

Vermont Rural Energy Council Charge

The Vermont Council on Rural Development institutes the Vermont Rural Energy Council to unite federal, state, non-profit, and industry leaders in identifying opportunities and proposing policies, investment strategies, and practical action to expand economic development in renewable energy generation, fuel development, and energy efficiency in rural Vermont. Rural energy generation - and leadership in developing the systems to expand it - is the key to the success of Vermont's economic brand and critical to the development of a more energy independent and innovative economy that will attract and retain young entrepreneurs and families.

Vermont is at the end of the energy pipeline and faces escalating energy costs that could undermine its economy and quality of life. Vermont has a significant opportunity to advance its energy future by supporting rural economic innovations in energy generation. Emerging technologies in biomass, thermal, water, farm and bio-waste methane, solar, bio-fuels, and small-scale and community wind projects offer unprecedented opportunities for rural entrepreneurship and should be systematically promoted today as elements in Vermont's economic brand, and as strategies toward the future sustainability and prosperity of rural communities. If Vermont leads in energy efficiency and the innovation of renewable local power, the state can build a major competitive advantage for its businesses and communities.

Toward that end, the Vermont Rural Energy Council (VREC) will evaluate issues and build a practical blueprint for action to promote energy generation in rural Vermont. VREC will explore opportunities provided by Vermont's forest, farm, solar, wind, water and thermal resources to maximize innovation and the sustainable use of Vermont's natural resources in energy generation. The Council will address opportunities to expand the generation of electric power but will consider transportation and home and commercial heating of equal importance.

VREC is not designed to address the wide range of issues related to Vermont's energy policy or to develop recommendations around the future of Hydro Quebec contracts, Vermont Yankee re-licensing, or utility-scale wind projects. Instead, VREC will make specific recommendations to Vermont's Governor, Legislature, Congressional Delegation, energy industry and public that would expand state policy and public/private cooperative action to support and enhance the generation of power, development of fuels, and improvement of energy efficiency in rural Vermont.

Goals of the Vermont Rural Energy Council

- Bring together leaders in federal, state, non-profit, private and research organizations to collaboratively develop an action plan to advance rural energy generation in Vermont.
- Expand the role of energy innovation in community and economic development in the State of Vermont.
- Identify strategic state policies and economic development tools to promote jobs and opportunities in this sector.
- Identify existing federal and state policy, technical, educational, legal, financial, and other barriers that must be overcome to grow the energy generation sector in Vermont.
- Supply research and recommendations to state, federal and private investors to assist them in making the best use of resources for the long-term growth and vitality of Vermont's energy sector.
- Create a platform of recommendations for incentives and supports for entrepreneurial activity in the rural energy sector in Vermont.
- Increase the size of the rural energy generation sector in VT and reduce the state's dependence on petroleum and the export of VT dollars for energy consumption.
- Identify what is achievable and systemically support the advance of energy efficiency and conservation.

- Build a global competitive advantage for Vermont by supporting a culture of resourcefulness, innovation and intellectual capital around energy.
- Provide Vermont input in federal legislation, inform the Vermont congressional delegation on potential improvements to the Federal Farm Bill, and support efforts to systematically leverage resources for rural development in Vermont.

VREC Membership

VREC will act as a public/private partnership that includes representatives from federal, state, business, local organizations, statewide non-profits, policy leaders, and producers of innovative energy development. VCRD will invite up to 20 individuals to serve on the VREC to capture leading ideas, rather than seek representatives from specific organizations or businesses. VCRD will manage the process, VREC members make content decisions.

In their discussions, VREC members will be expected to commit to personally attend meetings, to examine issues from all sides, and to consider the interests of the sector as a whole.

Timeline and Reporting

VREC will meet for 1 year. Monthly meetings will be scheduled beginning in June of 2006 toward a final report in June 2007.

- VREC convened **June 2006**
- VREC will gather and consolidate quantitative and qualitative data on the role of rural energy generation and opportunities in Vermont. **July to January**
- VREC will take testimony from energy developers, regulators, entrepreneurs, researchers, organizations, and Vermont policy makers. **Ongoing**
- Based on the current state of the sector and its economic opportunities, the council will evaluate current and future needs and strategic solutions to these needs. VREC will then produce a consolidated set of practical, workable, policy recommendations in a Final Report to the VCRD, the Governor, VT State Legislature, VT's Congressional delegation, concerned agencies, private sector businesses, corporations, foundations, and the people of the state of Vermont. **June 2007**
- Vermont Rural Energy Council disbands. **June 2007**
- With VCRD, VREC Members will work to engage Vermonters towards implementation of the plan of action contained in the VREC Final Report. **June 2007 - Ongoing**

The Role of the Vermont Council on Rural Development

VCRD will develop the collaborative framework for the VREC, invite participants, build the charge to the group, and establish a reporting sequence to the Governor's Office, VT's Congressional delegation, the Vermont State Legislature, concerned state agencies, non-profits and the private sector. VCRD will establish a chair for this effort, provide expert facilitation, produce and distribute reports, and carry the recommendations of the committee to state and federal policy-makers and legislators.

VCRD is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping Vermonters and Vermont communities develop their capacity to create a prosperous and sustainable future through coordination, collaboration, and the effective use of public and private resources. A dynamic partnership of federal, state, local, non-profit and private partners, VCRD is actively non-partisan. Its neutrality, along with its established reputation for community-based facilitation, put it in a unique position to sponsor, moderate, and coordinate committees concerned with policy questions of statewide importance.