- Work to balance economic development and quality of life.
- Find funding sources to pay infrastructure bills; residents cannot do it alone. Look outside the box.
- Don't lose the Vermont brand identity that makes it special. Be aware that other states could outpace us and compete with our brand specialties.

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

- Work on replacing high cost of electrical energy with water power. With today's know-how, this is a reasonable solution to pursue.
- Define a vision and then develop a good planning system to attract others and reach a goal of self-sufficiency.
- Good planning is needed to address many issues. Good data and understanding of issues is necessary to create good policies.
- Consider how capital is being used. CCV comes at too high a price and doesn't provide enough of what is needed to get a good job.
- Don't overtax education system. Tasks get added but no funding is provided to support extra work.
- Develop measurable educational goals with financial penalties for not meeting them.

- Re-think infrastructure. It was created in times of cheap oil and now there is more to maintain.
- Adequate funding is needed for regional planning to accomplish its goals.
- There is a critical need for high speed internet service in order to stay relevant.
- It is counterproductive to encourage recycling and then charge renters to recycle.
- State Legislature needs to manage all resources intelligently and efficiently. Don't waste money.
- Work on natural resource based economy. Work with farms, forestry, small based businesses, small businesses in small village centers and provide assistance in establishing services that are missing in Vermont which hinder business development.
- Develop 'green' technology in the home setting by educating engineers, architects and contractors. It could help bring back the younger workforce with good paying jobs. It is essential to address this now; it is the future.
- Explore opportunities in a land based economy in the area of timber, agriculture and buying local.
- Pursue energy efficiency.
- Develop creative problem solving when dealing with community and town issues.
- Recognize that the pressures on lower end of economy are immediate. Without relief in the cost of living for the poor, more crime and problems will snowball.
- Explore what other towns do to find inspiration for solutions.
- Provide more support for regional planning commission. Seek out information from the ground up and develop better information sharing.
- Explore possible fuels savings by using rail traffic.
- Vermont needs a clear vision for the entire state that would allow towns to work together.
- Qualified, experienced and committed volunteers on Boards and Commissions are decreasing.
- Recruit and engage young people with high energy and ideals to be part of the process and join in the responsibility.

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

(Session ended before this question was specifically discussed).