

VPR News

Rutland To Discuss 'Creative Economy'

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Nina Keck - Rutland, Vt.



VPR/Nina Keck

(Host) Rutland residents will get a chance to talk about what they'd like to see happen in the city Wednesday night at a public forum sponsored by Rutland's Creative Economy.

As VPR's Nina Keck reports, organizers are hoping for a big turnout similar to what the group had at its inception four years ago.

(Keck) Tara Kelly, chair of Rutland's Creative Economy, says over four hundred people showed up four years ago to dream big about what they wanted Rutland to become.

A long list of hopes and ideas was eventually whittled down to four key priorities: improving recreational opportunities, promoting local arts and culture, enhancing economic and environmental sustainability, and expanding the public outdoor spaces in downtown Rutland.

(Kelly) *"People said that they would like to be out and about and get a better feeling of public outdoor spaces in Rutland. And so they really*

identified the downtown as a key place that they wanted to gather and see their neighbors, to enjoy themselves during their time off."

(Keck) In response, Rutland launched Friday Night Live, a popular series of outdoor block parties that hundreds now regularly attend. Michael Coppinger, executive director of Rutland's Downtown Partnership, says it's been tremendous for local businesses.

(Coppinger) *"I know when I've talked with shop owners who've come in to downtown and want to start their business in downtown, they've specifically looked at Center street because that's where Friday Night Live is. So that alone increases the property values for those properties on Center Street."*

(Keck) Creative Economy volunteers are also working to renovate an outdoor alley in downtown Rutland that will provide even more public space.

It's a project that's received nearly \$1 million in funding. Tara Kelly says they just found out that another project they've been working on - an outdoor bike and pedestrian path - will get \$300,000 in state funding.

(Kelly) *"We've leveraged over \$1.3 million in the last two years in funds for our projects."*

(Keck) And she says that doesn't take into account the \$1 million in revenue generated by Rutland's year round farmer's market - another project the creative economy - along with other local organizations - helped launch.

Paul Costello, executive director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development, says Rutland's accomplishments are impressive.

(Costello) *"State and federal resources don't start things, they follow things. And it's really about community leadership that makes things happen."*

(Keck) Costello says communities all over Vermont are harnessing grassroots energy to promote their own economic development. In Hardwick, he says, they created a community supported local restaurant. In St. Johnsbury, they've dramatically expanded their farmer's market. In Manchester, Costello says they're working to expand broadband Internet coverage.

Back in Rutland, creative economy volunteers say what they've accomplished in the last four years is exciting. But Tara Kelly and Jim Sabatasa say it's time to seek out new ideas.

(Kelly - Sabatasa) *"In any good community planning process you ask yourself, 'What else?' It's four years. Things have changed, circumstances have changed. I think it's time we look back at the community and say, 'Be a part of this. We want you to see the positive things we're doing and share your positive ideas as well and look toward the future.'"*

(Keck) Just think, they say, of what the community can accomplish in another four years.