



Vermont Council on Rural Development

2016 Annual Report

<http://utrural.org>

Board of Directors

The Vermont Council on Rural Development (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 collaboration of federal, state, local, non-profit, and private leadership, VCRD is uniquely positioned to build partnerships to address policy questions of rural import. We welcome your comments, suggestions, membership, and support.



Vermont Council on Rural Development

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John Tracy, *State Director, Office of Senator Leahy*

2016 was a year of transition for VCRD's board. Our full slate of State sector board members transitioned off as their positions in State government were filled with new appointments when Governor Scott took office. We appreciate the dedicated service of **Lucy Leriche**, **Chris Recchia**, **Hal Cohen**, and **Chuck Ross** both to VCRD and to the people of Vermont they worked tirelessly for. We saw the retirements of two long-time board members; **Jenny Nelson** from Senator Sanders' office who served on our board for over 17 years and joined us regularly in our work with communities across Vermont, and **Robert Paquin** from the USDA Farm Service Agency who joined our board in 2009 and shared his time generously. We said goodbye to **Andrew Savage**, who left Vermont for an exciting new position on the west coast, and to **Alex Maclean** who stepped off the board to work with us in other ways this year. We appreciate the dedication and commitment of all.

We're excited to welcome a number of new board members this year. New State sector members joining us at the start of

2017 included **Al Gobeille**, Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Human Services, **Julie Moore**, Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources, and **Anson Tebbetts**, Secretary of the Agency of Agriculture, Food, & Markets. We also welcomed **Jen Kimmich** of the Alchemist representing the business community, and **Phil Fiermonte**, State Director of Senator Sanders' Office, will join us as an invited liaison.

In January 2017, we were thrilled to welcome **Jon Copans** to our team. As Director of our newly launched Climate Economy Model Communities Program. He will lead in developing and coordinating services in two communities annually to help them build and implement plans modeling state-of-the-art rural development in an age of climate change. Jon brings a depth of experience to VCRD from his recent leadership on energy policy and planning as Deputy Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Public Service and previous roles at the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation and Office of Congressman Peter Welch.

It's all about local leadership

VCRD has led Community Visit processes in over 55 towns and cities in Vermont. Over 10,000 Vermonters have participated, and more than 3,000 people have lined up to lead community and economic development projects forward. This year we are proud to have built a new partnership with the Vermont Community Foundation to strengthen and deepen our mutual capacity to help communities fulfill their goals.

Patriotism for place, faith in democracy, hard work and courage, engagement in action: these are key ingredients for community success. When you get down to it, it's about standing up for what is right, working with the full community to set common direction, lining up for action, and working together. No one can do that for us, for our towns—it's all about local leadership.

We see this in our work with every town. There is a point where the community comes together, has direction, and lines up for action, and all the citizens participating are connected as committed leaders for the future. That is so inspiring. Given the global and national challenges we face, when we see a town stand up together, we often feel like the center of world democracy is right there, right in this small hometown. Our strong local democracy and civic commitment is a foundation for optimism—which is another essential ingredient in success.

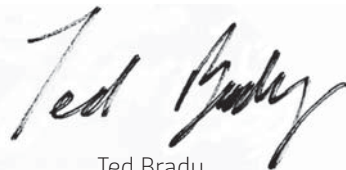
The Climate Economy

In addition to its Community Visits, VCRD has worked this last year to celebrate and advance economic development in Vermont that answers climate change. There is an international

economic competition to build solutions to climate change, reducing carbon and advancing creative business models for the future. It is not an accident that this effort is led in the US by key centers of innovation from Silicon Valley to Austin and Boston. Places that lead attract entrepreneurs, investors and creative youth. In the past year VCRD completed the year-long policy effort of the **Vermont Climate Change Economy Council** with their "Progress for Vermont" Action Plan, defining ways that Vermont can lead and benefit by advancing creative economic activity. We held the second **Vermont Climate Economy Summit** at VTC with 450 Vermont leaders and community partners. We founded and led the **Climate Economy Action Team** to promote policy and political efforts to advance economic development and branding for Vermont. We've developed the **Climate Economy Model Communities Program** to help communities come together to develop and implement economic development plans for the future. And finally, we've built the structure for a national dialogue to take place at the "**Catalysts of the Climate Economy**" Summit at UVM in 2017.

We are lucky to live in a place with strong communities, creative assets, and real democracy. We have our work cut out for us, and need to be creative and courageous in the face of the challenges that face our communities, our state, and the world today. But, as dauntless polar explorer Ernest Shackleton said, "Optimism is the true moral courage."

Thank you for your partnership, investment, and commitment to the vital future of Vermont and its communities!



Ted Brady
VCRD Board Chair



Paul Costello
VCRD Executive Director



Programs

Community Visits

VCRD's Community Visit Program engages a community through a facilitated structure that helps it identify its priorities, foster local leadership, and connect to state, federal, private, and non-profit resources to get things done.

In 2016, VCRD led Community Visits in Hardwick, Vernon, and Brighton/Island Pond. These five-month long strategic action planning sessions set community priorities and built task forces to move projects ahead:

- In **Hardwick**, over 160 residents participated with support from 41 visiting resource team members. Over 75 volunteers joined task force groups that will work to: **open a recreational center and expand recreation opportunities; expand the Jeudevine Library space and services; enhance Hardwick's downtown and build a business and economic development network; and build a school and community partnership and develop mentorship and career building opportunities for Hardwick youth.**
- In **Vernon**, over 110 community members, with support from 44 visiting resource team members, participated in the prioritization of three new initiatives: **develop the riverfront and improve trails and outdoor recreation;**

build a community store and café, and enhance the village center. Over 40 volunteers joined task force groups to move these priorities forward. Vernon community members also recognized the importance of the current efforts of the Vernon Planning and Economic Development Commission (VPEDC) and chose to support their continued work on key economic and business development strategies for the town including efforts to **develop a business incubator, improve broadband, and attract and grow energy businesses adjacent to current grid assets in town.** In the fall of 2016, VCRD facilitated two work sessions with the VPEDC and 15 invited guests to help strategize and frame actions for moving the work forward.

- In **Brighton/Island Pond**, over 175 residents participated with support from 25 visiting resource team

Brighton Recreation volunteer Heather McElroy says, *"Our goal is to ensure that the future of Brighton includes social activities where our community members can network and meet people with similar interests. We believe with the success that we have experienced, we will carry this momentum throughout the coming years."*

Community Visits in 3 Communities:

- 426** Community Members participated
- 169** Community Volunteers joined task force groups to move projects forward
- 85** federal, state, regional, non-profit, and philanthropic leaders participated and continue to serve as resources to task force groups

members. Over 50 volunteers joined task force groups that will work to: **advance a Brighton recreation program; revitalize and beautify the downtown; make Brighton an ATV destination; and support business growth and economic development.** The Brighton Recreation Committee formed in early 2017 and by April, had already experienced great success with their inaugural Maple Fool's Festival. A pancake breakfast, 5k run, baking contest, photo contest, free throw competition, children's games and activities, tug-of-war, and other activities throughout the town engaged residents from across the community and brought in folks from surrounding towns to enjoy Island



Hardwick



Vernon



Brighton

Pond. Despite six inches of snow the morning of the Festival, over 100 people took part. Future activities planned by the Committee include affordable swimming lessons, moonlight kayaking, and substance free dances and barbecues.

In January 2017, VCRD began work with key community leaders and stakeholders in **Lyndon** to identify key issues and ways to invite all members of the community to take part. Visits are also planned with the town of **Burke** in Spring 2017 and with the town of **Newport** in Fall 2017.

Past Community Visit Stories:

From Brighton to Vernon to Killington to Johnson – in every corner of the state, communities have come together through VCRD’s facilitated Community Visit processes to identify meaningful and transformative projects, connected with resources and support, and worked hard to realize a vision and direction for the future of their communities.

Swanton

A Community Visit to Swanton in 2015 built action priorities from economic development to recreation opportunities to access to the arts in the community. Central to much of the conversation was the sense that something needed to be done to address the growing use of drugs and alcohol in the community. Residents worried about the impact substance abuse and addiction have on the wellbeing and safety of the community. To unite the community around substance abuse and

to improve the quality of life, Swanton residents formed a Swanton Task Force to Reduce Substance Abuse.

After meeting with an envoy of leaders from Rutland Project Vision, and learning from area service providers and partners, they have built a strategy that, while supporting regional treatment efforts, focuses on prevention and community development and engagement. Initiatives include forums on individual and community health, a Town Hall on Underage Drinking in collaboration with Franklin County Caring Communities, a showing of the film *Resilience*, a documentary about ACE’s (Adverse Childhood Experiences), and a Prevention Forum to be held this fall.

Among these strategies is the development of a NOTCH Day Camp, which today is gearing up for year two of free summer programming for Swanton youth. With a focus on Prevention, the Camp engages campers in science, arts, reading and recreational activities and provides free daily meals through the USDA Summer Meals Food Program. Each day includes a science project and an activity such as archery, golf, or gardening. A hallmark of the camp is the practice of starting and ending each day with 15 minutes of “mindfulness,” helping campers to develop concentration and self-awareness, a mindful step toward the prevention of substance abuse.

Task Force chair Kathy Lavoie says, **“The Camp is in perfect alignment with SEP’s mission to ensure that Swanton is a more vibrant community – a place where people want to live, work, learn and play.”**

Killington

In 2008, the Town of Killington was challenged by a depressed economy, decline in cultural activities, lack of a sustainable year-round economy, and a strained relationship between Killington Resort and community members. Through a Community Visit process over 250 Killington residents came together to establish priorities that included building a mountain and town partnership, boosting four season recreation and events, and launching a comprehensive marketing campaign around a healthy recreation brand. Task forces launched these initiatives and, with strong local leadership, guidance and support from VCRD, and connections to visiting team resources, Killington has made significant strides.

Nine years later, the relationship between the Town, the Resort, and the community has significantly improved through the Killington Town Mountain Partnership built following the Visit. The Partnership spearheaded initiatives to co-brand and co-market the Town and the Resort to build a “healthy-recreation” brand and build and market year-round recreation and entertainment opportunities from mountain bike trails to a summer concert series to a Complete Streets concept for the community. A seven year decline in summer tourism has been replaced with six years of strong and steady growth, and in 2015, Killington was named one of the top five ski towns in the U.S by the *New York Post*.

While the success of this community has come out of local leadership, dedicated volunteers, and the heart of the community, according to Killington Town Planner Richard Horner, **“The VCRD Community Visit gave the Town the framework to make all of these great things happen. It gave voice to the concerns of many that Killington was lagging behind and failing to live up to its reputation as a world-class resort. The Town has made tremendous progress in the past eight years and is now clearly poised to keep the positive momentum going forward.”**

Working Lands Initiative

In the last five years, VCRD built and led the efforts of the Vermont Working Lands Partnership that unites over 1,000 farm, forest, value-added businesses, and others in advancing investment in the enterprises that conserve Vermont's land and serve as the foundation for its future, and for the culture and economy of the state. Working with the partnership, its leadership council, and a coalition of organizations, we framed and supported the passage of Act 142 in 2012 that built the Fund of the **Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Board** (WLEB) and we continue to promote state funding to invest in the Renaissance of agriculture and innovative entrepreneurship in the natural resource economy. WLEB is a key rural Vermont economic development success story. The fund is spurring start-ups, supporting growing businesses, and building infrastructure to support jobs, communities and the landscape of Vermont. After four years of the program:

- ▶ **129** agriculture and forestry projects have been funded
- ▶ **\$3.8 million** in Working Lands funds were distributed
- ▶ **\$7.4 million** in matching funds were leveraged
- ▶ **428** new FTE jobs were created
- ▶ **98%** of grantees entered new markets and increased their customer base
- ▶ **30%** of grantees increased employee wages
- ▶ For every \$10,000 invested: gross income increased by **\$148,237** and **1.23** new jobs are created.

Visit the WLEI website at workinglands.vermont.gov to find out more.



Vermont Higher Education Food Systems Consortium

VCRD is helping Vermont advance as the national epicenter for food systems education. Founded and facilitated by VCRD, the Vermont Higher Education Food Systems Consortium is made up of Vermont colleges with significant agriculture and food systems programs including **Green Mountain College, Middlebury College, New England Culinary Institute, Sterling College, University of Vermont, Vermont Law School, and Vermont Technical College** (and other VSC partners). VCRD continues to facilitate ways schools can build student pathways and partnerships to share VT's educational resources and enrich student experiences in creative ways. Visit vermontfoodeducation.org for more information.

Vermont Climate Economy Initiative

In 2015, VCRD founded and led the Vermont Climate Change Economy Council for a year-long evaluation of economic opportunities that solve climate change challenges. A February 2016 Vermont Climate Economy Summit served as a launching point for the "Progress for Vermont" Action Plan, a blueprint that now guides the work of VCRD and our partners. The Vermont Climate Economy Partnership was then formed to help advance policies to boost economic opportunities in energy development, efficiencies, transportation change, smart growth, working lands, recycling and other economic arenas that reduce carbon impacts. The Partnership is growing and today includes approximately 450 businesses and individuals committed to providing collective action in support of the plan.

To further drive this effort, at the end of 2016 VCRD convened a working group of key business and policy leaders to serve as the overall board for the partnership—the Climate Economy Action Team (CEAT).

In 2016, CEAT set priorities for policy action to promote the expansion of electric vehicles in Vermont (especially for trucks and public transportation), boosting the development of a Climate Economy Business Accelerator at the VT Sustainable Jobs Fund,

and advancing rational policies for energy planning to reduce carbon impacts.

To learn more and join the Climate Economy Initiative visit <http://vtrural.org/programs/climate-economy>

Climate Economy Model Communities Program

The Climate Economy Model Communities Program is providing local facilitation to model state-of-the-art economic development in a time of climate change. The Program will concentrate energy generation and

What is the Climate Economy?

The climate economy is an economic arena that includes the following key sectors:

- ▶ Clean energy development and distribution
- ▶ Thermal and electrical efficiencies
- ▶ Green building
- ▶ Changing transportation systems
- ▶ Farm and forest enterprises
- ▶ Recycling, reuse, and renewal of resources
- ▶ Building preservation and smart growth
- ▶ Knowledge/innovation-based economic development: the digital economy, arts, and creative economy
- ▶ Outdoor recreation and tourism

The climate economy is a broad set of economically significant aspects of almost all business and community life. It is a feature in all manufacturing, in tourism, and a fertile area for research and development that can model new businesses, create jobs, and develop infrastructure for the future, while mitigating climate risks.

Ultimately, the climate economy is an evolving answer to climate change; it is the economy of the future.

efficiency offerings from Green Mountain Power and Efficiency Vermont with customized projects that spring from each selected community. These projects will range from developing new paths or a downtown business incubator to developing a model electric jitney service for their downtown. VCRD will catalyze action plans and bring in leadership, organization and resources from state, federal and non-profit forces for good to help towns drive projects forward.

In 2016, funding was secured to initiate the program and Jon Copans was hired to serve as Program Director. He started working right away with partners Green Mountain Power and Efficiency Vermont to develop an RFP soliciting town interest in the program. A group of six regionally and economically diverse communities submitted strong applications. Pownal and Middlebury were selected to initiate the program in 2017, and organizing in Pownal is well underway. Efforts in Middlebury will begin in the late summer.

Learn more about the Vermont Climate Economy Model Communities Program here: <http://vtrural.org/model-communities>

National Climate Economy Innovation Summit

Both of Vermont's in-state Climate Economy Summits in 2015 and 2016 have asked leaders: "How can we promote Vermont as a dynamic center for entrepreneurship that directly answers the carbon/climate challenge?" Both have affirmed that we need to tell the Vermont assets story and use it to help brand the state in ways that will attract entrepreneurs, investors and mission-oriented youth. Both came to the idea that the best way to start such a marketing of Vermont (internally and externally) would be to hold the first ever National Climate Economy Summit.

VCRD and a steering committee of partners have framed "cc:econ Catalysts of the Climate Economy" a 3-day national innovation summit in Burlington to bring together entrepreneurs, investors, and thought leaders to gear up for the next stage of economic development and prosperity in a low-carbon future. The summit will feature speeches, roundtables, and discussion groups with industry leaders from around

the country in clean energy, green building, agriculture, transportation, tech innovation, efficiency improvement, smart growth, and more. The third day will take visitors on the road for tours of key Vermont assets (from Rutland's Solar City to Net Zero Burlington, distributed generation, green building, working lands/carbon sequestration, and more). For more information on Catalysts of the Climate Economy Summit visit www.ccecon17.com



VCRD stands for:

**Local Democracy · Rural Voice · Engagement
Patriotism of Place · Community Renewal · Working Lands
Innovation · Climate Economy · Youth**

VCRD at a Glance

- ▶ 19 years of Strategic Engagement for Action through 54 Community Visits creating over 200 community projects with thousands of volunteers.
- ▶ Led Broadband and Digital Economy Development Projects with 92 Vermont towns.
- ▶ Helped bring Front Porch Forum to every town in Vermont (the only state with community based social networks in every town).
- ▶ Developed 40 Downtown Wi-Fi Zones and supported the development of 40 municipal websites and helped hundreds of businesses and non-profits enter the digital age.
- ▶ Led the development of Vermont's Working Lands Enterprise Fund that has already increased business income by \$12M and created over 100 new jobs.
- ▶ Built over 21 Vermont Conferences and Rural Summits engaging over 5,000 people working together to spearhead rural progress.
- ▶ Developed 9 policy councils to unite Vermont efforts for the working landscape, in-state energy development, planning, the creative economy, the climate economy, and in setting vision through the Council on the Future of Vermont.
- ▶ Leading new initiatives to make Vermont a national leader for small business creation in the Climate Economy.

VCRD works toward a future for Vermont in which its:

- ▶ **communities** are healthy and resilient;
- ▶ **economy** is innovative and vibrant;
- ▶ **citizens** are engaged in community-building and governance, working closely with their neighbors;
- ▶ **communities** attract youth, entrepreneurs, and healthy diversity;
- ▶ **young citizens** are fully prepared to contribute to their communities and participate successfully in a changing economy;
- ▶ **rural character and open lands** are conserved and managed productively and profitably;
- ▶ **communities, businesses and citizens** prosper by designing and building economic solutions to climate change; and
- ▶ **communities** serve as a models for other communities throughout rural America.

Join VCRD. Make a contribution. Follow our efforts:

Website: <http://vtrural.org>

Facebook: [facebook.com/vtrural](https://www.facebook.com/vtrural)

Youtube: [youtube.com/TheVCRD](https://www.youtube.com/TheVCRD)

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VCRD would like to thank the many contributors who support our work in service to Vermont's rural communities. Annual membership dues contribute to fund all of VCRD's programmatic activities.

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