

7th Vermont Community Leadership Summit

October 6, 2026 | Vermont State University Castleton



Speaker, Presenter, Panelist, & Moderator bios

Richard Amore | Executive Director Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation | richard.amore@uvm.edu

P10(H). Community Gathering Spaces

Richard Amore, AICP/PLA, is a community and economic development leader, professional landscape architect, certified planner, and educator with more than 20 years of experience advancing place-based strategies that strengthen local economies and communities. He serves as Executive Director of the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation (CVEDC), working with businesses, municipalities, community organizations, and regional partners to advance economic opportunity and regional prosperity across Central Vermont. His experience spans economic and community development, downtown and village revitalization, housing and infrastructure, land use planning, real estate development, placemaking, and active transportation. He has held leadership roles with the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, USDA Rural Development, and Local Motion, where he developed partnerships, secured public and private funding, and helped communities move projects from vision to implementation. Richard brings a distinctly place-based perspective to economic development, grounded in the belief that strong economies depend on strong communities, vibrant places, local leadership, and the ability of communities to shape their own future. He holds master's degrees in Community Planning and Landscape Architecture and teaches urban and rural planning at the University of Vermont.

amber arnold | Executive Director SUSU CommUNITY farm | amber@susucommunityfarm.org

P8(H). How Farmers and Foresters are Building Community

amber arnold is the executive director of SUSU CommUNITY Farm, a 37-acre afroindigenous farm and Black archival sanctuary dedicated to land-based healing and ancestral remembrance. as a Black multiracial liberatory worker, her practice weaves together radical trauma healing, somatic work, and a Black womanist lens that honors the body as a vessel of both memory and liberation. amber tends SUSU CommUNITY Farm as a living archive, a place where soil, story, and spirit converge to restore what displacement and extraction have tried to erase. Her work is an offering back to community: healing that is communal, embodied, and rooted in the land itself.

Max Barrows | Peer Advocate Green Mountain Self Advocates | max@gmsavt.org

Spark Stories: Communities in Action

Max Barrows is Outreach Director for Green Mountain Self-Advocates, a position he has held since 2007. He mentors youth and adults with disabilities to speak up for themselves and become leaders. Max connects with people on all levels advocating for true inclusion of people with developmental disabilities. He is also the Assistant Director for Self-Advocacy Recourse and Technical Assistance Center (SARTAC), a national group supporting self-advocacy. Max spreads the important message that when you meet someone with a disability, you should always believe in their abilities. Max has received several awards for his advocacy work. In 2015, he was honored with a White House Champions of Change award. In 2019, he received a Champion of Equal Opportunity award from the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD). In 2020, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network honored him for his service to the self-advocacy movement. In 2022, he was invited to the White House by President Joe Biden and to Vice President Kamala Harris's residence to have his work recognized. Max is currently working with the National Disability Leadership (NDLN) as a facilitator.

Shannon Barsotti | VCRD Board Chair; Community & Economic Development Director, and Assistant Town Manager Town of Bennington | sbarsotti@benningtonvt.org

Summit Opening, P2(L) School Building Transformations and P10(H). Community Gathering Spaces

Shannon Barsotti works for the Town of Bennington as the Assistant Town Manager and Housing, Community, & Economic Development Director. She is chair of the VCRD Board of Directors and enjoys learning about community initiatives across the state. Shannon lives on a small farm in Pownal with her family and a medley of farm animals.

Kathryn Baxter | Lunenburg | kathrynmarshallbaxter@gmail.com

Spark Stories: Communities in Action

Kathryn Baxter resides in Lunenburg, Vermont and is a fellow community leader. As a dedicated volunteer, Kathryn leads the Lunenburg Outdoors: Recreation, Trails, & Tourism (RTT) Task Force and serves on the Northern Vermont Development Association board. Together with their community Kathryn has secured grants, built the first accessible trail in town, and ensured small-town voices are heard by major regional forces. At this year's summit Kathryn will share their personal leadership journey and invite you to share yours. Come ready to trade ideas, lessons, and inspiration so we can all build stronger Vermont communities together.

Nate Besio | Vermont Center for Independent Living | nbesio@vcil.org

P3(H). Safe Streets, Accessible Recreation, and Inclusive Mobility

Nathan “Nate” Besio is a Peer Advocate Coordinator who has worked for the Vermont Center for Independent Living since November 2013. Prior to that he has over ten years of business and accounting experience, primarily in the non-profit industry working for the State of Vermont and UVM. He is currently serving his 5th term as a Vermont Human Rights Commissioner and is a committed community leader who serves on many Boards devoted to the protection and advocacy for people with disabilities. Nate received a B.A. in Psychology from St. Michael’s College in 2000 and an M.B.A. from State University of New York at Albany in 2002. He loves playing adaptive sports such as power soccer, skiing, sailing and kayaking. Nathan currently resides in Colchester, VT with his wife Gretchen, son Reece and their dog Luna.

Sarah Blizzard | *Board Member* Shires Young Professionals | seblizzard@gmail.com

P7. Reinventing Social Connection

Sarah (SB) Blizzard, EdD (they/them) As a transplant to Vermont from North Carolina via Colorado just before the pandemic, SB was eager to find ways to connect with others in Bennington County. In 2024, they joined the board of Shires Young Professionals helping to foster a vibrant, welcoming network where emerging leaders can connect, grow, and contribute to the community. After asking themselves “What can I do to help foster community?”, SB returned to their musical roots and started Bennington Voices of Pride, a queer-centered community choir that fosters connection, belonging, and solidarity through the shared joy of making music. SB also serves on the board of the Bennington Free Library and works as the Associate Director of Greater Bennington Community Services.

Henry Botzum | *Board Member* Shires Young Professionals | hbotzum@gmail.com

P7. Reinventing Social Connection

Henry Botzum, Au.D., is the founder of Shires Hearing & Wellness, a Vermont-based mobile audiology practice focused on expanding access to care in rural communities. His work sits at the intersection of healthcare, entrepreneurship, and community development, with an emphasis on reducing barriers to communication and participation. He is passionate about building innovative, people-centered solutions that help rural communities thrive. Outside of his professional work, Henry is a co-founder of Bennington Voices of Pride, a community choir serving Southwestern Vermont and beyond.

Lauren Brady | *Community Engagement Coordinator* Vermont Council on Rural Development | lauren@vtrural.org

W8. Youth and Adults Leading Together

Lauren’s interest in community engagement started with her first experiences as a farmer connecting with people and with the land. An alum of College of the Atlantic, they worked with Knoll Farm in Vermont and First Light in Maine, and on farms in both states for 10 years. In 2023 they joined VCRD to support Community Visits and the Vermont Community Leadership Network.

Megan Browning | *Board Member* Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN) | megan@nofavt.org

P8(H). How Farmers and Foresters are Building Community

Megan Browning has ten years of vegetable farming and management experience on farms across New England. She holds a Bachelors Degree in Environmental Studies from Colby College, and a Masters of Science in Leadership for Sustainability from the University of Vermont. In her role at NOFA-VT she uses her facilitation and organizing skills to convene farmer-to-farmer learning groups with a focus on beginning farmers, soil stewardship, and shared land access. Megan also serves on the board of the Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN).

Bebe Bullock | Arlington Common | bbullock@berkshireschool.org

P10(H). Community Gathering Spaces

Bebe Bullock is a board member and Co-Founder of the nonprofit organization Arlington Common, an initiative born from community input to create a central gathering space in Arlington VT. By acquiring and repurposing a decommissioned historic church property in the heart of Arlington’s historic village, the organization created a multi-use hub comprising three main buildings. Today, it hosts a fitness center, pickleball courts, a performance hall, and art galleries and workshop space in the Watkins House.

Joe Camaratta | *Chair* Waterbury Housing Task Force | housing@waterburyvt.com

P1. Community Housing: Borrowing Brilliance

Joe Camaratta chairs the Waterbury Housing Task Force, where he works with town officials, housing professionals, and property owners to find practical ways to create more housing in the community. The Task Force’s recent work has included establishing a Housing Trust Fund, helping homeowners understand how to add ADUs and other small-scale housing, and bringing better housing data into local planning. Joe is also active in historic preservation, which shapes his interest in finding ways to add housing while respecting the character and history of Vermont communities. He especially enjoys learning what is working in other towns and figuring out what might be adapted to work in Waterbury.

Susan Clark | *Founder, Consultant* Slow Democracy | sclarkmountains@gmail.com

W14. Finding “Both/And” Solutions to Your Community’s Hard Questions

Susan Clark is coauthor of *Slow Democracy: Rediscovering Community, Bringing Decision Making Back Home*; and *All Those In Favor*, a book about Vermont town meetings. Susan consults with communities across the northeast on how to build inclusive, deliberative, and empowered public engagement. She serves as Middlesex town moderator. Susan's work can be found at <http://slowdemocracy.org/>.

Sue Coakley | Chair Putney Planning Commission | PC_Chair@putneyvt.gov, coakleyse@gmail.com

P1. Community Housing: Borrowing Brilliance

As Chair of the Putney Planning Commission since March 2023, Sue Coakley directed the development of Putney's 2023 Town Plan and follow-up projects including a 2026 Comprehensive Village Plan now underway, 2025 Housing Needs Assessment and Action Plan, 2025 Putney Zoning Bylaws Modernization (underway), and 2024 feasibility study and follow-up grant funding to design and construct a signaled crosswalk in Putney Village (now in development). She is assisting the renovation of Putney's Historic Town Hall, and co-leading implementation of 2025 Housing Study recommendations to increase affordable housing for Putney's low-, moderate and middle-income households. A champion of community engagement, she facilitates active public participation in Planning Commission projects, and contributes to related community initiatives including Discover Putney, and the Putney Housing Solutions Task Force. She founded and served as Executive Director of Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships (NEEP) from 1995 – 2020 and served Vermont Energy Investment Corp. Board of Directors for 27 years. Formerly an Electric Power Division Economist at the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities, she holds a 1978 Windham College bachelor's degree in environmental science and a 1984 Antioch New England Graduate School master's degree in resource management and administration.

Paul Costello | *former Executive Director* Vermont Council on Rural Development

Vermont Lifetime Leadership Awardee

Paul Costello served as Executive Director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development from 2000 to 2021, leading statewide efforts to strengthen rural communities through facilitation, policy development, and community engagement. Under his leadership, VCRD supported towns across Vermont through its Community Visit program, convened annual Rural Summits, and launched major initiatives to advance the digital economy, working landscape, climate economy, and community leadership. Paul also founded and guided numerous statewide councils including those focused on agriculture viability, forest products, culture and innovation, planning, rural energy, and the future of Vermont. A native Vermonter, Paul attended UVM and earned a PhD in intellectual history from McGill. He has served on boards spanning corrections education, cooperatives, philanthropies, libraries, and multiple gubernatorial commissions. Today, Paul continues his commitment to community as a member of the Foundation for a Resilient Montpelier, a leader in the local development corporation, a member of the Montpelier City Council, and an active participant on multiple boards. And when he's not working in service of community, you'll likely find him on a mountaintop, skinning his way up a backcountry slope, or paddling a quiet stretch of river.

Amy Cunningham | Deputy Director Vermont Arts Council | ACunningham@vermontartscouncil.org

P12. Steady Leadership in a Changing World

Amy has served as the deputy director of the Vermont Arts Council since 2018, where she manages operations and leads the grants team. Since 2001, Amy has had the privilege to work in leadership roles in several statewide organizations, including the Vermont Historical Society, Everybody Wins! Vermont, and the Vermont Humanities Council. She has served on many Vermont nonprofit boards, including chairing the Montpelier Community Fund, the Kellogg Hubbard Library, and Mentor Vermont boards.

Caitlin Cusack | Vermont Land Trust | caitlin@vlt.org

P3(H). Safe Streets, Accessible Recreation, and Inclusive Mobility

Caitlin spent most of her youth building forts and exploring the woods behind her home in eastern Massachusetts. She joined Vermont Land Trust in 2015 after seven years as a consulting forester and educator with the VT Urban and Community Forestry Program. In her current role as a VLT forester she manages land owned by VLT, provides technical assistance to conserved landowners, and contributes to education and outreach on Vermont's forests and their care. She also serves on the steering committee of Women and Our Woods Vermont. Caitlin lives in Bristol with her husband and daughter where they have a bird-friendly sugaring business, Little Hogback Farm.

Jackie Dagger | Program Manager Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative

(VOREC) | jackie.dagger@vermont.gov

P11. Outdoor Recreation Economies

Jackie serves as the Program Manager for the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC), a multi-sector network of public/private partners working to strengthen the connections between Vermont's outdoor recreation resources and the benefits that come from participation in outdoor recreation. In this role, she develops critical relationships between state agency staff and stakeholders working within Vermont's outdoor recreation landscape. Her passion is fueled by a love for the outdoors, and she enjoys exploring her favorite places on skis, by foot or paddle and climbing up rocks. In addition to holding a Master's of Environment and Community Planning from Antioch University Seattle, Jackie holds a BA in Anthropology from George Washington University and a Certificate in Planning for Effective Public Participation from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

Martha DeGraaf | Manager City of Vergennes | manager@vergennes.org

P11. Outdoor Recreation Economies

Martha DeGraaf serves as the Recreation Director for the City of Vergennes, where she leads year round recreation programming and oversees the city's parks, pool, and outdoor recreation facilities. She builds partnerships with neighboring communities, schools, nonprofit organizations, local businesses, and volunteers to expand accessible recreation and youth opportunities throughout the region. Martha is currently helping guide several major initiatives, including the Veterans' Memorial Park Master Plan, a new community pavilion, and the Commodore Club's out-of-school programming for youth in grades 6–12. Drawing on her 20 years as a childcare provider, she brings a deep commitment to young people, community connection, and creating welcoming spaces where everyone can participate.

Harmony Belle Devoe | Youth Vermont State Youth Council | harmony.devoe@vtstateyouthcouncil.org

Spark Stories: Communities in Action

Harmony Belle Devoe (17) is the Inaugural Vermont Youth Poet Laureate, a Northeast Regional Youth Poet Laureate runner-up, and is Chair of the Vermont State Youth Council. Her multiracial heritage of Filipino, Indigenous Nipmuc, and European, inspires her to address the injustices in our world, especially those brought upon marginalized communities and the Earth. She places a high value on the transformative power of words to educate, inspire, and create social impact. She finds it her responsibility to write and work in the pursuit of a more just and equitable world. Harmony aspires to publish her first book in the near future.

Marcella Eversole | Chair Putney Housing Solutions Task Force | Marcellaeversole@gmail.com

P1. Community Housing: Borrowing Brilliance

Marcella Eversole has spent 3-years serving as the Co-Chair of the Putney Housing Solutions Task Force, launched through the VCRD Our Future Putney Community Visit. For 20 years, she has been recognized for her ability to empower entrepreneurs, business leaders, political advocacy groups, and individuals to align their work with heart and purpose. In San Francisco, Marcella co-founded a women-led, collectively held, space that incubated new culture through courses, classes, movements, and organizations. This work helped seed initiatives such as the Arete Center for Excellence -- now, the Circling Institute -- and CoWorking, redefining the way we work across the globe. She's worked with The Center for a New Mainstream, National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), UN World Environment Day, The Natural History Museum, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) & The Intelligent Optimist. <https://www.marcellaeversole.com/about.html>.

Kate Forrer | Executive Director Vermont Woodlands Association | director@vermontwoodlands.org

P8(H). How Farmers and Foresters are Building Community

Kate Forrer is the Executive Director of Vermont Woodlands Association and a Vermont-licensed forester. For more than 20 years, she has brought landowners, forestry professionals, and community partners together around the shared challenges and opportunities of sustainably managing Vermont's land. Her first forestry job in Vermont was working with a horse logger, an experience that taught her the value of listening to the people doing the work and finding practical ways forward.

Felicia Fowler | Vermont Adaptive Sports | felicia@vermontadaptive.org

P3(H). Safe Streets, Accessible Recreation, and Inclusive Mobility

Felicia assumed the role of Program Director in late 2024 after being program manager since the summer of 2022. Prior to that, she was the Program Coordinator for Sugarbush and Central Vermont programs for four years. She holds a Master's in Therapeutic Recreation Administration from UNH as well as a Bachelor's in Recreation Management & Policy. Prior to completing her master's degree, she interned with the Adaptive Sports Center in Crested Butte, Colorado. Her areas of expertise include adaptive sports & recreation, youth programming, camp programming, event planning, mountain biking and snowboarding.

Gary Fox | Economic Development Director Town of Rockingham | development@rockbf.org

P11. Outdoor Recreation Economies

Sarah Furman | Executive Director Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region |

sarah.furman@rutlandeconomy.com

P6. Small Town Economies: Models for Businesses and Beyond Sarah is the Executive Director of the Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region (CEDRR). Prior to this role, she spent 11 years with Heritage Family Credit Union, where she held senior leadership positions in lending and helped support the growth, success, and resilience of local businesses throughout the region. A lifelong Vermonter, Sarah was born and raised in Castleton and continues to call it home, where she lives with her husband and daughter. Sarah holds a master's degree in Accounting from Siena College.

Kristen Getler | Roxbury Village School Committee Town of Roxbury | reimaginervs@gmail.com

P12. Steady Leadership in a Changing World

Nicole Gratton | Field Services- Community Support Specialist Preservation Trust of Vermont | nicole@ptvermont.org

W10. Capital Projects 101: Vision to Planning to Implementation and N1. Community Project Help Desk with Resource Providers

Nicole Gratton leads the Village Trust Initiative program at the Preservation Trust of Vermont; working to build capacity in Vermont's small villages through the creation of local non-profits who then lead projects of impact in historic buildings. Her background in education, municipal and regional planning, and life in the NEK shape her approach to community and economic development -- grounded in local leadership, leveraged by outside technical assistance and funding, and built on a shared value that place matters. Nicole holds an undergraduate degree from UVM, a Master of Education degree from Lyndon State College, and a Master in Urban Planning degree from McGill University. When not supporting the future of Vermont communities, she is out in the wilds, exploring with her two girls.

Lena Greenberg | Co-Director Community Resilience Organizations | lena@gocros.org

P9. Building Community Climate Resilience

Lena Greenberg (they/them) is a climate futurist, strategic communicator, and systems thinker based in Burlington, VT and in relationship with the broader Winooski watershed. In the past, Lena has taught about urban environmental systems; campaigned against the fossil fuel industry; and grown and distributed vegetables. Lena has co-directed CROs since 2024.

Kris Gruen | *Director* The Creative Campus at Goddard | kgruen@thecreativecampus.org

W9. Creativity as a Leadership Practice

Kris Gruen is a Central Vermont based artist, educator, and thought leader. He developed award winning language arts programs for secondary school age learners and taught throughout Washington County for nearly two decades. As a touring musician and recording artist, he's released six LPs with international distribution on the Mother West label in Los Angeles. He was the Director of WGDR, Central Vermont Community Radio from 2010-2021, and is currently leading the repurposing project at the old Goddard College Campus in Plainfield as the Executive Director of The Creative Campus at Goddard.

Jenn Hayslett | *Owner* Jenn Hayslett Coaching & Consulting | jennhayslettcoaching@gmail.com

W6. Funding Your Project: Institutional and Individual Giving

W12(L). Fundraising Conversations: Building Relationships That Lead to Giving

Jenn Hayslett is an executive coach and consultant with over 30 years of experience helping people and organizations lead with clarity, integrity, and heart. Her work focuses on leadership development, strategic planning, fundraising, and team building. She's trained hundreds of professionals through hands-on workshops, courses, and coaching programs that focus on real-world impact—especially in values-driven and mission-based settings. Jenn is the creator and lead trainer for the Fundraising Certificate Program through Common Good Vermont and Philanthropy Massachusetts.

Sarah Henshaw | *Nonprofit Helpdesk* | sarah@leavesofchangevt.com

P4. Boosting Local Democracy Without Picking Sides

Sarah Henshaw is a nonprofit professional with over 20 years of partnering with communities, nonprofits, and individuals. Sarah's work focuses on rethinking how relationships, skills and lived experience come together to build prosperous and inclusive communities. She is a connector and collaborator in collective learning and change processes, who has worked with nonprofits around the world in different roles – from program manager and director to grant writer and board member. Sarah is the Founder of Leaves of Change VT, a woman-owned nonprofit advisory and consulting collaborative working in partnership with US and international nonprofits. Through Leaves of Change VT Sarah leads initiatives to bring humans together to solve big problems, including supporting the Lamoille Area COVID regional command, co-founding the long-term recovery group for Lamoille County (affectionately known as LeARN) after the 2023 floods, co-designing and start-up management of the Nonprofit HelpDesk, and collectively designing the Nonprofit Collaborative Laboratory (affectionately known as CoLab). Sarah is never bored, participating on multiple nonprofit boards, volunteering with her local Home Health & Hospice, teaching at Michigan State University's Global Nonprofit Leadership program, and staying active outdoors.

Jessica Hyman | *Education & Special Projects Manager* Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity | jhyman@cvoeo.org

P1. Community Housing: Borrowing Brilliance

Jess Hyman is the Education and Special Projects Manager for Statewide Housing Advocacy Programs at the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO), where she oversees educational programming and supports tenant organizers and housing advocates. Jess has a background in fair housing, food justice, journalism, and community development and is passionate about fostering healthy, inclusive, engaged, and informed communities. Originally from the Eastern Townships region of Quebec, she lives in the Old North End of Burlington and delights in organizing monthly neighborhood dinners and helping coordinate a community garden.

Peter Johnke | *Deputy Director* Vermont Center for Independent Living | peter@vcil.org

W7(L). Planning Accessible Public Engagements

Peter is the Deputy Director of the Vermont Center for Independent Living. He's been part of the Independent Living Movement for over 30 years. Peter has low vision and is hard of hearing and refers to himself as a 'carless' traveler, so he advocates for public transportation and to make biking and walking safer for everyone. He's involved with many national, state and local organizations advocating for accessible transportation for people with disabilities.

Alyssa Johnson | *Community Visit Program Director* Vermont Council on Rural Development | alyssa@vtrural.org

P2(L) School Building Transformations

Alyssa Johnson is the Community Visit Program Director at the Vermont Council on Rural Development. Prior to joining VCRD in 2021, she served as the Economic Development Director for Revitalizing Waterbury and served as Chair of the Waterbury Selectboard until recently. Alyssa graduated from UVM and lives in Waterbury.

Sarah Kearns | *Business Advisor* Vermont Small Business Development Center | sck01042@vermontstate.edu

N1. Community Project Help Desk with Resource Providers

Sarah is a business advisor with the Vermont Small Business Development Center (VtSBDC) and brings more than two decades of experience in both large companies and start-ups. Before moving to Vermont in 2006, she worked in the Boston area for Converse, Inc., leading business development in Latin America, followed by strategy and business development roles with several consumer-product start-ups. She holds an M.B.A. from Babson College and a B.A. from the University of Colorado. At VtSBDC, Sarah focuses on general advising and youth entrepreneurship and has owned an import company featuring sustainable jewelry from Ecuador and a business consulting firm. Outside of work, she enjoys watercolor painting, travel, and keeping her two Labrador dogs out of trouble.

Cari Kelly | *Owner* Hopeful Minds | cari@ourhopefulminds.com

W4. Mental Health Literacy for Communities

Cari Kelley, Founder of Our Hopeful Minds, is certified to teach Mental Health First Aid, QPR suicide-prevention training, and Mental Health Literacy. She delivers engaging trainings to workplaces and communities, inspired by her lived experience supporting a family member with severe anxiety, depression, and addiction challenges. Cari brings 30+ years of nonprofit experience, including work with United Way of Northwest Vermont and lives in Grand Isle, Vermont.

Pat LaClair | *Program Director* UP for Learning | pat@upforlearning.org

W8. Youth and Adults Leading Together

Pat is a program director with UP for Learning, where he works to support youth-adult teams as they come together to make their schools and communities the best that they can be for everyone. This work involves helping teams collect, analyze, and share data as part of a Youth Participatory Action Research cycle. Pat is interested in helping youth and adults feel a sense of agency and power in the systems they are a part of.

Jeanette Langston | *Owner* Social Roots Studio | jeanette@socialrootsstudio.co

W3. Wild Belonging

Jeanette Langston is the founder of Social Roots Studio, a mission-driven social enterprise in Rutland, Vermont, that helps organizations, workplaces, and communities learn how to intentionally weave the practice of social connection into their planning, projects, and everyday life. A U.S. Regional Ambassador for the global Social Connection Collective and a Social Innovation Diploma holder from the UN-mandated University for Peace, she founded and led the nonprofit Social Tinkering before launching Social Roots Studio. Jeanette is dedicated to fostering authentic, regenerative connection practices that strengthen the wellbeing of people, teams, and communities.

Abby Long | *NEK Collaborative* | abby@nekcollaborative.org

P3(H). Safe Streets, Accessible Recreation, and Inclusive Mobility

Abby Long | *Executive Director* NEK Collaborative

Abby considers herself fortunate to have lived and worked in a wide range of environments around the world. Her experiences include teaching in rural China, Southeast Asia, the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, and Belize, as well as contributing to Gulf Coast restoration efforts through AmeriCorps following Hurricane Katrina. She holds a B.A. in Public & Community Service Studies and American Studies from Providence College, and a Master's Degree in Intercultural Service, Leadership & Management from the School for International Training Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont. Abby holds a certificate from Marlboro College in Nonprofit Management and is a recent graduate of the Snelling Center for Government's Vermont Leadership Institute. For eight years, Abby served as the Executive Director of Kingdom Trails, where she championed the power of outdoor recreation to support community and economic vitality. Today, she is honored to continue advancing the Northeast Kingdom region she calls home, where she lives with her husband and their 5-year-old son.

Brian Lowe | *CEO* Assembly Theory | brian@assemblytheoryvt.com

P5. AI for Rural Leaders

Brian is the founder and co-Managing Partner of Assembly Theory. He focuses on projects related to housing policy and development, practical and ethical AI integration, municipal operations, and climate resilience.

HB Lozito | *Executive Director* Out in the Open | hb@weareoutintheopen.org

P7. Reinventing Social Connection

HB Lozito (they/them) is the founder and executive director of Out in the Open, an organization that connects rural LGBTQ+ people to build community, visibility, knowledge, and power. They are an alumni of and advisor to the Better Selves Fellowship and a board member of Vermont Public. HB also loves laughing, playing cribbage, carving wooden spoons, solar eclipse totality, and finding blue sea glass.

Neale Lunderville | *Chair* AI Task Force | neale@lunderville.com

P5. AI for Rural Leaders

Neale F. Lunderville is the President & CEO of VGS. He previously served as General Manager of the Burlington Electric Department, and, prior to that, as Co-Founder and CEO of an energy startup. In 2011, Governor Peter Shumlin appointed him to lead Vermont's recovery efforts following Tropical Storm Irene. Neale also served in two top cabinet posts for Governor Jim Douglas: Secretary of Administration and Secretary of Transportation. Neale serves as a director on several Vermont and regional boards and is an Honorary Commander for the Vermont Air National Guard. He graduated from American University in Washington, D.C. and received their 2012 Alumni Achievement award. In May 2026, Governor Phil Scott appointed Neale to Chair the newly established Vermont AI Economic Task Force.

Cass Madison | *Executive Director, and Co-Chair of AI Task Force of the Community Resilience Working Group* Center for Civic Future | cass@centerforcivicfutures.org

P5. AI for Rural Leaders

Cassandra Madison is a nationally recognized leader in public interest technology with two decades of experience helping government deliver services with integrity, empathy, and modern tools. She turns policy into practice, guiding the design and implementation of public systems that are effective and responsive to people's needs. She is Executive Director of the Center for Civic Futures, equipping government leaders to safely explore emerging technologies, and co-founder and CEO of Madison Insights, which helps mission-driven organizations build the

teams and capacity to deliver technology that improves lives. Cass has worked both inside government and alongside it, giving her a 360-degree view of how to build capacity and drive change. She serves as a Senior Advisor to the Federation of American Scientists and the Aspen Institute's Financial Security Program and is a Fellow at Renaissance Philanthropy. Previously, she was Vice President of Partnerships at the Tech Talent Project and Deputy Commissioner for the Vermont Department of Health Access, where she led the turnaround of the state's Health Insurance Exchange and Integrated Eligibility System—work featured in *Power to the Public* and recognized nationally. She holds a B.A. from Penn State University and is a former Non-Resident Fellow at New America's New Practice Lab. Cass is known for bringing clarity to complexity and connecting big ideas to real-world impact.

Bill Moore | *Deputy Town Manager and Recreation Director* Town of Brandon, |
Vermont Community Leadership Awardee

Bill Moore has been instrumental to community and economic development in Brandon, Vermont, where he serves as Deputy Town Manager and Recreation Director, and has also served as Economic Development Officer, Interim Town Manager, and Town Moderator. Working with the Recreation Department Committee and other town boards, he has expanded free and low-cost programs and events like the Brandon Carnival, supported local businesses through the Route 7 reconstruction, and championed Brandon's identity as the birthplace of the electric motor. Bill's leadership has been central to advancing the town's flood resilience infrastructure, and he played an important role in Brandon's most recent Community Visit. Beyond his local work, Bill serves as Vice President of the Board of Directors of the Vermont Community Development Association, contributing to statewide efforts to strengthen communities and local economies.

Madison Murphy Barney | *Founder & Principal* The Center for Story & Strategy, | mbarney@entangledhealth.com

W1. Storytelling: Bridge Divides and Build Trust

Madison Murphy Barney is a sister, author, doula, and story-driven strategist. She is the founder and principal of The Center for Story & Strategy, a boutique firm specializing in community engagement, story-driven strategy, authentic communications, and organizational doula work. She is also the author of the newly released book *Our Ancestors Want Us to Be Mushrooms*.

Ryan Nakhleh | *Founder* Local Maverick | ryan@localmaverickus.com

P6. Small Town Economies: Models for Businesses and Beyond

Ryan Nakhleh is the founder of Local Maverick, a commerce ecosystem dedicated to strengthening Vermont's economy by helping local businesses grow through curated retail, events, and strategic partnerships. After graduating from Northeastern University, Ryan returned to his hometown of Shelburne, Vermont, to pursue a career in business development and marketing. His experience ranges from working with a global luxury brand across Beijing, New York, Hong Kong, and Munich to developing new retail opportunities with local farms and small businesses throughout Vermont. Since launching Local Maverick in 2020, Ryan has helped dozens of Vermont makers, farmers, and entrepreneurs expand their access to customers and new markets. He is passionate about strengthening local economies through entrepreneurship, collaboration, and community engagement.

Elisabeth Nance | *Grant Programs Manager* Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development |
Elisabeth.Nance@vermont.gov

N1. Community Project Help Desk with Resource Providers

Elisabeth received her undergraduate degree in Social Studies Licensure from the University of Southern Mississippi and her Masters in Resilient and Sustainable Communities from Prescott College (having started at Green Mountain College). After various careers, including marketing manager for a casino company, data processing technician for the Burlington Free Press, and customer service representative for an online job board, Elisabeth started her economic development career as the Economic Development Coordinator for the Town of Swanton and the Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation. In 2024 she moved into her current role as Grant Programs Manager for the Vermont Department of Economic Development, supporting the State Program Manager for the Northern Border Regional Commission and assisting with the Brownfields Revitalization Fund, and the Rural Industry Development Program. Elisabeth is the Agency of Commerce and Community Development Designee on the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative Board. She lives in St. Albans City with two cats, Mary-Margaret and Henry.

Devon Neary | *Executive Director* Rutland Regional Planning Commission | devon@rutlandrpc.org

N1. Community Project Help Desk with Resource Providers

Devon Neary is Executive Director of the Rutland Regional Planning Commission and Chair of both the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies and the Marble Valley Regional Transit District. With experience in regional planning and project management, he focuses on community-based planning, relationship building, and consensus-driven solutions. A lifelong Vermonter, Devon enjoys exploring the outdoors with his wife, Marisa, their son, Ira, and their dog, Kipa.

Bess O'Brien | *American film producer and director* The Creative Campus at Goddard | bobrien@pshift.com

W11. EVERYDAY - Big and Small: A Conversation with the Filmmaker

Bess O'Brien is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and theatre producer, and Co-Founder of Kingdom County Productions and Writers for Recovery. Her recent films include *Just Getting By*, *Coming Home*, *The Listen Up Project*, *All of Me*, *The Hungry Heart*, *Ask Us Who We Are*, and *I Am From Here*, exploring issues from food and housing insecurity to incarceration, addiction, foster care, and racism in Vermont. Her work is widely recognized for its deep listening and community impact. As U.S. Representative Becca Balint notes, "Bess listens deeply to Vermonters, and makes them the center of her stories." Senator Bernie Sanders has praised her as "exemplary in the state of Vermont" for elevating critical issues facing children and families.

Maggie O'Brien | *Regional Planner - Emergency Management* Rutland Regional Planning Comm | maggie@rutlandrpc.org

P9. Building Community Climate Resilience

Maggie has cultivated a passion for ecology, environmental justice, and systems thinking even before earning her bachelor's degree in environmental studies from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. She took up roots in Vermont in October 2022, serving as the emergency management planner with the Rutland Regional Planning Commission. Her first major disaster, the July 2023 floods, served as a catalyst for a serious examination and tackling of emergency planning and preparedness gaps in the Rutland Region through the lens of community and climate resilience. She continues to leverage existing local relationships, mutual aid networks, and a "neighbors helping neighbors" philosophy to meet municipalities where they are as they address capacity and sustainability challenges.

Kate O'Neill | *Human Advocacy Director* Center for an Agricultural Economy | kate@caevt.org

P9. Building Community Climate Resilience

Kate O'Neill is the Human Advocacy Director for the Center for an Agricultural Economy, in Hardwick Vermont. In addition to providing Human Resources for CAE, she is a member of the Leadership Team and supports the work of the Community Connections Team, focused on Food Justice, Place Based Education, and Community Partnerships.

Robyn Palmer | *Community Engagement Director* Secretary of State's Office | robyn.palmer@vermont.gov

P4. Boosting Local Democracy Without Picking Sides

Robyn Palmer is the Director of Civic and Voter Engagement in the Vermont Secretary of State's Office. Prior to taking this position, she served as the Program Manager of the SerVermont AmeriCorps VISTA Program for almost 10 years. Robyn has a BA in American Studies and Art History from Temple University in Philadelphia and earned her Master's in Higher Education from the University of Maryland. She is a two-term AmeriCorps alum, a live music fan, and a birder. Robyn is so grateful to call Vermont home and currently resides in Shelburne with her husband, their growing record collection, and two silly cats.

Sarah Pelkey | *Director of Economic Development* Chamber and Economic Development Corporation of the Rutland Region (CEDRR) | Sarah@rutlandeconomy.com

N1. Community Project Help Desk with Resource Providers

Sarah Pelkey is the Director of Economic Development at Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region. Her role at CEDRR serves as a primary driver of business and economic growth initiatives across the Rutland Region with a priority focus on economic development strategy and special projects. Sarah holds roles on the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Steering Committee, the South Lake Champlain Basin Water Quality Council, the Rutland Airport Business Park, and the Rutland Airport Committee.

Jeff Pratt | *Co-Chair* New Haven Housing Taskforce | jepratt27@gmail.com

P1. Community Housing: Borrowing Brilliance

Jeff Pratt has co-chaired the New Haven Housing Task Force with fellow Rutland native, Rick Shappy, since its inception in January 2026. He has lived in New Haven for over 30 years and served on the school board and volunteered within several other community groups. Professionally, Jeff has owned several Vermont-based businesses and now enjoys a career as a digital commerce consultant for clients such as Green Mountain Coffee/Keurig, GE Healthcare and Cracker Barrel. As a panelist, Jeff can share the experiences this Task Force has had in identifying and engaging stakeholders within the community, select board and outside agencies as the Task Force establishes a common vision for the future of housing opportunities within New Haven.

Jon Ramsay | *Executive Director* Center for an Agricultural Economy | jon@caevt.org

P8(H). How Farmers and Foresters are Building Community and P12. Steady Leadership in a Changing World

Jon is a lifelong farmer from Greensboro, and this has always informed how he has approached his off farm work. For the last 27 years, Jon has worked with community members and farmers across Vermont. This work includes 20 years at Vermont Land Trust and seven years as the Executive Director at the Center for an Agricultural Economy. Jon has overseen CAE through a period of tremendous growth including COVID response efforts, the construction of a new food hub facility, onboarding of Farm Connex now CAE's largest program and working to support the community after multiple climate disaster.

Shanna Ratner | *Ambassador* Braver Angels | shanna@yellowwood.org

P4. Boosting Local Democracy Without Picking Sides

Shanna Ratner is the founder and Principal of Yellow Wood Associates, a firm specializing in rural economic and community development since 1985. She is the author of *Wealth Creation: A New Framework for Rural Economic and Community Development*, (2020), and *Progress You Can See: Measuring for Social Change* (2023). She is a skilled facilitator and a concerned citizen and was responsible for bringing Braver Angels to Vermont in 2017. She was the moderator and co-leader of the Braver Angels of Franklin County VT Alliance from 2017 to 2024. It was one of the first rural Alliance, and it helped seed other Braver Angels Alliances in Vermont, including the Chittenden County Alliance.

Randy Richardson | *Upper Valley Trails Alliance* | randy.richardson@uvtrails.org

P3(H). Safe Streets, Accessible Recreation, and Inclusive Mobility

Randy spent most of his professional life in education -- first as a teacher and coach and then as an administrator. But a decade ago, life brought changes that led him to focus his professional energy on trails and outdoor recreation with the team at the Upper Valley Trails Alliance. His responsibilities include everything from grant writing, to stonework, to tool sharpening. Randy has also served on the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council and several trail committees in Woodstock, VT and is fully committed to maximizing access to all of the health and community benefits of trails.

Dotty Ricks | Board member League of Women Voters of VT | drdaerin@gmail.com

P4. Boosting Local Democracy Without Picking Sides

Dotty is a 32-year member of the League of Women Voters of Vermont, where she has focused on voting rights and reproductive freedom. She served as the League's point person in the Vermont campaign to pass the Reproductive Liberty Act and currently serves on the League's board, as the coordinator of state voter registration events, and as its advisory member to the Vermont Commission on Women. She is an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church, a longtime member of the gleaning group, Community Harvest of Central Vermont, and as a volunteer, directed the delivery of over 100,000 meals to Vermont's homeless during the beginning of the pandemic. She earned a master's degree from Texas Woman's University with additional graduate hours at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, and Auburn University. Her work history includes teaching at the University of New Orleans, the University of Kentucky, and Auburn University. She lives in Graniteville, Vermont and has an adult daughter who is a writer living in Colorado. Dotty shares her home with two very spoiled beasts of the canine variety and is an unapologetic and avid Star Wars fan. In her free time, she practices Pilates and likes to travel to faraway places with strange sounding names.

Andy Robinson | Owner Andy Robinson Consulting LLC | andy@andyrobinsononline.com

W5. Facilitating in Demanding Moments

Andy Robinson (<https://andyrobinsononline.com/>) provides training and consulting for nonprofits, businesses, and government agencies. He's designed and facilitated thousands of workshops, webinars, retreats, and programs covering a variety of topics, including fundraising, board development, marketing, leadership development, facilitation, planning, change management, alternatives to the 501(c)(3), and train-the-trainer programs. Andy is the author of six books, including Train Your Board (and Everyone Else) to Raise Money, <https://trainyourboard.com/>. He currently serves on the Selectboard in Plainfield.

Dru Roessle | Program Manager Wellbeing Economy Alliance of Vermont | drusilla@vsjf.org

W13. From Crisis to Opportunity: Rethinking the Big Issues

Tino Rutanhira | Director VT Professionals of Color | tino@vtpoc.net

P5. AI for Rural Leaders

Tinotenda Rutanhira is a seasoned equity strategist, facilitator, and co-founder of the Vermont Professionals of Color Network, where he serves as Co-Executive Director. He brings expertise in Appreciative Inquiry and inclusive organizational development, with experience supporting equity-focused board transformation for organizations such as the Janet S. Munt Family Room, the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and the University of Vermont Academics. He collaborates with subject matter experts to implement equity-centered improvements grounded in community insight, lived experience, and a deep commitment to systemic change in Vermont. Tino was born in Harare, Zimbabwe. He completed university studies in South Africa before immigrating to the United States. Prior to joining VT PoC full-time in 2024, Tino was employed at Dealer.com and Cox Automotive. He also sits on the Board of The Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce as well as the Board of Let's Build Homes. An Entrepreneur by heart, over the last 5 years Tino has produced and hosted his own podcast called "On The Shoulders of Giants," co-founded and sold Best In VT Tours & Charters, acted in a play at the Flynn called "The Call," and performed standup comedy at the VT Comedy Club. In 2019, he co-founded the Vermont Professionals of Color Network. When not working or creating, Tino enjoys listening to music or podcasts, and watching or playing in competitive sports. He loves to play and watch football (soccer), and most Saturdays he can be seen in his beloved Liverpool FC jersey yelling at the TV! Most importantly, Tino is a single parent of the most beautiful, intelligent, amazing, (insert glowing adjective here ...) 20-year-old daughter. Parenting is by far his biggest source of pride and joy.

Rebecca Sandborn-Stone | Owner Community Workshop, LLC. | rebecca@communityworkshopllc.com

W15. Engagement By Design: Crafting Processes that Work

Rebecca Sanborn Stone is passionate about helping people create great communities and big change. She is an award-winning community planner and instigator, writer, speaker and strategist. As a Principal at Community Workshop LLC, she is known for using creative and surprising techniques to revitalize rural communities, engage people, and build vibrant and livable places across North America. Rebecca is the author of the DIY Community Cookbook: a Do-it-Yourself Guide to Making Your Community a More Livable Place, and a Co-Founder of the pop-up Bethel University. Rebecca lives in Bethel, Vermont with her husband and two daughters, one dog, fifteen chickens, and a big garden.

Jessica Savage | Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives Vermont Council on Rural Development | jessica@vtrural.org

W2. Best Practices for Meeting and Event Facilitation and W5. Facilitating in Demanding Moments

Jessica joined VCRD in 2021 and serves as the Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives. Prior to joining VCRD, she served 15 years in the public sector mainly in the natural resources and recreation management fields. She has an MPA from UVM, is an avid outdoorsperson and a mom to two young children.

Kathryn Schenkman | Vice President Valley Hub Inc – RHS Repurposing Project | kms@penstrokepress.com

P2(L) School Building Transformations

Gretchen Schimelpfenig | Huntington Block Party | gschimelpfenig@alumni.stanford.edu

P7. Reinventing Social Connection

Gretchen Schimelpfenig is a Huntingtonian living in the Lower Village adjacent to the Village Green. She is invested in cultivating community connection through play and music. She is an engineer, violinist, and an organizer.

Karen Scott | *Grants Coordinator for Strategic Partnerships* Vermont Community Foundation | kscott@vermontcf.org

N1. Community Project Help Desk with Resource Providers

Karen Scott is a Grants Coordinator on the Community Impact team at the Vermont Community Foundation. For the past four and a half years, she has worked behind the scenes to channel philanthropic resources into creative, positive change for the state—supporting everything from competitive discretionary grants to statewide partnerships. Karen’s entire career has been rooted in helping Vermonters thrive, building on a background in higher education, educational opportunity initiatives, and nonprofit management.

Jules Shackman | *Loan Officer* VT Economic Development Authority (VEDA) | jshackman@veda.org

N1. Community Project Help Desk with Resource Providers

Jules Shackman is a Loan Officer at Vermont Economic Development Authority. He assists Vermont businesses seeking financing to grow and expand as well as new owners starting up or purchasing a business. He is based in Burlington Vermont and serves the entire state.

Laura Sibilia | *Director of Regional Economic Development Strategies and Programs* Brattleboro Development Credit Corp. | lsibilia@brattleborodevelopment.com

N1. Community Project Help Desk with Resource Providers

Laura Sibilia, a Dover resident, joined the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) in 2011 after serving as Executive Director of the Mount Snow Valley Chamber of Commerce. She brings extensive experience in strategic planning, partnership development, nonprofit management, communications, fundraising, and community engagement. At BDCC, Laura supports regional initiatives focused on economic resilience, community development, and long-term economic vitality across Southern Vermont. Her work has included coordinating business recovery efforts following Tropical Storm Irene and helping lead regional economic development planning through Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS). Laura also represents her region in the Vermont House of Representatives.

Denise Smith | *Executive Director* VT Council on Rural Development | denise@vtrural.org

Opening

Denise joined the VCRD team in September 2024. She comes to VCRD with over 20 years of leadership, non-profit management, community development, and business experience. Since 2017, she has served as Director of Population Health Programs and Strategies at Northwestern Medical Center where she worked alongside change makers to improve the health of Vermonters. And before that, she was Executive Director of Friends of Northern Lake Champlain, a non-profit organization focused on improving the water quality of Lake Champlain. Denise also sits on a number of boards serving as Chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee for Lake Champlain, Chair of the St. Albans Planning Commission, and Treasurer of the Vermont Public Health Association. Denise attended the University of Vermont as an undergraduate and served in the Peace Corps in Maui West Africa shortly after graduating. In 2018, she received her Master of Science in Leadership for Sustainability from UVM’s Rubenstein School. Denise lives in St. Albans with her husband, three children, and two dogs.

Mike Solimano | *President & Ceo* Killington Resort and Pico Mountain | msolimano@killington.com

P6. Small Town Economies: Models for Businesses and Beyond

Mike Solimano is the President and CEO of Killington/Pico Ski Resort, where he oversees all operational and strategic aspects of the largest ski resort in the Eastern United States. His career began at Deloitte, where he advanced to Audit Manager before pursuing his passion for the ski industry. He later served as Vice President of Finance and Operations for Skis Dynastar North America, a subsidiary of the Rossignol Group, before joining Killington/Pico Resort in 2001 as Director of Finance. In addition to his leadership role at Killington/Pico, Mike holds multiple board positions, including Audit & Finance Chair for Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO), board member and past Chair for Ski Vermont, and board member for the Vermont Business Roundtable, Vermont Futures Project, and Killington Mountain School. Previously, he served as Chair of the Rutland Regional Medical Center Board. He is also actively involved with the National Ski Area Association, contributing to the broader ski industry. When not working at the resort, he enjoys outdoor activities like skiing, biking, hiking, and tennis.

Nic Stark | *Geographic Information Systems Planner* Rutland Regional Planning Commission | nic@rutlandrpc.org

P11. Outdoor Recreation Economies

Nic Stark is the GIS Planner at the Rutland Regional Planning Commission, where his planning, data analysis, and mapmaking support outdoor recreation planning across the region, including serving as Secretary of the Delaware & Hudson Rail Trail Council. Outside of work, he stewards the Poultney River Loop Trail and sits on the boards of Slate Valley Trails and the Poultney Downtown Revitalization Committee.

Meg Streeter | *Chair* Old School Enrichment Council (Old School Community Center) | megstreeter.realestate@gmail.com

P2(L) School Building Transformations

Meg Streeter is a Vermonter who has been a realtor and volunteer for decades in her hometown of Wilmington. She has held leadership positions in her profession as well as being involved in start-ups in housing, finance and recreation. She is currently the chairperson of the non-profit organization that owns the community center located in Wilmington’s former high school.

Thayer Tomlinson | *Board Member* Friends of Algiers | thayertomlinson@gmail.com

P6. Small Town Economies: Models for Businesses and Beyond

Thayer Tomlinson works in regenerative agriculture and sustainable energy as a consultant for a number of organizations. She lives in Guilford and in addition to serving on the Friends of Algiers Village board, she is a long-time board member of a local non-profit childcare center in Brattleboro and has served on Guilford’s Planning Commission and Energy Committee.

Rick Ufford Case | Mayor City of Newport | Rick.UffordChase@newportvermont.org

P12. Steady Leadership in a Changing World

Barbara Vacarr | Board Chair The Creative Campus at Goddard | bvacarr@gmail.com

P12. Steady Leadership in a Changing World

Barbara Vacarr, PhD, is a psychologist, educator, and organizational leader whose work explores how leaders and communities build the capacity to navigate uncertainty, cultivate creativity, and imagine new possibilities. She has served as President of Goddard College and President and CEO of Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health and previously founded and led graduate programs in adult learning and human development at Lesley University. She currently serves as Board Chair of The Creative Campus at Goddard, where she is helping to reimagine the former college campus as a living commons for community, creativity, learning, and belonging. Across her work, Barbara is particularly interested in the inner capacities of leadership that allow people and organizations to remain grounded, adaptive, and generative in times of profound change.

AnGayle “AJ” Vasiliou | Professor Middlebury College | avasiliou@middlebury.edu

P5. AI for Rural Leaders

Andy Vermilyea | Environmental Chemistry Professor VTSU Castleton & helped to establish “Friends of Castleton Parks & Recreation, Inc. | msolimano@killington.com

P6. Small Town Economies: Models for Businesses and Beyond

Andy Vermilyea is an Environmental Chemistry Professor at Vermont State University Castleton, is an avid outdoor recreation enthusiast, and has about a decade of experience working with nonprofits organizations focused on a combination of outdoor and community recreation. He was part of a team that helped to grow and professionalize Slate Valley Trails (SVT) out of Poultney, VT. Andy joined SVT as a Director on the board during the organization’s first year and took leadership positions as the Secretary and President over the next six years as SVT grew from a fully volunteer ‘club’ to a robust fundraising organization with paid staff that aimed to provide world class foot and bike trails for both the local community and to attract visitors to help stimulate the local economy. Recently, Andy has helped to establish another 501(c)3, Friends of Castleton Parks and Recreation, that aims to fundraise to support recreation for all ages in Castleton, VT. **Friends of Castleton Parks and Recreation, Inc.** is a volunteer-led 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting recreation, community wellness, and quality of life in the rural town of Castleton, Vermont. Founded in 2024 to advocate for and strengthen local parks, programs, and recreational facilities, the organization works in partnership with the Town of Castleton Parks and Recreation Department to provide opportunities for residents of all ages. In just a few years, the Friends have built a broad base of community support through grassroots fundraising, local business partnerships, special events, and volunteer engagement. These efforts have helped fund youth scholarships, recreational programming, athletic equipment, and a major community campaign to renovate the Castleton Recreation Center gymnasium. The organization’s success demonstrates how rural communities can leverage volunteer leadership, local pride, and strategic fundraising to invest in shared public spaces that strengthen community connections, economic vitality, and overall well-being.

Heidi Wilson | Song Weaver Heidi Wilson | WilsonHeidiAnn@gmail.com

Opening Song

Heidi Wilson’s passion is to share original songs in service to community and the wild world; songs that celebrate the seasons, bring groups together, offer thanks, muster courage, and make room for healing. Heidi has been leading community singing groups for the last 19 years including work with the Summit School of Traditional Music and Culture, University of Vermont, Village Harmony, Burlington Integrated Arts Academy, Young Tradition Vermont, the Unitarian Church of Montpelier, and more. As a member of Heartwood Trio, Heidi is thrilled to be performing The Well Tree, their original storytelling musical, for audiences of all ages. HeidiAnnWilson.com.

Marian Wolz | Resilience Section Lead Climate Action Office | Marian.Wolz@vermont.gov

P9. Building Community Climate Resilience

Marian is the Resilience Section Lead in the Climate Action Office. She works closely with state and local partners to increase resilience to the impacts of climate change. Marian’s work focuses on supporting and building capacity in communities to implement adaptation actions and coordinating with other state agencies and partners on resilience planning and policy. Marian joined the Climate Action Office in 2022, after serving as the Global Warming Solutions Act Coordinator, where she supported the Vermont Climate Council in writing Vermont’s Initial Climate Action Plan. Prior to joining the Agency of Natural Resources, Marian worked at Vermont Emergency Management, supporting statewide emergency response and recovery planning.

Jasmine Yuris | Chair Johnson EATS | jasmineyuris@gmail.com

P10(H). Community Gathering Spaces

Jasmine Yuris serves as co-chair of Johnson EATS and vice chair of the Johnson Public Library. A homeschooling and homesteading mother of three, she believes that civic engagement and accessible public services are the foundation of healthy, thriving communities.