



# The Vermont Climate Economy Initiative

## Ideas to Advance Vermont's Climate Economy

*Ideas for action shared by over 125 participants in 3 Climate Economy Forums held in Rutland (August 26, 2015), Brattleboro (October 6), and Burlington (October 29). While the action ideas serve as key input for the Vermont Climate Economy Council (VCCEC), they are not intended as platform recommendations by the VT Council on Rural Development or VCCEC. These ideas will be reviewed by the VCCEC as they develop their platform of recommendations for release in February 2016.*

### **Economic Development, Technology, and Business Incubation**

#### **Create "Eco Development Districts" in Vermont Communities**

Vermont should create "Eco Development Districts" in Vermont downtowns and villages around the state with clear goals to support economic development and business incubation focused within the climate economy sector.

#### **Develop a Green Civilian Conservation Corps**

Vermont should create a civilian conservation corps focused on energy and the environment. This would create jobs and help to move forward renewable energy development and conservation work.

#### **Support Research and Innovation**

Vermont should invest in research and innovation within the climate economy sector.

#### **Encourage Vermont Businesses to Become Benefit Corporations**

Vermont should offer a tax break to encourage businesses that come to Vermont to incorporate as Benefit Corporations (B Corps) so they must consider shareholders, the environment, and local communities in their business model.

#### **Protect Vermont's Small Businesses and Farms**

Small farms and small businesses are essential foundations of Vermont's economy and the conservation of the working landscape that defines the state. As we encourage growth and development in the climate economy and other sectors, we need to ensure that we prioritize the protection and support of Vermont's small farms, forest products enterprises, and small local businesses.

#### **Offer "Carbon Smart" Technical Assistance for Businesses**

Technical assistance should be available to support businesses in moving towards a less carbon-intensive operating model. For example, businesses need assistance in transitioning to tele-commuting as a way to reduce emissions from long commutes around the state.

#### **Build a Cross-Sectoral Technology Council**

Technology development and dissemination is key to advancing the climate economy. With so many actors in the technology development field, there is a lot of potential for scattered efforts. Vermont should create a Technology Council with public, private, and non-profit representation to better coordinate efforts.

#### **Invest in Research, Innovation, and Incubation**

Vermont can be the center of creative and innovative climate economy development. We should be sure to invest resources and time into the support of creative startup businesses that help to solve the climate challenge. Business and tax regulations should also be reviewed to ensure that we are cutting red tape for new business development.

## **Putting a Price on Carbon**

### **Implement a Carbon Tax**

Vermont should implement a carbon tax in order to accurately account for the actual price of carbon, change consumer behavior, and encourage efficiency upgrades.

### **Invest Carbon Tax Revenue in Low Income Weatherization Programs**

Revenue from a Carbon tax should be used to support programs that offer weatherization to low income households and to help lower income households make energy upgrades.

## **Transportation**

### **Make Vermont a Leader in Human Powered Hybrid Mobility**

Vermont should create a deliberate strategy to become a national leader in human powered hybrid mobility such as electric bikes, cargo bikes, and commuter bikes that change the way Vermont families and individuals get around. The state could attract innovative bike companies and focus on the necessary infrastructure to encourage bike friendly towns and cities.

### **Improve Bicycle Infrastructure**

Vermonters would like to rely more on biking for recreation and transportation, but are concerned about safety and accessibility on our roads. All repaving projects and transportation infrastructure development should include safe and accessible bike lanes to allow for biking to work and to amenities, and also to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels for transportation.

### **Build Bike Paths in and between Vermont Communities**

Bike lanes and paths should be developed in Vermont downtowns, and that connect towns and villages to each other to encourage outdoor recreation, alternative transportation, and support local businesses in the region.

### **Encourage Rail Transit**

Vermont communities, tourists, the economy, employers, and commuters would benefit from increased access to rail transit throughout the state. Rail is both a good option for mass public transportation, but also for moving freight to and from the state. Vermont should move forward with strategies to bring rail to the state and work with communities around the state to ensure usability and accessibility.

## **Justice and Equality**

### **Ensure that all Vermonters Benefit from Economic Prosperity**

In order to promote justice and equality as we move forward with economic development and growth, we need to ensure a progressive tax structure in Vermont that ensures a redistribution of wealth and promotes a healthy economy and economic wellbeing for all. We need to ensure that everyone benefits from economic prosperity, not just the wealthy.

## **Marketing Vermont as a Climate Economy Destination**

### **Build a National Climate Economy Marketing Campaign**

Vermont should make an effort to tell the story of the great climate economy innovation and development going on in the state and promote the state as a climate economy destination for visitors, businesses, and entrepreneurs. We can declare ourselves as national center of the climate economy.

## **Renewable Energy Development and Siting**

### **Site Solar Energy Projects on Existing Infrastructure**

When expanding renewable energy projects in the state, developers should first focus on development on existing structures. Recommendations for available space included; the rooves of big box stores, residential rooves, or even Vermont roadways.

### **Get Creative with Renewable Energy Projects**

Renewable energy developers should enlist local artists and innovative technology experts to rethink the way that solar looks. This could make us view the technology differently and welcome it in Vermont towns and cities.

### **Encourage Geo-Thermal Heat Pumps**

There are many opportunities in Vermont to expand the use of geothermal heat pumps however the current draft of the Comprehensive Energy Plan (CEP) does not include a reference to this technology. Vermont should encourage development of this technology and it should be included in the CEP.

### **Implement Careful and Predictable Renewable Energy Planning**

Predictability and clear regulations are critical to ensure that renewable energy projects can move forward in the state. Vermont needs a clear and predictable path for development.

### **Simplify and Market the Residential PACE Program**

PACE (property assessed clean energy) is a financing program that is available to some communities around the state, but that is underutilized. Vermont should market and encourage the program as a strategy to connect this program with more communities and simplify the program for use by the average Vermonter.

### **Develop a Commercial PACE Program**

A commercial PACE (property assessed clean energy) program could finance energy efficiency retrofits and clean energy development for industry and business owners.

## **Education**

### **Advance Environmental Literacy in Vermont's Schools**

Youth are a critical asset in advancing Vermont's climate economy. Vermont should work hard to foster the next generation of climate economy leaders and encourage and use the creativity of young people in the state. Ensuring environmental education and literacy from a young age is critical for the future of the climate.

## **Housing**

### **Develop Sustainable, Affordable Housing Opportunities**

Vermont needs to develop housing opportunities to meet the needs of lower income Vermonters that are both affordable and energy efficient.

### **Build Housing to Attract Young Professionals**

If we want to attract young professionals, entrepreneurs, innovative business leaders, and young families to Vermont, we need to make sure that we develop housing that meets the needs of this population including efficiency, affordability, outdoor space, walking paths, bike lanes, and access to amenities.

## **Tourism**

### **Market Vermont as a National Bicycle Tourism Destination**

Bicycle tours could be a key way to attract tourists to our state to take part in less carbon-intensive activities, while supporting the local economy. A bicycle destination map or tours could highlight local food, Vermont's downtowns, and our beautiful landscape.

### **Offer a Carbon Offset Program for Visitors to Vermont**

Vermont should offer visitors the opportunity to pay into a fund that would offset their carbon emissions from travelers to the state. This could be available at every Vermont Welcome Center.

### **Develop a "Museum of the Future"**

Vermont should develop and market a "Museum of the Future" or a "Museum of a Changing Climate" in order to investigate and understand the past and explore innovative and creative ideas for the path forward. A museum would attract people here, share what is happening in Vermont's green economy, and could be advertised internationally. This could help to create a common vision for the types of businesses and innovation we want in Vermont moving forward.

## **Efficiency**

### **Put a Value on Energy Efficiency Upgrades**

Vermont should identify a common metric to put a value on energy efficiency upgrades. This would incentivize more home owners to take action around weatherization and home retrofits.

### **Invest in Residential Efficiency**

Efficiency efforts create jobs, return money to the Vermont economy, and reduce emissions. Vermont should make funding available to subsidize home retrofits and weatherization projects for Vermont homeowners.

### **Develop a One-Stop-Shop for Efficiency and Energy Development**

There are many businesses and organizations in Vermont working on residential energy development and efficiency upgrades. Vermont needs a one-stop-shop for residential efficiency and energy so that homeowners have a place to go to get information on their options around providers and financing and how to move forward.

## **Conservation and Protecting Vermont's Landscape**

### **Implement Tougher Siting Standards for Renewable Energy**

Vermont should enact tougher regulations for renewable energy projects regarding noise and environmental impacts in order to decrease the projects' impacts on public health, the Vermont landscape and natural resources.

### **Protect Vermont Forests**

Vermont should make it a priority to protect our forests, which are one of our greatest assets. Forests have the ability to sequester carbon, and are a critical part of Vermont's working landscape.

## **Policy and Regulations**

### **Lift the Net Metering Cap**

Currently, utility companies are only able to source 15% of their capacity from net metering. The cap should be lifted for residential systems from 15KW and under to allow for further development of distributed generation in the state.

### **Enforce the Anti-Idling Law**

Vermont should identify effective strategies to effectively implement and enforce the anti-idling law to reduce the impact of idling cars on our carbon emissions.

### **Adjust Property Tax to Account for Locational Efficiency**

The Property Tax in Vermont should be adjusted to reflect the distance between homes. This measure would act as a disincentive to sprawl and encourage growth in compact downtowns and villages.

### **Divest from Fossil Fuels**

Vermont should be leading the way in encouraging energy and efficiency development, but we can also lead the way and send a clear signal by redirecting all stocks, bonds, or investments that support the fossil fuel industry towards supporting businesses and industries more in line with Vermont's values and efforts to reduce carbon emission and support clean energy development.

## **Resilience**

### **Develop Local Microgrids**

Vermont should focus on the development of local microgrids to ensure resilience in the face of a national grid outage.

### **Plan for "Climate Refugees"**

As the global climate changes, some places in the world are becoming difficult to live, and populations are beginning to move towards locations that will be more livable in the future. Vermont, with a mild climate and access to water, is a place that will become attractive to populations displaced by climate change. We need to get ahead of this trend and ensure that we are planning to handle this population influx.

### **Conduct a Resiliency Audit**

Vermont should conduct a resiliency audit to determine how prepared we are in the face of extreme weather events and natural disasters. This is a way that Vermont could save money and also create a job opportunity for consultants.

### **Develop a Disaster Notification System**

As Vermont begins to see more extreme weather events like Hurricane Irene, we will need a disaster notification system and the ability to connect those affected with critical survival resources and services.

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The Vermont Climate Change Economy Council is managed and facilitated by:

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