



The Vermont Climate Change Economy Council Charge Document

The Vermont Climate Change Economy Council (VCCEC) is charged by the Vermont Council on Rural Development to connect key business, public policy and scientific leaders, to evaluate how climate change will affect economic opportunities in Vermont, and to frame ways that Vermont and its businesses can get out in front of these opportunities to create jobs and advance the future resilience and prosperity of the state.

VCRD charges the VCCEC with a one year mission to develop a structured plan for practical action to reduce carbon emissions and climate vulnerability and to stimulate green economic development in Vermont. With VCRD facilitation, research and management, the VCCEC will build a bold action plan to create jobs and boost prosperity while reducing carbon impacts and advancing efficiencies.

Challenge

Climate change can be paralyzing. Many worry that addressing climate change can undermine jobs and diminish economic opportunity. Confronting climate change through innovative economic development, however, can be a competitive strategy, one that will build national reputation, create jobs, and attract youth and entrepreneurship to the states that lead. One of the key goals in Vermont's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy aims toward the goal that, **"Vermont is a haven for businesses leading the world in adapting to, mitigating and reversing the effects of climate change."** How do we systematically advance an agenda to model economically successful solutions and to prosper while confronting climate change?

Goals

- Identify opportunities created by climate change to strengthen Vermont's economy and job creation through strategies advancing key business clusters and economic sectors.
- Build an increased sense of unity in Vermont around policies to confront and mitigate the impact of climate change and to advance economic opportunities and solutions that respond to climate change.
- Build a public information campaign to celebrate innovation and Vermont's green business leadership: internally and externally marketing to build the Vermont brand as an economic/environmental problem solver.
- Expand Vermont's economic brand around climate change solutions to retain and attract youth and creative entrepreneurs to locate throughout the state.

Elements in A VT Situation Analysis

Assets

- State policies, businesses and the working landscape have contributed to a “VT Green” brand which is a key to attracting and retaining youth for the future.
- VT has invested in a State Energy Plan that contains aggressive clean energy goals for transition to an electric car fleet (2030) and 90% renewable power (2050).
- There is strong clean energy leadership active in Vermont: at the state’s leading utility, in VT businesses, in state government, at Renewable Energy VT and the Energy Action Network, as well as national and international leadership groups at Clean Energy and the Regulatory Assistance Project.
- There is strong academic leadership in climate science and policy, especially at UVM and the VT Law School.
- Vermont has good assets in economic development and planning including a new State Economic Development Strategy plan that highlights the clean energy, working lands and the green economy.
- State, regional planning commissions and the Institute for Sustainable Communities have led resilience planning efforts.
- Vermont state and congressional leaders have set bold direction around climate change.

Current Need

- The “Resilience” and the “Green Economic Development” discussions are in separate rooms; resilience and mitigation dialogues are separate and lack a common economic focus.
- Current dialogues are disconnected and there is no independent center-point outside state government that unites policy, business and science in framing ideas into a consistent platform for economic action.
- Much of the climate change dialogue is framed around curbing carbon and is seen as by some as detrimental to business and economic development. The ‘resilience dialogue,’ on the other hand, is reactive—it describes how to prepare for the next flooding, or how to improve emergency services—and does not connect to an economic development strategy.
- The fundamental shift ahead is economic. We struggle to create a centrist dialogue that frames solutions to build Vermont’s prosperity and to advance strategies to grow and attract entrepreneurs to confront rather than just adapt to climate change.
- Currently adopted state plans call for increased thermal efficiency, the electrification of vehicles, dramatically expanded distributed clean energy projects, and resilient communities all of which will require strategic economic development and significant public and private investment.
- Vermont needs to tell its business story in a way that promotes a brand identity as the most welcoming state in the union for clean energy, working lands, and green economic development.

- Vermont is among the most rural and oldest states demographically; communities throughout the state are desperate to retain and to attract creative young people and entrepreneurial activity.

VCRD Actions

To respond to these assets and challenges, VCRD will build a 2015 Summit Conference on “Creating Prosperity and Opportunities Combatting Climate Change.” Held in a rural location, the conference will involve key scientists, business leaders, and innovative non-profit and community leaders to add up best practices for resilience and mitigation in one event. The conference would focus on economic foundations with panels, facilitated dialogue, and keynotes on the challenges and opportunities ahead and how Vermont can build or advance key business sectors, clusters, infrastructure, and solutions.

The VCCEC will form at the conclusion of the Summit. Over the course of 2015 will evaluate findings, key ideas and suggested action steps derived from this event. The VCCEC will lead regional public forums, evaluate and summarize research findings, interview key stakeholder groups, and consider model economic development strategies from other states and countries.

During 2015, this group will develop a strategic platform of recommendations for action, and report to the Vermont Legislature, the Governor and the public in January 2016.

VCCEC Outcomes

- An increased sense of unity in Vermont around policies and strategies to respond to economic opportunities created by climate change in key business clusters and sectors, and a more consistent approach to encourage investment in these opportunities.
- State, business and non-profit action to advance economic levers and incentives to grow businesses, to enhance employment opportunities, and to market Vermont as green-business friendly.
- News cycles around Vermont’s green business leadership: internally and externally marketing to build VT brand leadership.
- Expansion of VT’s green brand and capacity to attract youth and creative entrepreneurs to locate throughout the state.

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