

## **COMMENTARY FROM MONTPELIER: Sept, 2008**

In one of the earlier group meeting reports, an observation was made that Vermonters are often clearer about what we are against than about what we are in favor of. There is some truth to this and it is something the Future of Vermont Report should address.

Observing the progress of legislation at the Statehouse, one can see that being successful requires the support of a broad coalition, whereas stopping legislation only requires few people to object and raise questions. Certainly this is the perception of many in the business community about permitting. It takes many people to imagine and implement a project, but only a few to stop it. This is the perception of many people about how educators often respond to efforts to improve public education systems. There are many other examples.

This is also true in the general public dialogue, and it tends to stop any effort to work toward good solutions. The strategic advantage in a public process naturally seems to go to the opponents and naysayers, and this tends to drive out productive dialogue and creativity.

Your report should strongly argue that this is not good enough, because it results in a stalemate instead of a solution - status-quo instead of success. A solution would be something that is practical, addresses the legitimate interests of all the parties, etc., and that, most importantly, is agreed to by all parties as being an improvement over the status-quo. A stalemate should never be considered by anyone as a success, because it means that an opportunity for improving things has been lost. Instead, your report should challenge people to work for solutions instead of settling for stalemates, and should point to some examples where this has worked to everyone's benefit.

This can be couched in terms that draw on the Vermont values of pragmatism, open processes, and age-old belief in local solutions to local problems, pointing to examples where success has replaced confrontation and stalemate.

Engaging in a dialogue that leads to success is difficult and takes skills that are often lacking such as leadership, trust building, and negotiation. Interesting that these are the skills that the VCRD has brought to so many communities and issues!