

Community-wide planning effort to launch

Posted: 02/23/2012 10:34:47 PM EST
Friday February 24, 2012

KEITH WHITCOMB JR.

Staff Writer

BENNINGTON -- If other towns are any indication, some changes and new initiatives could be coming to Bennington in the near future.

On March 15, there will be a Community Visit Meeting here, hosted by the Vermont Council on Rural Development, during which members of the community will develop ideas for future projects or community efforts. Exactly where and when the meeting will be held has yet to be determined, said council Executive Director Paul Costello, but everyone is invited to participate.

34 communities

The meetings will take place in the afternoon and into the evening, and the plan is to feed everyone pizza as well. The council has conducted similar planning efforts -- which include visits by state officials and others to speak with residents -- in 34 communities over the past 13 years.

Costello said steering committees in recent months have worked to set up forums where people can discuss ideas on how to improve the Bennington community. This was done in Pownal a number of years ago, and that town was able to create a Pownal Wiki, a recreational committee, and a communications committee which organized a number of candidate forums. More recently, he said, Rutland went through the process and was able to get a multi-million dollar bicycle trail project rolling.

"We don't think we know what's good for Bennington," said Costello, adding that the

ideas will come from the people who attend the forums. His group will facilitate the meetings, moderate them, and after they're done, help distill a list of goals to be worked on.

The general forum topics will include poverty, youth, education, downtown, work force, economic development and growth; community and collaboration, arts, recreation and entertainment, and Bennington's self-image.

He said 30 people from state and federal government, business people and non-profit group leaders will attend the forums to listen to the public's ideas.

"At VCRD, we know that the best decisions are made locally, and that local leadership and the participation of residents is the real key to progress," said Costello. "But we also know that local efforts sometimes need the assistance of state or federal resources to be completed. The Community Visit will allow Bennington residents to build on their assets, prioritize their ideas, and connect with experts and resources from around Vermont to get things done."

Dr. Michael Brady, a local dentist and chairman of the Southwestern Vermont Health Care Board of Trustees, is serving as the chairman for the Bennington Community Visit process, which Costello said spans three months.

Dan Monks, Bennington's Planning Director, said that "VCRD's Community Visit process will provide an excellent opportunity for Benningtonians to express opinions on the things that matter to them, to identify priorities for the community and to develop strategies to accomplish measurable results."

ORIGINAL HP INKS. GET MORE.



LEARN MORE AT HP.COM

