

Randolph Area Creative Communities Program

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Introduction

The Randolph area joined the Creative Communities Program in the program's third round of working with villages, towns and cities around Vermont. The application spoke to needs like building linkages among plentiful cultural resources, finding mechanisms to support a regional creative economy, and tying cultural growth into overall plans for the economic future. Overall goals emphasized the strong creative activities already happening in the area. Randolph strategically set the stage for the partnerships alluded to in their listed goals by pulling together diverse groups to write the application. The Randolph Area Economic Development Corporation, Randolph Area Chamber of Commerce, Chandler Center for the Arts, White River Craft Center, and Rural School & Community Trust prepared the application, lending economic, cultural and educational perspectives to the work. The Creative Communities process provided a forum for this type of creative partnering to continue in a forward-thinking way.

Randolph hosted three public forums over the course of its Creative Communities Program work (see next section for details). These forums drew together thoughtful groups of individuals with an overall positive feeling about their region. Comments struck a consistently optimistic tone – emphasizing the need to build from great things already happening, rather than starting from a focus on what's "wrong." The Creative Communities Program application highlighted how this positive attitude had basis in a history of ability to recover from difficult times. For example, Randolph successfully faced the challenge of downtown revitalization following several major fires in 1991-1992. The community recovered from disaster to gain a Vermont Historic Downtown designation and hosted the Vermont Community Development Association's statewide meeting in 2006. This meeting allowed Randolph to showcase work on business growth and development, arts and culture, and housing.

One theme that captures many local assets is the concept of Randolph as a center, both literally and figuratively. This idea appeared both in Randolph's application and in subsequent community discussions. The area's easy access from interstates and public transportation, along with meeting facilities in locations like Vermont Technical College, makes Randolph an ideal gathering place for people from around the state. The Randolph area also has a critical mass of activities that engage local citizens in community life. One forum speaker described this as all the legs on the stool for self-sufficiency, including cultural activities, necessary goods and services, a strong and walkable downtown, and recreation.

The Creative Communities Program offered one way to unify the components that define Randolph as a center of activity. Randolph emphasized bringing together a range of people and organizations by calling their effort the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative, identifying different sectors that have a stake in the creative economy. The final projects chosen during the Creative Communities Program provide a platform for maximizing the potential of existing resources.

The goal of **Promoting Environmental Initiatives that Define Randolph as a Green Community** clearly has its roots in a range of projects that already exist for the Randolph area. An initial brainstorm of existing efforts (recorded in a later section of this report) ranged from sustainability education at Vermont Technical College to a new festival celebrating local agriculture to Randolph's position as a public transportation hub. The Environmental Initiatives group will begin to establish Randolph's "green" reputation with an early focus on solid waste management and the local food system, two important topics that lend themselves to measurable outcomes.

The effort to **Improve Internet Access** will provide residents in the Randolph area with a tool to connect with each other, develop businesses, and access information about what is happening in their region. The Internet is becoming increasingly vital to economic development. It also has a key role to play in community strengthening. The **Heart of Vermont Collaborative** project team recognizes this second aspect through an early focus on placing community information online. This group will also focus on providing schools with the equipment needed to access that online information and, in a separate project, inventorying creative economy assets.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development has enjoyed working with everyone involved in the Randolph area's Creative Communities Program. We would like to especially thank our local steering committee for their hard work putting together the community forums, as well as the Randolph National Bank, Gifford Medical Center, Chandler Center for the Arts, and Vermont Technical College for meeting space. The refreshments provided for the forums were truly impressive, for which we thank the Bear Mexican Restaurant, Chandler Board Members, the Chamber of Commerce, Three Bean Café, and Randolph Co-op.

Accomplishments in the Creative Communities Program result from local leadership and community effort. However, VCRD is eager to support implementation. We suggest that you carefully review the Recommendations section of this report for concrete resources and ideas, and that you call upon members of the Resource Team (listed at the end of this report) and VCRD staff for help.



Overview of the Creative Communities Program

By 2003, the idea of the creative economy had become pervasive in Vermont, but few policy makers and local leaders had understanding of how to advance the opportunity of the creative economy systematically in state policy or in practice in towns throughout the state. The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) convened the Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation (VCCI) to craft a strategic plan that would coordinate the work of statewide leadership, the congressional delegation and state legislature, and provide community leaders with a guide to practical action. The final product, *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy*, was formally issued at the beginning of the 2005 Vermont Legislative session.

The VCCI report is available online at <http://www.vtrural.org>. It outlines the current strength of Vermont's creative economy and offers recommendations for increasing the contribution that the creative economy can make to the state's overall economic health.

One of the policy recommendations in the VCCI report was to establish a Vermont Creative Communities Program that would jumpstart local creative economy development projects by offering targeted assistance for community-led planning. VCRD received a grant from Jane's Trust to implement this program starting in 2005.

Today, the Creative Communities Program builds on both VCCI's findings and the successful Community Visit program that VCRD has managed for many years. Community Visits offer a way for communities to identify key issue areas and construct work plans for addressing selected public concerns. Creative Communities Visits do the same around the creative economy.

The Creative Economy

Organizations around the world, including several in New England, have studied and set their own definitions of the "creative economy." Some definitions focus on the revenue generated by particular creative sectors that fit standard industrial codes, others focus on the individual qualities of creative workers, and still others attempt to pinpoint specific policies that spark creativity in *every* worker.

The Creative Communities Program considers all existing creative economy perspectives and uses a working definition with three key components that are common to most creative economy discussions:

- **The Importance of Place:** Our discussion of "place" includes the natural, physical and community environments that form the foundation for creative economy work. Is this a place where people will *want* to work, live, and participate as active citizens? Is there a healthy mix of culture and commerce? Is there a strong community identity that distinguishes this place from any other?

- **Creative Partnerships:** The 2004 *Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy* report began to outline the breadth of businesses, individuals, and organizations that contribute to a strong economy. These contributors include groups that have not traditionally been thought of as business partners, such as arts, heritage, place-based, and other (usually) not-for-profit organizations. They are core partners in economic development discussions. Who needs to be at the table to help build a strong local economy?
- **Individuals' Creative Skills:** Businesses in every field generate a competitive advantage from new ideas and unique skills – how do we increase business' ability to capitalize on creative contributions? What type of environment attracts and retains today's top creative thinkers? What inspires creative thinking in *everyone* in a community?

The Creative Communities Process

The Creative Communities Program consists of three public meetings that generate the brainstorming, prioritized projects, and action steps detailed in this report. The goal is to bring a diverse group of community members to the table who are in agreement in their commitment to a strong future for their community and can begin to work together to identify key steps for ensuring that future. The timeline for Randolph's process was:

- **January 30th, 2007 – First Public Forum:** In the month leading up to the first forum, a local group of volunteers, led by Sharon Rives, sent invitations to scores of area organizations, businesses and individuals. They also placed advertisements in public places and worked with the Herald of Randolph on a story. Ultimately, a capacity crowd arrived to the January 30th forum at Gifford Medical Center. This forum combined presentations on what the creative economy means with brainstorming about how it applies to the Randolph area and specific ideas for projects to advance local creative economic development. This list formed the basis for the prioritization session in the second public meeting.
- **March 1st, 2007 – Project List Review and Prioritization:** The second community meeting reviewed and revised the list of project possibilities outlined in the first meeting. Through discussion, championing, and voting, participants identified 3 priority areas to become the focus of forming Project Teams and work plans in the third, and final, forum.
- **March 28th, 2007 – Project Team Working Day:** In the final meeting run by VCRD, Project Teams for each project set specific strategies, identified available (and potential) resources, and outlined a work plan for the next year around the projects selected in the second meeting. A Resource Team invited by VCRD facilitated the group discussions, offered ideas and resource suggestions and answered questions from their experience. The work plans based on this meeting and recommendations received later from the Resource Team appear in the following pages of this report.

More detailed notes on this process appear in the following pages.

I. First Public Forum on the Creative Economy

Gifford Medical Center

January 30th, 2007



The first public forum for the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative (the name of the Creative Communities Program in the Randolph area) took place on the evening of January 30th in the conference room at Gifford Medical Center. This forum used a slightly different format than other Creative Communities Program kick off forums. Because the Randolph area had many creative economy assets and projects in development (see the notes below) the local group directing the program asked that discussion focus on the central question of forming collaborative, effective linkages among the Randolph area's cultural and development resources as part of strengthening the local creative economy.

The evening began with a welcome from Sharon Rives, who is chairing the Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative for the Randolph area. Paul Costello and Helen Labun Jordan, both of the Vermont Council on Rural Development, then provided a brief overview of what the creative economy term means. The introduction moved quickly to facilitated discussion of creative economy projects happening in, or planned for, the Randolph area and what could strengthen these projects. The following notes capture the comments received during that discussion.

What does the creative economy look like in the Randolph area today?

- Randolph has “all legs of the stool” for economic development: strong arts, technical college, medical center. What remains is to get the word out.
- Vermont Technical College (VTC) and Gifford Medical Center are both dynamic institutions that not only contribute to community life in the Randolph area but also push the envelope with innovations that can have a larger economic impact. For example, VTC is pioneering a program to help young farmers acquire dairy herds. Gifford is building a model for institutions to use local foods in cooking. There are many examples of these organizations’ willingness to try new things.
- The downtown is a major asset.
- Randolph is at the center of the state, making it very accessible both as a regional seat and as a gathering place for people from around Vermont.
- Randolph is accessible by car, by bike, and railroad. Also, Stagecoach lets people get to activities by bus.
- There is a high concentration of artists, both professional artists and those involved in arts outside of their profession.
- A strong music community exists, including not only performers but also composers and an excellent venue at Chandler.
- Arts are combined with other aspects of the region’s heritage. For example, this May will be a Fiddlehead Festival that celebrates the beginning of the growing

season and the arts. At the end of the season is the well-established New World festival.

- Agriculture has a long history in Randolph. The town is particularly known for its connection to Justin Morgan (at one time the town clerk) who bred the Morgan Horse line.
- Today, agricultural heritage appears in many creative ways in Randolph. Two examples are Vermont Technical College's work on alternative fuels and Gifford Medical Center's program that brought local food in to use in the hospital's menu.
- The residents of the Randolph area have a great diversity of background, perspectives and lifestyles. It's a great community for getting to know people who are very different from you. This individuality and diversity should not be lost in any effort to "brand" the area.
- Randolph celebrates youth and families. Multiple programs target a young audience.
- The Underground Center for the Arts presents music events (usually for a younger audience), space for performances, dance, and music lessons.
- An important element in local creative endeavors is people willing to take risks. This risk taking is what defines an entrepreneur.
- Sometimes risk taking for progress comes in the form of community commitments or changes within an existing business (not necessarily an entirely new business). For example, Gifford now has an endocrinologist – the first (and only) one in Central Vermont.
- There is a great ethic of volunteerism.
- Randolph has very strong recreation. It used to be a hub for bicycling, host of an annual BikeFest, and could be again. There's an excellent golf course, which is expanding.
- Randolph has a vibrant church community.
- The Randolph Garden Club does projects to beautify downtown.

What major new projects are promoting the creative economy?

- Multiple organizations and businesses are planning expansions, including: the Chandler, Three Stallion Inn, Prevention Partnership, and the Landfill, which is experimenting with a model to turn waste into compost.
- August, 2007 begins the centennial season for the Chandler. Many events will mark this season, including youth productions and new music commissioned for three concerts. There is a newly hired outreach coordinator. Chandler is also planning a renovation and expansion of the building that makes it more accessible and adds teaching space.
- The Fiddlehead Festival will kick off in May, 2007. As mentioned above it is a celebration to start the growing season.
- Youth have outdoor activities existing and being developed. The Boys & Girls Club helps run activities. One project underway is seeking funding for a cover to the ice rink. A bowling alley has been recently bought.
- The Randolph Rotary Club will host their first Art Auction, including local artists.

- The White River Partnership is making progress in cleaning up area streams.
- The Vermont Technical College is starting an agricultural incubation program that gets a herd of cattle to young farmers.
- A local artist wrote the book “Water Music” that has been developed into a curriculum integrating arts and music into the study of the environment.
- The proposed Agricultural Museum has a site and is in the planning stages.
- The Sustainable Living Network’s Randolph area branch is working to identify their next projects. A big vision is for creating an environmentally friendly living space and farming collective that provides affordable *and* sustainable housing. They are also considering a free, integrated healing clinic.

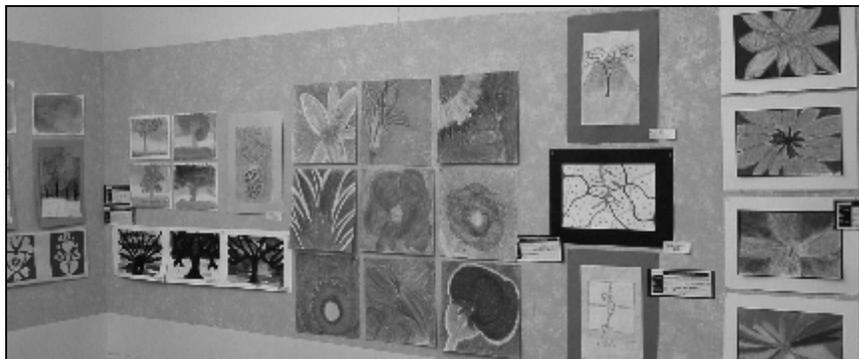
What are strategies for encouraging both existing and future creative economy projects?

- Local residents don’t necessarily appreciate all the things that the area has going for it. Randolph needs a forum for presenting / marketing its assets along with addressing opportunities and challenges.
- A PR person could get out information on dynamic things happening in Randolph – marketing them both locally and outside the region.
- Randolph should build a common invitation to let everyone easily find out about activities happening in the area. The Herald of Randolph does have a calendar, but it doesn’t go very far out. A web-based calendar could let people search for events, see further out, and also be a good tool for people planning to visit Vermont who are researching their trip options. Possibly this project could happen through the Chamber of Commerce. Another option would be to invest in an expanded online calendar for the Herald of Randolph.
- Randolph needs some form of brand identity to use in marketing and on the website.
- More efforts should tie into the idea of being a “Center” - of the state, of arts, of recreation, etc. Linked to this Center idea is the fact that you don’t have to leave downtown Randolph – shopping for essentials, entertainment, food are all available. The town can support and augment this useful variety.
- Rural broadband is a major issue. Residents and businesses outside of downtown don’t have good access to high speed Internet. Even options in the downtown itself could be improved by wireless hot spots.
- The way to attract young people will be to build a sustainable, green society that offers them the type of lifestyle they consider important.
- The area could work more with VTC, ensuring that the college is integrated into community and cultural life off campus.
- The fact that Randolph offers a great place for



children and teenagers, with multiple programs and activities, should be made more apparent to people considering moving to the area.

- Randolph has a lack of things happening downtown at night.
- The festivals in Randolph could be presented together as cyclic celebrations: Fiddlehead Festival in the spring, 4th of July in summer, New World at the start of fall. These could highlight Randolph's assets throughout the year.
- There's an opportunity for Chandler to serve a coordinating role, building collaborations between arts and cultural organizations under one umbrella.
- Randolph should build a map of cultural resources in the region to understand how the components fit together and their interconnections.
- Increasingly, people don't live in the downtown. Empty houses in the center of town reduce vitality. Randolph should focus on the desirability of central housing.
- One way to further increase activity in the downtown is a local currency. Similar options already exist in the form of holiday gift cards for local spending and Gifford bonuses that are a local business coupon.
- Randolph should redefine its education system to be more creative, more participatory, and draw in older generations.
- Safety and health are the key reasons why people live in this area. More focus should be on attacking the drug culture through demonstrating healthy lifestyle decisions. The Prevention Partnership is an important first step.
- Individual artists would benefit from an organization that represents their interests. Some examples of potential projects are to gather work of area artisans into a gallery for sales or to bring in artists in residence with open studio space where they demonstrate their work.
- Fostering tourism is a way to grow the economy and introduce more people to the region.
- The Randolph area should have better outreach to new and also former residents. New residents could be welcomed with a neighborhood potluck. Previous residents could be seen as "alumni", with an invitation to come back and visit. The Chandler is reaching out to previous residents as part of its centennial season with a "Returning to Randolph" exhibit.



II. Initial List of Project Possibilities

The January 30th public forum produced stacks of notes from enthusiastic discussions. As described in the previous section, the forum began with what creative economic projects exist *already* in the Randolph area and then used this list to start a discussion of possibilities for consciously building from these strengths. This second half of the discussion led to a long list of project opportunities.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development looked through the first forum notes to pull together the first draft of a projects list. These projects express the specific ideas presented in January, combining very similar ones and adding in considerations that came up during the background discussion. It blocks out ambitious concepts that could provide a starting point for project teams to research and refine. VCRD did not filter projects based on feasibility or how closely they relate to the creative economy. Instead, this process simply organized the notes, combined small ideas into larger ones, and connected general observations to concrete project possibilities.

Revisions to the initial list occurred at a public meeting, on March 1st, where participants added new topics, combined existing topics into single projects, and made corrections to each proposal. This public process produced the following, final proposed topic list.

Build a Marketing Campaign Around Randolph as a Center: Randolph is literally in the center of Vermont and figuratively a center of activity. More could be done to promote this central position, emphasizing Randolph's accessibility along with the diversity of things happening in town, including a downtown that meets most of its residents' needs. This marketing effort should reach both potential visitors living outside of the Randolph region and local residents who may not realize everything happening in their own backyard.

Establish Randolph as a Major Recreation Hub: One of Randolph's community assets is recreation. Recreation meets lifestyle interests of local residents of all ages and provides a tourist draw. There are many options for enhancing Randolph's position in Vermont's recreation, including the possibilities of re-instituting the BikeFest, drawing in stores that meet recreational needs (for example gear outfitters and repair shops) and simply advertising what already exists.

Improve Internet Access: Rural broadband access is a major issue across Vermont. Businesses increasingly need a web presence, particularly home-based businesses, artists, craftspeople, and entrepreneurs. The necessary high-speed Internet access is not available in many areas around Randolph. Furthermore, while downtown Randolph offers high-speed Internet, it does not have the widespread wireless access (including wireless hot spots) that is becoming standard in downtowns around the state. Randolph citizens should take proactive steps to improve Internet access.

Develop a Comprehensive Community Calendar: Randolph should build a common invitation to help everyone find out about activities happening in the area. This information can be spread through a community calendar that is available online, unites events listings for all social, cultural and civic activities, allows local people to search for events, extends several months into the future, and serves as a tool for people planning a visit to Vermont. Two possible organizations to host this project are the Chamber of Commerce and Herald of Randolph. The calendar should reflect a larger web of cooperation and complementary activities so that everyone (arts groups, businesses, individuals, etc.) remains in touch with what is happening across the community.

Promote Environmental Initiatives that Define Randolph as a Green Community: One thing that many people, particularly young people, look for when locating in Vermont communities is environmental sustainability. This “green” aspect is one way in which Vermont establishes a unique culture. Randolph already has a good base for being known as a sustainable community, including a strong downtown retail area, research initiatives at VT Technical College, connections to the local food system, and project planning through the Sustainable Living Network. Existing initiatives should be supported and more comprehensive planning and coordination should occur to establish Randolph as a leading environmental community. There is a range of issues to address, from local foods to transportation systems. This committee will begin to prioritize possible projects, building the way from more basic to more ambitious initiatives.

Tie Existing Festivals Together into a Cycle of Festivals: The new Fiddlehead Festival in May greets the beginning of the growing season, the Fourth of July celebrations occur at the height of summer and the New World Festival closes out the growing season. These events should be explicitly tied together as a “cycle” that connects arts, culture, an agricultural heritage, and Randolph’s natural surroundings.

Promote Downtown Housing to Ensure Long-Term Downtown Vitality: Residents describe Randolph as “having everything” in a diverse downtown with basic shopping, entertainment, key services and a unique character. However, the vitality of this downtown requires a viable mix of commercial, retail, and residential space. Trends are currently away from housing in the downtown. Losing people who live in the heart of Randolph undermines many of the goals stated for the creative economy, with an impact on everything from being a sustainable community to having evening activities. Randolph should focus on ways to make downtown homes more attractive for incoming or relocating residents.

Launch a Buy Local Campaign: One way to further increase activity in the downtown is a specific buy-local campaign. This campaign can consist of marketing (and there are many models to draw from) and also more specific promotions that focus people on spending in the downtown. Examples of existing, specific promotions in Randolph are holiday gift cards for local spending and Gifford bonuses that are a local business coupon. The Randolph Food Co-op promotes local foods. Some communities take their

Improve Nighttime Activity: As with many rural areas, Randolph does not have many activities downtown in the evenings. Some potential residents, particularly young people, will look for a viable nightlife in their town. Randolph could build on its existing activities to increase what is available in the evening hours, including music performances, venues for local performers, and customers in signature restaurants.

Provide More Activity for Youth: Children and teenagers in the Randolph area don't have enough fun activities outside of the school day to keep them occupied. While some programs do exist for after-school time, more is needed. As cultural and community resources are developed for the creative economy, one group should develop projects with a specific youth focus.

III. Priority Topics **Selected March 1st, 2007**

The gallery at the Chandler Center for the Arts provided the meeting space for the second community meeting of the Randolph area Culture, Community & Commerce Initiative on March 1st, 2007. This meeting is the center point of the democratic decision-making that takes place through the Creative Communities Program, where residents select priority areas that will become the focus of yearlong project teams. This is a forum where ideas flow freely, arguments are offered, perspectives shared, and people have the opportunity to champion their beliefs and then vote their priorities.

The first step in the evening was to review the list of ideas drawn from the initial forum in January. Participants revised this list, added new ideas, and combined some closely related items to develop the final version listed in the previous section. Discussion then led each participant to mark their first choice from the list, a decision that started the process of considering priorities and removed some low-priority items from discussion. Finally, a combination of championing favorite projects and voting led to the final three priority projects.

The three priority issues selected by the Randolph area are:

Improve Internet Access: Rural broadband access is a major issue across Vermont. Businesses increasingly need a web presence, particularly home-based businesses, artists, craftspeople, and entrepreneurs. The necessary high-speed Internet access is not available in many areas around Randolph. Furthermore, while downtown Randolph offers high-speed Internet, it does not have the widespread wireless access (including wireless hot spots) that is becoming standard in downtowns around the state. Randolph citizens should take proactive steps to improve Internet access.

Promote Environmental Initiatives that Define Randolph as a Green Community: One thing that many people, particularly young people, look for when locating in Vermont communities is environmental sustainability. This “green” aspect is one way in which Vermont establishes a unique culture. Randolph already has a good base for being known as a sustainable community, including a strong downtown retail area, research initiatives at VT Technical College, connections to the local food system, and project planning through the Sustainable Living Network. Existing initiatives should be supported and more comprehensive planning and coordination should occur to establish Randolph as a leading environmental community. There is a range of issues to address, from local foods to transportation systems. This committee will begin to prioritize possible projects, building the way from more basic to more ambitious initiatives.

Create Stronger Collaborations Around the Creative Economy: The planning process undertaken with the Creative Communities Program is only a beginning. A local group should meet on a regular, ongoing, basis to strategically support the Randolph region's creative economy. Planning tasks would involve a thorough creative economy asset inventory, building creative partnerships (for example between business and the arts), assessing what organizations are struggling and identifying efficient resource use. This group will re-review all projects suggested through the Creative Communities Project, as well as new initiative suggestions.

Note: The first project team meeting for this priority renamed the group: Heart of Vermont Collaborative.



IV. Action Plans **March 28th, 2007**

On March 28th, community members from throughout the Randolph region organized into Project Teams to implement the ideas generated during the earlier strategic planning sessions. Each Project Team has a chairperson to run sessions for the next year. At the first team meetings on March 28th, committee members worked closely with facilitators and resource teams to develop step-by-step action plans, and to devise a list of human and financial resources to help achieve their goals. This final phase of the program marks the time when residents begin the work of turning ideas into action. The Resource Team members, listed at the end of this report, are available to lend ideas as the projects move forward. Their initial recommendations are in the following section.

Create Stronger Collaborations Around the Creative Economy **April 24th Re-named: Heart of Vermont Collaborative**

The planning process undertaken with the Creative Communities Program is only a beginning. A local group should meet on a regular, ongoing, basis to strategically support the Randolph region's creative economy. Planning tasks would involve a thorough creative economy asset inventory, building creative partnerships (for example between business and the arts), assessing what organizations are struggling and identifying efficient resource use. This group will re-review all projects suggested through the Creative Communities Project, as well as new initiative suggestions.

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Action Steps

1.) Creative Economy Inventory

Build a creative economy inventory of the Randolph area, including:

- Organizational plans for the future
- Development needs
- Potential barriers to action

2.) Build Goals

Build actionable goals for the creative economy in Randolph.

3.) Collect Ideas

Collect actionable ideas from within the community and from other communities.

4.) Vision and Brand

Create a community vision and brand. Each member will bring 3-4 statements for the next meeting to start this discussion.

5.) Community Calendar

Build a multi-media community calendar that unites groups and activities. Use the calendar as a vehicle to present Randolph's vision of itself and of local activity.

Resources

- Preservation Trust Tours
- People who have succeeded in other towns in building collaboration - e.g. Rutland
- People who have done Internet-based collaboration in other towns – Pownal, Putney.
- Invite representatives of crucial groups in town to join the committee.

Initial Focus Projects (chosen 4/25/07)

- Promote Universal Digital Access: Find ways to provide universal community access to computer hardware, through public or private means
- Inventory Creative Economy Assets: Create a comprehensive list of local area talents and organizational assets/capacity/missions/strengths that will foster collaboration.
- Identify Web-Based Tools: Investigate web-based tools that will make collaboration within the community easier, more effective, and more accessible/interesting to youth



Promote Environmental Initiatives that Define Randolph as a Green Community

One thing that many people, particularly young people, look for when locating in Vermont communities is environmental sustainability. This “green” aspect is one way in which Vermont establishes a unique culture. Randolph already has a good base for being known as a sustainable community, including a strong downtown retail area, research initiatives at VT Technical College, connections to the local food system, and project planning through the Sustainable Living Network. Existing initiatives should be supported and more comprehensive planning and coordination should occur to establish Randolph as a leading environmental community. There is a range of issues to address, from local foods to transportation systems. This committee will begin to prioritize possible projects, building the way from more basic to more ambitious initiatives.

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Existing Projects:

- Single stream recycling at the transfer station.
- Recycling at local businesses.
- Gifford Medical Center has a new local foods project.
- The Randolph food co-op supports local producers.

- Water First is active in water issues, such as groundwater mapping and commenting on the Agency of Natural Resources' river basin planning for the White River.
- There are local examples of highly energy efficient homes – for example straw bale homes and ones with alternative energy sources.
- Randolph is a center of public transportation – Stagecoach, the 89er, train.
- The Flood Plain Forest.
- Vermont Technical College initiatives include:
 - Building a free village connection with Stagecoach
 - Campus greening initiative.
 - Conducting a green communities assessment with Yellowwood Assoc.
 - VTC has a wind tower
 - VTC is going through an Act 250 permitting process for a grass or carton pellet boiler.
 - There's a feasibility study underway for converting the heating system to biomass.
 - Recycling initiatives include using recycled newspaper to bed cows.
 - There is a new sustainable design and technology bachelor's degree.
 - There may be a new sustainable farming program.
 - VTC hosts events like the NOFA and grass farmers' conferences and a variety of speakers on environmental topics.
 - A proposal is being developed for a Center for Sustainable Technologies that can be a resource for the community, businesses, and k-12 education.
 - VTC is working to increase its work with the larger community.
- There are many area organic farms. The town conservation committee is preserving farms with conservation easement purchases.
- Micro-hydro contractors live in town.
- There is a farmers' market.
- There are four town forest parcels. One project underway is to make these parcels more accessible for the public.
- The Water Music curriculum around music and water is becoming a state model.
- The Sustainable Living Network and VT Earth Institute sponsor discussion courses, most recently on global warming.
- The Central VT Invasive Plant Coalition is working to eradicate invasives (eg wild chervil).
- Randolph Coal and Oil may start selling biodiesel (B100).
- Randolph Union High School heats with wood chips.
- Planning has started for the Good Earth Collective eco-village.
- West Brookfield has a localvore group.
- The First Branch Sustainability Project works on peak oil concerns. The most recent project has been promoting solar water heaters.
- The new Fiddlehead Festival celebrates arts and agriculture in the spring. There may be future festivals that combine music, agriculture and clean energy.
- Randolph Area Food and Farms hosts a festival and workshops.
- The town is setting up an energy committee.

- Randolph has an Earth Charter resolution. <http://www.earthcharter.org/>
- In 2006 there was a Fair Trade Fair to raise awareness.
- Randolph's planning commission is working on incentives for clustered development.
- The I-89 planning district is working to balance growth and environmental sensitivity.
- The Salisbury Square project hopes to have green development.
- There is a farm incubator, with potential for more.

Possible Projects for Environmental Initiatives Committee:

Recycling & Waste Management

- Increase use of recycling facilities – focus on schools and institutions
- Recycling at town events.
- Expand recycling capacity at landfill – for example more types of plastics, composting

Support New Energy Task Force

- Reduce night lighting
- Seek LEED certification for the new municipal building.

Transportation

- Pathways for bikes, walking
- Revive VT Transit Line
- Support expanding Stagecoach routes.

Water Protection

- Vegetative buffers
- Protect aquifer recharge capacity
- Improve sewer capacity and sustainable waste-water treatment
- Put in systems to handle stormwater
- Advocate for state control (v. FERC control) of water rights

Agriculture (producers focus)

- Support more sustainable agriculture practices – for example handling copper sulfate.
- Convert waste agricultural products to electricity.

Food System (consumers focus)

- Support the co-op
- Increase local food purchasing by everyone
- Connect farmers and restaurants

Town Green Spaces

- Control invasive plants

Help make the town forests more user friendly
Increase green spaces in town.
Evaluate what happened to the community gardens, whether that project might be started again.
Find green uses for currently fallow land
Bio-remediation project near Branchwood

Green Business

Provide incentives for green businesses to start in Randolph
Encourage green business spin-offs from VTC
Assist local businesses with greening efforts

Other

Promote non-Internet forms of communications
Build VTC and community collaborations around the environment.

Criteria for Initial Projects:

- Appropriate for a local, volunteer, ad hoc committee.
- Opportunity to involve youth.
- Establish identity as a green community.
- Potential for short-term, visible success to build momentum.
- No duplication of efforts.
- Connect existing efforts.
- Engage diverse community groups.
- Build a model for other projects.
- Set a foundation that can start small and grow to much bigger projects.

Final Focus: A combination of recycling and food systems. Recycling presents a clear metric for measuring success, involving different groups in work with immediately tracked results. At the same time, there is growing statewide concern about the local food system and the challenges faced by the food co-op are an immediate reminder of this concern. There are several areas of overlap between these two topic areas, including:

- Composting.
- Reduced packaging possible with local foods (less packaging for shipping, possibility to buy in bulk / with your own containers, using fresh ingredients instead of pre-packaged).
- Reduced food waste – including tie-ins with the food shelf and gleaning.
- Creative recycling for on-farm use & cost reductions– for example the recycled paper bedding at VTC.
- Agricultural waste to energy.

This group will begin its work with an education campaign on re-using products that might otherwise be sent to the landfill.

Improve Internet Access

Rural broadband access is a major issue across Vermont. Businesses increasingly need a web presence, particularly home-based businesses, artists, craftspeople, and entrepreneurs. The necessary high-speed Internet access is not available in many areas around Randolph. Randolph citizens should take proactive steps to improve Internet access, and attempt to achieve 100% broadband availability in the Randolph area

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Action Steps

1.) Organize Informational Meeting

Meeting should include the surrounding communities, to hear from:

- Burlington Telecom (about fiber-to-the-home)
- Wireless broadband providers
- Comcast

2.) Research Other Towns

Research other towns that have deployed a municipally owned broadband service using wireless or fiber.

3.) Contact 5 Town Broadband Project

Contact the 5 Town (Tunbridge/Thetford/Chelsea/Royalton/Vershire) broadband project to determine if joining their project would benefit Randolph.

4.) Conduct a Survey

Survey Randolph residents and businesses to determine:

- Who currently uses broadband, and from what source
- Who is interested in having broadband service
- What people are willing to pay for broadband

5.) Read Legislation H. 248

Read the current proposed Telecommunication Authority Legislation H.248 to see how it might affect the local effort. If appropriate, encourage Randolph legislative representatives to support it.

6.) Explore Option of a Municipally-Owned System

Explore the possibility of a municipally-owned broadband system with the Randolph town government.

Resources Needed

(See Also Recommendations Section)

- Perspective on statewide efforts and what's available for Randolph.
- Example of other communities that have done similar projects.
- Understanding of all options available.
- Information for Internet service providers.
- Price estimates.
- Resources for conducting survey.



Resource Team Recommendations

Resource Team members represent a wide array of professionals from across the state, and agree to serve as partners and advisors to the Randolph area Project Teams. Their recommendations encompass their experience, past success, and consideration of the Randolph area's unique assets and needs. It is hoped that community members will turn frequently to these pages for concrete ideas, resources, and support. Resource Team members are eager to support the Project Teams as they begin their work. Call on them for help (contact information is found at the end of the report). The following are recommendations compiled from the Resource Team's comments.

Creative Economy Collaborations

One popular format for building an inventory of local assets is **Asset-Based Community Development**. Information about this method, including multiple publications, is online at: <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>. The particular inventory proposed by Randolph will pose an added challenge of defining what qualifies as a "creative economy" asset. **Paul Costello** at the Vermont Council on Rural Development (802 828-6024) can be contacted to sound out ideas.

The Web project can serve as a complement to the inventory and as a starting point to build communications to all active groups in the community. Develop the website in tandem with the inventory then share it with other media (community access TV, the Herald, etc.). Work with the town to ensure the interactivity of the developed site and that it includes information that will interest and ultimately unite a wide variety of constituencies. Combining the web project with the inventory project is an efficient way to utilize inventory information immediately while also advertising the web work as you communicate with groups / individuals in the inventory.

Maintaining a lively, useful website will require a thoughtful outreach campaign from the beginning. As mentioned above, this outreach can begin with the inventory. Other important marketing would be to announce the start up through familiar media outlets, such as the Herald, spreading word through the schools, placing advertisements where people go to access high speed Internet (libraries, coffee shops, etc.) and being responsive to community interests in what a website should provide.

VCRD has worked with communities that undertake web projects at different levels of investment. A simple solution to a community website is a wiki or a blog. **Pownal, Putney** and **Brattleboro** offer examples of these easily-started websites. One drawback of the free exchange made possible by wikis or blogs is a risk of attracting negative, sometimes personal, attacks online. A system for keeping the dialogue constructive should be in place before launching the site.

St. Johnsbury and **Rutland** offer examples of major website projects that require a significantly greater investment of time and funds. The St. Johnsbury Creative Communities report includes a detailed outline of action steps for creating a community

website (report available online at <http://www.vtrural.org>). They have since chosen a slightly different path for implementing the website idea. More details are available from **Linda Fogg**, Director of St. Johnsbury WORKS! (802-748-7121). See below for Rutland contacts.

To address the larger issue of collaboration, consider a road trip to see how other towns are building collaboration. Contact **Whitney Lamy** at the Chaffee Art Center in Rutland (802-775-0356) or **Gail Nunziata** of the Brattleboro Arts Initiative (254-1109). Ask **Preservation Trust of VT** to help organize it (as they have with other communities); contact Paul Bruhn at 658-6647.

Ask Helen Jordan for reports from other Towns in the Creative Communities Program or access them on line at <http://www.vtrural.org> and participate in the VCRD conference on “Advancing Vermont’s Creative Community” at the Statehouse on July 18th. The conference will be a good opportunity to learn what other towns have attempted.

For the specific goal of bringing computer systems to the community, a good first stop for learning about donation options would be **IBM**. Contact **Marie Houghton** at 802-769-2736.

Promote Environmental Initiatives that Define Randolph as a Green Community

Many resources exist for the Environmental Initiatives groups’ specific interest areas of waste reduction and local food system as well as the starting, general, goal of establishing Randolph as a green community. A useful first step would be to combine the initial, broad mission with the work done on reaching specific project areas to reach a mission statement that is concise and gives a good sense of the group’s goals. A short, catchy name could capture the sense of these goals.

Examples of local places with general, community-wide environmental initiatives include:

The **Addison County Relocalization Network (ACoRN)**, which is designing its own local initiative using as a template the Energy Independence Plan from Willits, CA.

<http://www.willitseconomiclocalization.org/Papers/EnergyIndependencePlan.pdf>.

Fred Dunnington (Middlebury Town Planner) is involved in both AcoRN and the Creative Communities Program. He can be reached at: (802) 388-8106.

An example of a community life initiative including sustainability is **Burlington’s Legacy Project**: <http://www.cedo.ci.burlington.vt.us/legacy/>. A related Burlington initiative, their food council, is listed later in this section.

Rutland started an environmental initiative as part of its Creative Communities Program. Background information is part of the Creative Communities Report online

at <http://www.vtrural.org>. For more up-to-date information, contact their Creative Communities Chair **Tara Kelly** at (802) 775-0871.

The **New England Grassroots Environment Fund** (NEGEF) and its website, <http://www.grassrootsfund.org>, are good places to go for basic information and funding opportunities. NEGEF has funded many community initiatives, including the Randolph's Water First and the Randolph Neighborhood association, and a number of energy and climate action groups in and out of Vermont. Contacting NEGEF and leaders of groups that have received their assistance can generate a long list of possible strategies.

The **Vermont Natural Resources Council** has information on a variety of environmental initiatives, along with staff that can provide technical assistance in some areas. Visit their website at: <http://www.vnrc.org/>.

For the particular issue of recycling and solid waste management, a first stop for information on all the possibilities can be zero waste campaigns.

The **Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District** has zero waste materials online at: <http://www.cvswwd.org/>. Their Executive Director, **Donna Barlow Casey**, was part of the Resource Team that visited Randolph.

The **Toxics Action Center**, with an office in Vermont, also has partnered with CVSWMD to develop resources for zero waste initiatives. Their website is: <http://toxicsaction.org/>.

The **Association of Vermont Recyclers** has established its reputation for finding fun, creative ways to educate Vermonters about recycling and other waste issues. Visit their website at: <http://www.vtrecyclers.org>.

The University of Vermont can offer creative ideas for recycling and re-use. Their position as a large university has allowed for interesting experiments in waste management. **Gioia Thompson** coordinates UVM's environmental council (802-656-3803) and **Erica Spiegel** leads recycling efforts (802-656-4191).

For local food system issues, several communities and regions are moving towards grassroots efforts to coordinate support for local food producers.

Hinesburg participated in a VCRD Community Visit in which local foods emerged as a priority project. The report on their work, including contact information, is available online at: <http://www.vtrural.org>.

Localvores are a growing movement in Vermont. These groups support Eat Local Challenges throughout the state. A West Brookfield chapter exists, along with a Central Vermont Localvore project in the nearby Montpelier area. Information on the history of the Vermont Eat Local Challenges is available at <http://www.uvlocalvore.com> or contact **Helen Labun Jordan** at (802) 223-3793.

The Burlington Community and Economic Development Office hosts a **Burlington Food Council**. The contact there is **Betsy Rosenbluth**: 802-865-7515

The Massachusetts-based **Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture** (CISA) organization has a useful, comprehensive guide to starting your own buy local campaign. Ordering information is online at:
<http://www.buylocalfood.com/>

Salvation Farms works specifically on reducing food waste by bringing excess food to Vermonters in need. **Theresa Snow**, Salvation Farms' founder, participated as part of the Randolph Resource Team. The organization offers materials to help start local gleaning projects. Visit them online at: <http://www.salvationfarms.org/>. Or, better yet, contact Theresa to arrange a visit to their center in Wolcott (802-888-5055).

Tom Gilbert at **Highfields Institute** in Hardwick offers consulting on composting at any scale. If this group reaches the level of a serious discussion of managing organic waste and begins to address questions like choosing a site and legal issues, Tom can be a great resource. He is available at 802-475-5138 or www.highfieldsinstitute.org.

One more way to combine local foods and waste management is to organize local bulk orders. These orders could have the added advantage of providing a bridge for food access while Randolph seeks a solution for the recent loss of the Co-op. Associated Buyers and United are two bulk ordering companies. For advice on how to set up a local order, contact **Erika Mitchell**, the bulk ordering coordinator in Adamant, via e-mail at: frizzles@intergate.com.

Internet Access

As this group prepares to frame the issue of Internet access, it is important to remember that Internet is both a residential service issue *and* an economic development issue. Fully capturing all aspects of what Internet access can provide will strengthen any final project plans. It also prevents the instinct to see creating Internet access as something better left to the technically savvy, when in fact it requires people with a diverse range of skills from politics to business to community development.

Be sure to explore what other communities have done. Ask about strategies, pitfalls, lessons learned and what options look best not only today, but ten years from now (including fiber optics). To connect with communities contact:

The 5 Town (Tunbridge/Thetford/Chelsea/Royalton/Vershire) broadband project contact is **Janet Zug** at janet@zugglass.com.

VCRD's **Vermont Rural Broadband Project**, which assists rural towns with broadband issues, has many contacts. The web site, www.VTRuralBroadband.org, contains links to other local projects across the state. Project managers: Al & Laura Duey, 802 467-1266.

In addition to community-based contacts, many statewide programs can provide assistance. State of Vermont resources include:

Tom Murray, Commissioner, Dept. of Information and Innovation, Thomas.Murray@state.vt.us, 802-828-4141 – has responsibility for over-all telecommunications planning in Vermont.

Charlie Kremer, Dept. of Information and Innovation, wireless coordinator, Charlie.Kremer@state.vt.us, 802-828-3224 – works with wireless providers and coordinates state broadband grant program.

Chris Campbell, Director, Telecommunication Division, Vermont Public Service Department, Chris.Campbell@state.vt.us, 802-828-4074 – author of the current state telecommunications plan; responsible for the regulatory side of telecommunications.

The Randolph state representatives might also have ideas for assistance. They will be thinking about statewide Internet issues:

Senator: Mark MacDonald, mmacdonald@leg.state.vt.us, 802-433-5867

House: Patsy French, pfrench@leg.state.vt.us, 802-728-9421 and Jim Hutchinson, jhutchinson@leg.state.vt.us, 802-728-5294



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