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# Imagining Vermont:

*Values and Vision for the Future*



Final Report of the  
Council on the Future of Vermont

*Spring, 2009*



*Produced by*

**Vermont Council on Rural Development**

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The artwork in this book is from five artists who are commissioned by the Vermont Arts Council's *Art of Action* project. Their work is in draft form or is work they submitted for their proposals. Some of the work reproduced here has been cropped or the color changed for printing needs. Their final commissioned work will be completed in September 2009 and will be on display around the state with the *Art of Action* project. The artists are:

Annemie Curlin, pages 4 (“Sprawl”) and 18 (“Charlotte Town Center”)

Susan Abbott, pages 17 (“Farm Autumn Study”), 21 (“Roads in Spring Study”), and 33 (“Field Study, Winter”)

Curtis Hale, pages 21 (“Richmond Study”) and 94 (“Hale Street Truss #1, graphite”)

Kathleen Kolb, page 21 (“Cutting. 9x12 oil”)

John Miller, page 56 (“Pete’s Greens, Craftsbury” collage detail, original in color)

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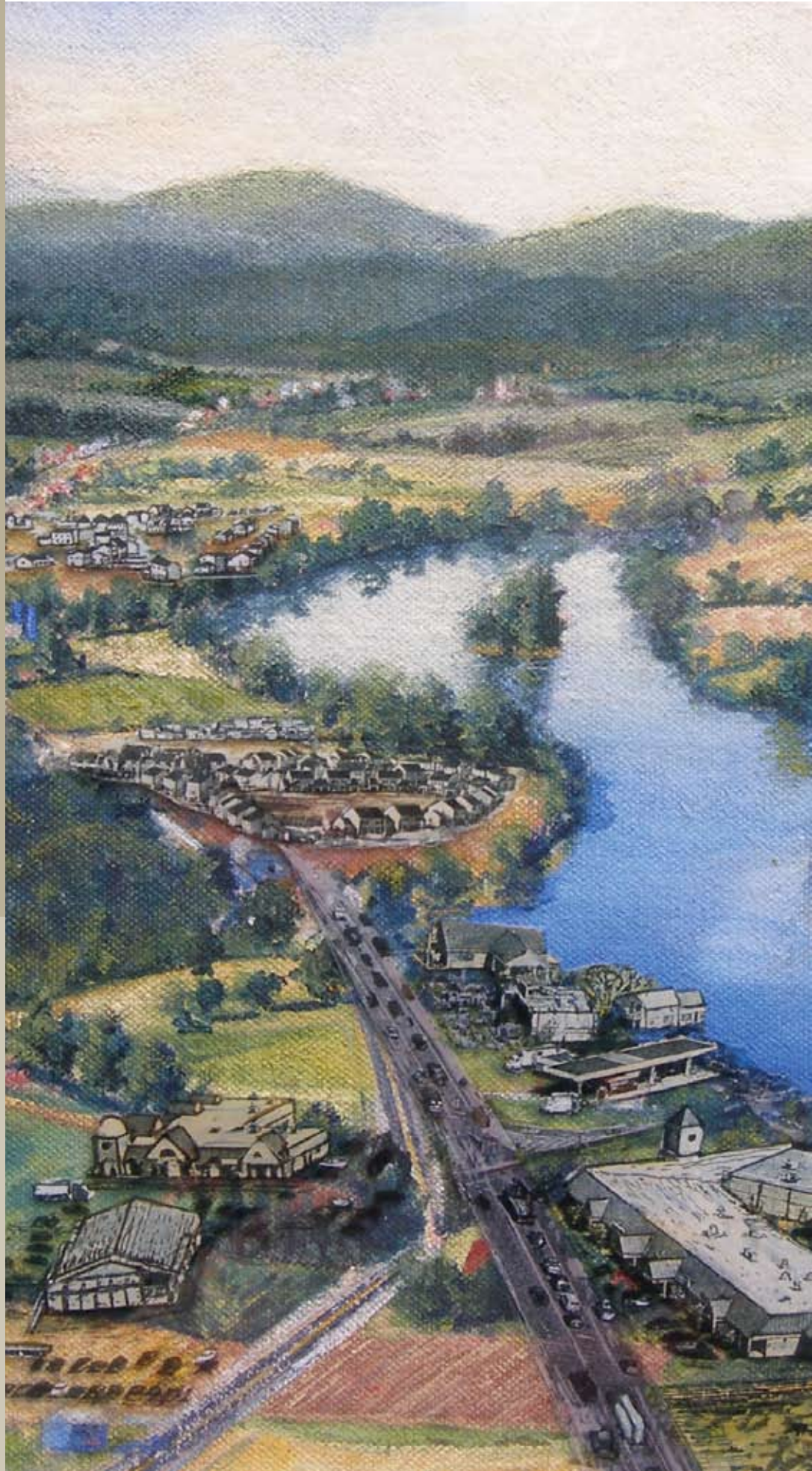
*\* Part Three is available online and in print in the complete edition of Imagining Vermont.*

# Part One

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## Introduction



**A**bout once a generation Vermonters have paused from their daily concerns and seasonal politics to take part in statewide conversations that consider where we are, where we are going, and the realities and trends that will influence our common future. Such studies have resulted in major findings about who we are as a people and the evolving assumptions and goals we share. They also have led us, as a state, to articulate a set of values that are inherent in our special Vermont sense of place, dedication to community, and identity.

The Council on the Future of Vermont was founded in September 2007 by the Vermont Council on Rural Development in the belief that in this time of rapid change we all need to take time together to examine the big picture trends, evaluate the opportunities and challenges ahead, and consider common Vermont priorities.

Economic, social, and environmental challenges face Vermont, ranging from global trade patterns and climate change to an erosion of cultural traditions, which have the potential to undermine traditional land use patterns, the economy, and the strength and unity of communities. These challenges are compounded by demographic pressures, which include an aging population; social, economic, and cultural divisions; uncertainty about energy supply and volatility in its costs; and the need for affordable housing, government services, public safety, and transportation.

Vermonters recognize the fragility of the state. They see serious dangers before us, and a variety of ways that Vermont could fail, go off in the wrong direction, or be derailed by energy, economic, or ecological problems that originate far beyond the borders of the state. Even as the Council on the Future of Vermont completes this report Vermonters are confronting the impact of a global economic crisis, the full dimensions of which may not yet be fully revealed.

Vermonters do not flinch in the face of these challenges. We look ahead. We consider together. We act in a tradition of civil dialogue and dedicated civic commitment. In every conversation of the statewide Council on the Future of Vermont process, Vermonters recognized that there are many ways that we can go wrong in preparing for the future, but expressed a sense of responsibility to act, not just be acted upon, to do what is within our power to prepare for and respond to regional, national, and global changes, and to do so in the spirit of Vermont's tradition of public participation and mutual civic leadership. With this foundation, Vermonters are united beyond their differences.

In Vermont, there is a deep tradition of public involvement in civic life and government. Therefore, the responsibility of determining the future of the state falls to the many, not the few.

The Council on the Future of Vermont invited all Vermonters to participate in describing what we stand for as Vermonters in our time and what our long-term priorities are for the future of the state we love. This document is the Council's report from Vermonters to Vermonters on the issues they believe are most important for our time and for the future.

### History of Vermont's Statewide Discussions

Charged to build a statement reflecting Vermonters' points of vision, values, and priorities in our time, the Council on the Future of Vermont follows in a strong tradition of public involvement in conversations about the direction of the state held throughout our history. From the Commission on Country Life in 1929 to the Commission on Vermont's Future in 1988, these statewide policy conversations have engaged and united Vermonters, inspired leaders, and initiated practical gubernatorial and legislative initiatives.

Following the great flood that caused much destruction in Vermont and the loss of many lives, Governor Weeks established the **Vermont Commission on Country Life** in 1927. With nearly 300 citizens on its team and led by a group of researchers at UVM, the Commission set out to provide a comprehensive look at life after the devastation and to define what must be done to secure the future of the state. The Commission posed significant questions about Vermont and in 1929 published the book *Rural Vermont: A Program for the Future*, covering topics ranging from soils, agriculture and natural resources, to homemaking, education, religion, culture, population, government, and the preservation of Vermont history and ideals. Each chapter in the book – almost 400 pages long – has a list of recommendations for maintaining and promoting the welfare of the state. The breadth of the work made it a Vermont policy handbook for the 1930s.

In 1968, a time of rapid change for Vermont and the nation, Governor Phil Hoff chaired the **Vermont Planning Council**, which issued a series of planning goals for the state in its report, *Vision and Choice: Vermont's Future*. This document outlined goals for education and culture, economic development, environment, health and social services, housing and other public services. In 1969 newly elected Governor Deane Davis convened a special meeting on natural resources that was attended by over 500 people and paved the way for the appointment of the **Governor's Commission on Environmental Control** whose report on growth, land use, and development planning spurred the passing of Act 250, the Land Use and Development Act. This landmark legislation, designed to safeguard the environment, community life, and aesthetic character of the state, is still law today, forty years later.

Twenty years after Act 250's implementation, Vermont again faced rapid growth and development pressures. In September 1987 Governor Madeleine M. Kunin instituted the **Governor's Commission on Vermont's Future**. Their task was to "assess the concerns of Vermont citizens on the issue of growth, to establish guidelines for growth, and to suggest mechanisms to help plan Vermont's future." The Commission heard from over two thousand Vermonters and wrote its recommendations in its 1988 *Report of the Governor's Commission on Vermont's Future: Guidelines for Growth*. The Commission wrote that Vermont's values could be understood in four basic components: community life, agricultural heritage, environmental quality, and the search for opportunity. From the Commission's recommendations came Act 200, structuring and giving more authority to a system of municipal, regional, and

state planning with a major impetus to both land conservation and the development of affordable housing through the Vermont Housing Conservation Board and its partners.

### **Formation of the Council on the Future of Vermont**

The Council on the Future of Vermont is a two-year initiative of the Vermont Council on Rural Development. The Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) helps Vermonters and Vermont communities develop their capacity to create a prosperous and sustainable future through coordination, collaboration, and the effective use of public and private resources.

From community centered initiatives that build upon local, citizen based efforts, to policy councils that build collaboration among state, federal, non-profit, and private sector leaders, VCRD has designed and implemented highly effective programming to identify and address key issues that affect rural life. VCRD is a neutral, non-partisan organization with a mission to bring Vermonters together across political lines and organizational boundaries to advance rural community development throughout the state.

Over the last several years, at both the community and the policy levels, VCRD heard people ask "What is our vision as a state?" and "What would we sacrifice to achieve the future we desire?" After almost two years of deliberations, VCRD recognized the need for a state level dialogue, a process of coming together to discuss our values, priorities, and goals as Vermonters.

In September 2007, VCRD founded the Council on the Future of Vermont (CFV) and charged it to serve as a leadership council to take public opinion throughout Vermont, research trends, and, based on its findings, articulate a comprehensive picture of the values, concerns, and aspirations of Vermonters as they consider the future of our state. This book is the culmination of the Council on the Future of Vermont's work.

The VCRD board and staff selected members of the Council on the Future of Vermont to represent a wide range of professional, personal, and geographic diversity, and new and old Vermonters. VCRD staff managed and facilitated the process and coordinated the preparation of this report. All content decisions, however, are based on ideas contributed by thousands of Vermonters and have been made by the members of the Council on the Future of Vermont.



## Method and Process

The Council on the Future of Vermont fulfilled its task only because of partners who believed in the project, dedicated members who worked hard to accomplish the results, and thousands of Vermonters who spoke, wrote, called in, or otherwise contributed to its deliberations. These people all deserve special recognition and are found in the Acknowledgements section of this report.

The Council on the Future of Vermont invited Vermonters to participate in many ways: through public forums, in small group settings, at schools, churches and businesses, as well as online and over the telephone. The Council invited presenters to share their thoughts and ideas for the future of the state at its monthly meetings. **In total, over 3,900 Vermonters contributed their ideas to this process.**

The Council held fourteen public forums, one in each county of the state. In addition, the Council convened more than ninety focus group meetings with a wide range of Vermonters, such as high school and college students, farmers, teachers, nurses, factory workers, low-income Vermonters, veterans, seniors, foresters, granite workers, and advocacy groups. The Council visited with inmates at a prison facility and refugees who spoke no English. They met with long-time Vermont families and new citizens. They shared lunches and sat over coffee with, and listened to opinions of more than fifteen hundred Vermonters. All of these people spoke about what Vermont meant to them, what common values Vermonters shared, what challenges and opportunities they saw as most important, and what their priorities were for Vermont's future.

The Council then invited over three hundred statewide organizations to contribute their concerns and ideas to the process. Just over forty of these groups were interviewed in person, such as the Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Vermont Center for Independent Living, Vermont School Boards Association, Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Rural

Vermont, Yankee Farm Credit, Vermont Hospitality Council, Vermont Humanities Council, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Associated Industries of Vermont, and Vermont Interfaith Council. Over seven hundred people from these stakeholder organizations were interviewed. The Council also set up an online site, **[www.futureofvermont.org](http://www.futureofvermont.org)**, which hosted an electronic public forum where nearly two hundred more Vermonters wrote in their ideas.

The Council also produced statistically significant polling and a comprehensive trend line research project that identified major changes in Vermont in the past few decades. Working with the Center for Rural Studies at the University of Vermont, the Council designed and conducted two statewide polling efforts. The first, a telephone poll, had 699 respondents. The second, conducted online, had 829 respondents. The results of the polling were published in August 2008 under the title, *Looking Ahead: Vermonters' Values and Concerns*.

To complement public input and testimony, the Council commissioned the Center for Social Science Research at St. Michael's College to conduct research into fourteen of the most important issue areas identified by Vermonters in the public forums. The research team worked with data analysts at other universities, state agencies, non-profits, and business organizations to compile one of the most comprehensive analyses of general Vermont trends in the state's history. Each chapter of *Vermont in Transition: A Summary of Social, Economic and Environmental Trends* highlights characteristics and major changes in economy, society, infrastructure and landscape over the past few decades.

In addition, the Council was honored to work with various creative partners, such as the Vermont Arts Council and the Young Writers Project. These organizations created contests and commissions of their own either using the collected materials of the Council or contributing directly to the Council's deliberative process. A class at Green Mountain College dedicated their service learning work to the Council on the Future of Vermont's process as well.

The Council members took on the task of evaluating all the voices, notes, research and data compiled for the project. Their results, summarized in this book, represent a synthesis that describes Vermont values, points to some common elements of a Vermont vision, and concludes by affirming some critically important directions for the future of the state.

### **Imagining Vermont: Values and Vision For the Future**

*Imagining Vermont: Values and Vision for the Future* represents the final findings of the Council on the Future of Vermont. The report incorporates a reflection of the views, concerns, and visions articulated by Vermonters; the historical research and polling data; and the Council on the Future of Vermont's interpretation of these materials and its attempt to describe the values, vision, and priorities of Vermonters.

*Imagining Vermont* consists of three parts.

**Part One** includes an Introduction, a Values Statement that emerged from the testimony of thousands of Vermonters, and summary of the general findings from all the inputs to the Council on the Future of Vermont process (Sections I, II and III). **Part Two** is the interpretation of these findings by the Council on the Future of Vermont members in the form of Conclusions and a summative Vision for the state in the next decades. Part Two also includes the Council's Closing Reflections on the entire process (Sections IV, V, and VI).

**Part Three** of *Imagining Vermont* includes ten chapters that describe public testimony, trend line research, and statistical polling data in categories ranging from culture to the economy. These chapters are critical for any serious reader of the results of the Council on the Future of Vermont because they include the voices of Vermonters and reflect tensions, conflicts and points of unity from the gathered inputs.

In order to disseminate these findings as widely as possible, the Vermont Council on Rural Development's website ([www.vtrural.org](http://www.vtrural.org)), as well as the Council on the Future of Vermont website ([www.futureofvermont.org](http://www.futureofvermont.org)), will host *Imagining Vermont*, as well as public contributions, background materials, research, and polling in easily downloadable form, so that anyone can access the materials on their own.

The Council on the Future of Vermont (CFV) acted from a powerful sense of responsibility to accurately report what we heard from Vermonters, how their opinions and ideas fit with trend line data, and what the Council concluded from all this information in term of the values, goals, and visions of Vermonters in our time. We hope that this report will contribute to mutual understanding in Vermont and to our ability to work together as Vermonters to successfully address the challenges ahead.

## **Vermonters Value:**

### ***Community*** –

a shared feeling of belonging, acceptance and trust; a sense that the success of each neighborhood, town, county, and the state depends on the contributions and engagement of every individual.

### ***Environment*** –

a reverence for the land and committed stewardship of the working landscape, including farms and forests; the natural landscape, including mountains, lakes, and streams; and the built landscape, including the state's historic architecture and community centers.

### ***Hard Work*** –

a tradition rooted in the state's agrarian and industrial heritage and legendary work ethic that invites and encourages entrepreneurship, resourcefulness and creativity.

### ***Independence*** –

both politically and as a way of life, reflecting a desire to live independently and championing individual freedoms and self-reliance.

### ***Privacy*** –

as a personal right and as an expression of respect toward others that encourages tolerance and open mindedness about the lifestyles and beliefs of others.

### ***Small Scale*** –

the strength that comes when government, business and communities are accessible and personal.

### ***Vermont*** –

residents feel the state has a unique identity that has been defined by centuries of traditions shared by young and old, urban and rural.



## Concerns, Challenges and Opportunities



**T**his section summarizes and reflects what the Council heard from Vermonters in forums, research, polling, online, and from focus group discussions. This summary of major concerns, challenges, and opportunities is based on the data and information gathered and the testimony heard throughout the process. **For more detailed information and a more thorough discussion of the testimony and research inputs to the Council on the Future of Vermont, see Part Three of *Imagining Vermont: Values and Vision for the Future*.**

### Vermont Culture

Distinctive because of its small scale, Vermont historically is a place where very few are anonymous, where people with different jobs interact daily, and where young and old mix. Common backgrounds, shared traditions, and working proximity often make the people of Vermont communities egalitarian, coming together in local meeting places to decide collectively their own future. Civility, a sense of scale, a sense of history, as well as a tolerance for different lifestyles have

marked Vermont culture in the past and are still elements that people in the state praise and prize today.

**Vermonters are proud of their state and its characteristics.** As Vermonters look ahead and try to understand how to adapt to future challenges and preserve what they value today, they focus on finding balance, engaging in ongoing dialogue, and developing efficiencies of scale. One clear idea that emerged from the thousands of conversations that the Council held is the need to find balance points between, on the one hand, the complex working out of community needs and engagement, and on the other hand the freedom of individuals. Vermonters are committed to defining the “Vermont way.” A positive and evolving understanding and practice of the state’s motto, “Freedom and Unity,” still represents an apt description of how we work together.

**Vermonters are conflicted about the goals of progress, yet united in wanting to see positive movement forward, while avoiding the destruction of Vermont’s cultural values and community.** This sense of balancing challenges and contradictions extends into conversations about economic development and land

use, education and youth, infrastructure and investment, as well as public and civic life. Vermonters take their civic responsibilities seriously, and the state has a dynamic community and political culture as a result.

**Vermonters have a strong sense of identification with the state**, yet often hold to one of two very distinct senses of their personal identity: citizens often classify themselves as “Vermonters” or “newcomers.” In every single forum across the state, the Council heard from residents who would begin “I’ve only lived in Vermont for twenty-seven years, but ...” Today, there are more Vermonters who were born elsewhere than were born here. At the same time, the Council often heard participants in public forums blame newcomers for many challenges confronting the state, such as the increasing cost of living, changing regulations, higher taxes, and patterns of land use and development. There is a delicate balance in Vermont between heritage and progress, especially in small towns. In some cases, differences based on wealth or time in the community divide residents and undermine the benefits that could come from all residents contributing their best talents and resources for the well-being of their communities.

Vermonters praise the accessibility of government at all levels, and value being actively involved in community, municipal, and regional affairs. **Protecting culture and community is not just a passive sentiment for Vermonters. Whether newcomer or multi-generational native, Vermonters want to act to maintain the Vermont identity.** Vermont is an activist state: Vermonters do not want to be defined by ideas of progress imposed from the outside, but to define themselves and their own future. Vermonters believe that the state is still the right size to come together and plan for its future in a collective way.

## Population

Vermont’s population is racially homogeneous, with a relatively white composition compared to the rest of the nation. Some of the concerns about the population the Council heard reflect the trends that are typically seen in white or Caucasian American populations, such as low fertility rates and a somewhat older profile. While statistics do not show other population trends as being dramatically different from the New England region or the nation as a whole, the small scale of Vermont magnifies the impact of shifts in any direction.

**Vermonters place high value on the small size of the current population.** Citizens actively commend the sense of belonging that comes with a small population and many feel it to be a defining characteristic worth preserving.

While out-migration of young people has consistently occurred in rural places like Vermont, **Vermonters emphasized that giving young people good reasons (good jobs, affordable housing, and good quality of life) to move back to the state is crucial for the future.**

Vermonters recognize the growing diversity in the state, particularly in some regions. **Because racial and ethnic diversity has not historically been an issue in the state, some Vermonters emphasize the need to build relationships and put plans in place now that will welcome and celebrate changing demographics.**

Although there is no consensus on how to take action to affect population issues, Vermonters seem united on these specific challenges and concerns.

## The Natural Environment

The Council on the Future of Vermont may have collected more comments and recommendations from Vermonters about their concerns and priorities for the environment, nature, farms, working lands, and communities than any other topics. To capture the wide range of information about the Vermont landscape, the topic is divided into three specific areas: *Natural Environment* includes the natural landscape such as mountains, lakes, streams and forests; it focuses on issues of air quality, habitat and pollution. *Working Landscape* includes agriculture, forestry, and other natural resource-based economic sectors. *Built Environment* includes downtowns, community centers, historic buildings, land use, economic growth, and regulatory issues.

The natural environment in Vermont – particularly its mountains, waters, and weather – appeals to the heart and soul of its citizens. People in this state constantly describe their love for the special place in which they live. **The connection to the land is an identifying element for Vermonters.**

Perhaps in part because of their attachment to it, **Vermonters often emphasized preservation of the environment** and opposed risking any natural resource through over use or development. For many reasons – whether the enjoyment of outdoor recreation, the peace of the wild, or the pleasure of a nice view – Vermonters like the landscape as it is today. Significant changes in the environment would damage what many say is most essential to the state and the reason they choose to live here. Many also talked about how the landscape attracts tourists and new residents, giving an economic reason to preserve the landscape. Vermont’s heritage of open, un-posted land and traditional uses, makes a central contribution to our sense of community and is of vital importance to Vermonters.



In general, three sets of values came into play as residents discussed the Vermont environment: the ecology and natural assets of the landscape; the beauty and aesthetic values associated with it; and the economic values of jobs and revenue that can be generated through different uses of it. While individually Vermonters may disagree on how to balance their values concerning the natural environment, most agreed that looking forward, a carefully constructed balance of these uses is crucially important. The Council heard that the state should step up its focus on the environment and **become a national leader in creative environmental solutions that keep Vermont special, contribute to the economy, and serve as a model for other states and countries.**

### The Working Landscape

When Vermonters talk about the “working landscape” they often refer both to the land used actively in agriculture and forestry and to way of life associated with these professions. The value of the working landscape to Vermonters is hard to quantify, but central to their personal identification with and love for Vermont. Agriculture, for example, was often portrayed as threatened by outside forces but presenting opportunities for new growth. Vermonters see maintaining agriculture as a high priority for Vermont in the future.

Overwhelmingly, **Vermonters are united in support of the state’s agriculture and working landscape.** The highest ranked value in both CFV polls was the statement: “I value the working landscape and its heritage.” Forum conversations across the state echoed this statement.

Many Vermonters expressed their concerns about **the threats to agriculture**, including the rising costs of doing business, the price of land, the lack of a younger generation of farmers to take over farms, and the subdivision and loss of arable and forested lands due

to residential sprawl. In addition, the dairy economy, which is the cornerstone of agriculture in state, is highly susceptible to national and global price fluctuations, changes in markets and increasing costs of production.

For those directly involved, there are hard feelings about the treatment of agriculture and the forest products industry in the state. Farmers and loggers feel unappreciated and unsupported. There are also divisions within agriculture that undermine the mutual success of diverse farms and value-added enterprises.

To many who provided testimony at forums, agriculture in the state exemplifies Vermont’s ecological, community, and land values. Vermonters believe agriculture can attract tourists, new residents and new revenue to Vermont, both through its impact on the landscape and sales of products to people outside the state.

Even with all the challenges, there is a great sense of hope for the future of agriculture in Vermont. Many Vermonters talked about local farmers who are creating new ways to market products, share resources, or collaborate to overcome obstacles. **Vermonters see innovative agricultural enterprises as a strong element in Vermont today and for the future**, and the numbers of farmer’s markets, community-supported agriculture ventures, and other means to generate in-state revenue have increased over time.

Often neglected in public forums, but just as vital to the working landscapes, is the forest products industry. It is clear from research findings that Vermont’s forest products industry is at a dangerously critical point, and the Council heard testimony about the number of mills and other working forest enterprises at risk of going out of business. **Agriculture and the forest industry are essential to Vermont’s character and the working landscape; they are major drivers of the tourism industry and foundations for many other external values and benefits.**

## The Built Environment: Land Use and Development

Vermonters love to compare their relatively undeveloped state with its neighbors to the south: such as New York, Massachusetts and New Jersey. For decades Vermont has had in place strict environmental regulations that are in part responsible for the look of the state, but are still a constant struggle for developers. In testimony about land use and development, Vermonters focused on their desire for the continuity of the state's historic development pattern of tidy villages and cities surrounded by farms, fields, and forests. Many also articulated their desire to balance land-use regulation with essential economic development, job growth, and affordable housing for Vermonters of all economic levels.

**Vermonters are very concerned with and emphasize the need for affordable housing.** While the availability of affordable housing in Vermont may be better than neighboring states, Vermonters recognize this as a major challenge for the future of community and development. The problem cuts across socioeconomic lines and affects both long time residents and newcomers, youth and older residents.

Vermont has generally preserved an historic pattern of working landscapes, working farms and forests, and villages and town centers. **There is a prevailing sense that the state's historic development pattern has both enabled small businesses and farms to prosper and fostered community but that these effects are endangered today.** Some Vermonters see a threat in any change of land use patterns because this sense of community is precious to them. Many were ready to offer solutions, believing that the state should identify the type of development that fits the natural landscapes, local scale, and strong communities for which the state is famous.

Overall, **Vermonters want to see balance in the dialogue about land use.** They recognize that land in the state is a finite commodity and struggle to give the economy, the community, and the environment equal value at the table.

## Economy

Since most of the public engagement process undertaken by the Council on the Future of Vermont was from late 2007 to the summer of 2008, the concerns, challenges, and opportunities here reflect what Vermonters were thinking before the full ramifications of the current economic recession of 2009

became obvious. Still, there are major points of unity in the testimony and data that the Council gathered on affordability issues, business development, job and workforce development, and the call for a carefully considered long-term strategy.

The Council's polling documented that **Vermonters are most concerned about increasing costs of living.** Items viewed as necessities are becoming out of reach for individuals and families earning average wages, not just in Vermont but across the nation. In public forums the issue also took shape in comments on taxes, wages, and fixed incomes and the elderly. Research showed the Council that while household income in Vermont over the last twenty years has increased, the earnings of some Vermonters have not kept up with inflation, particularly as a result of the rising costs of health care, housing, and education.

For Vermonters participating in public forums, the affordability challenge translated into increasing economic divisions. Vermonters emphasized that the small scale of communities in the state historically meant that people could interact with one another no matter who they were or what they earned. **Vermont's income disparity gap (the gap between "rich" and "poor") is lower than the national average, but it is widening and it affects the working relationships of people in communities throughout the state.**

Throughout the state the Council heard concerns about the challenges of doing business in Vermont. Citizens talked about how state government agencies adequately support small businesses and start-ups, but worried that when a business grows and needs to expand, it is difficult to do so in Vermont. Larger businesses that support many of the workers in Vermont have a history of moving out of state where it may be easier to grow or where lower costs lead to a higher return on investment. This pattern worries Vermonters today. The Council also heard complaints that the State focuses on luring businesses here from out of state, rather than helping those already here succeed and grow.

**Vermonters also share significant concerns about workforce development.** Although Vermont has a highly educated workforce, some complain that the education system does not meet the needs of employers. Also, the historic pattern of employment has changed, with increasing numbers of Vermonters finding jobs in areas like health care, retail, professional services, and government, while jobs in manufacturing and natural resource employment in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting have declined.

Vermonters point to creative solutions and innovative ways to diversify the state's economy. Many told the Council that 'clean and green' businesses fit well with Vermont's environmental ethic and brand identity and could bring economic benefits to the state as well as attract a younger, well-educated workforce. Participants noted that the aging population in Vermont will mean that **there is a growing opportunity and need for jobs in health care; and they emphasized the need for improved information technology** as a way to enable rural Vermont businesses to expand markets and increase services. Finally, Vermonters want to see **improvement in the regulatory system, with a goal of achieving consistency, transparency, predictability, and efficiency.**

### Education

Public education is highly valued by Vermonters, **who believe that the education system must change to prepare students for success in the twenty-first century.** They recognize that there are enormous demands put on the system to meet many needs, and many worry that the costs of providing for these demands and supporting the state's education system is growing at an unsustainable rate. They are concerned about the high costs for education, and at the same time they see education as fundamental to the future prosperity of the state. Still today, the small town school is a center for community life and a gathering place for the many activities that draw people together.

In the public forums, the Council heard Vermonters' concerns about the costs and financing structure for the public K-12 education system in Vermont. **Not everyone agrees with the way public schools are financed today, or what must be taught for young people to thrive and be good citizens.** Research shows that expenditures per student and number of personnel per student have increased while enrollment in public schools has dropped over the past eight years. Vermonters have always been concerned with equal access to education and the state has taken measures to equalize these costs across Vermont. The cost discussion can be divisive because it points to an either/or solution: either small towns consolidate schools, and in many cases lose what they see as the heart of their community, or they face uncontrolled costs and inefficient or inadequate educational services. Many Vermonters do not accept this dichotomy and expressed dedication to preserving their local school; they seek a responsible and fiscally sound way to do so. **Vermonters are also concerned**

**about the rising costs of higher education and the major increases in debt load that young people face today.**

Beyond the discussion of costs, it is clear that **many Vermonters see improving the education system as the solution for many of the complicated economic and social issues facing the state.**

In 2008, only five states across the country had higher levels of educational attainment than Vermont, where 35.5 percent of citizens over age twenty-five have a bachelor's degree. Still, **many Vermonters believe that education in the state should better prepare young people with a wide variety of skills to enter the workforce.** They think technical and vocational education, personal career management skills, and lifelong learning are critical for the jobs of tomorrow. Vermonters also place great emphasis on education as the seedbed for innovative business development that will provide for the state's future prosperity. Institutions of higher education in Vermont have an impact on the local economy by attracting highly educated employees, as well as being a focal point for cultural, artistic, civic, and recreational events and activities. Considering the state's six public and eighteen private colleges and universities together, higher education is the fourth largest enterprise in Vermont today.

The Council also heard about the challenge of retaining youth in the state. In 2002, the number of Vermont high school graduates deciding to enroll in out-of-state institutions of higher education surpassed those enrolling here. It is interesting to note, however, that the influx of out-of-state students choosing Vermont more than offsets this out-migration. The research of the Council shows that Vermont is a net importer of college students. **Higher education has a significant role to play in helping young people get started in Vermont and making it their place to live and do business.**

### Human Services, Health and Safety

The root causes of poverty, unemployment, crime, and other societal problems are hard to quantify and challenging to solve. Vermonters care deeply about these issues, especially as they see them affecting their own neighbors and towns. The socially progressive policies that help to support those in need in the state are a hallmark of Vermont, but also strain the financial and service delivery systems in place today. Vermonters believe that creative solutions can be found.



Statistically, Vermont is one of the safest and healthiest states in the country; this is recognized by newcomers as well as long-time residents. In 2008, human services in Vermont covered a broad and complex array of social, medical, and wellness issues that are difficult to provide uniformly in a rural state.

Research shows that **Vermont is rated as the healthiest state in the union, but the costs and availability of health care are major concerns** for citizens. There was a strong call in public forums for an affordable universal health care system. Seeing the trend toward an aging population, citizens worried about how older citizens will find security on fixed incomes. Businesses are having increasing difficulty providing health benefits to their employees and it is getting harder to provide medical services in rural areas where primary care physicians are less available.

Vermonters also see opportunities for employment in health and health care in coming years. Research shows that health care is a growing industry in the state, and **Vermont's aging population will require the growth of medical-services related jobs in the future.**

Another service, historically provided at the local level, is emergency response; medical, firefighting, and ambulance services. Rural towns are having an increasingly difficult time maintaining their local services because of the rising costs of equipment and increased demands on time for mandated training. Emergency services and communications in a rural, mountainous state are hard to provide in any case because of the distance between communities and small number of ready volunteers. **Many Vermonters are concerned about the impact of emergency service expenses on small town budgets and would like to see a concerted effort to consolidate to save costs.** Overall, and consistent with their strong feelings about community, Vermonters expressed concern for the welfare of others and a desire to strengthen local systems, including regionalizing to support efficient human service systems.

Vermont has a reputation for generosity in providing state support for people below the poverty line. Yet conversations across the state, especially with social service professionals and residents in poverty, have affirmed that disincentives inherent in benefits and support systems today impede individual and family efforts to move toward financial independence. **Many human service workers in Vermont today expressed their interest in seeing benefit cliffs eliminated and support systems improved so that people using state support can succeed on their own.**

### Infrastructure

Vermont's society and economy rely on a complex web of infrastructure systems: transportation, water, sewer, power, and communications. Often these systems are invisible to the people who rely on them. Because Vermonters recognize that the physical and electronic infrastructure provide the necessary foundation for successful community and economic development, **they want to see investment in infrastructure in order to offer greater efficiencies to Vermont's businesses, improve the quality of life, and bring existing systems up to standards. However, opinions on where that investment should go are varied.**

People are concerned about the older infrastructure of roads, bridges, and water and sewer systems. Commerce and community life could be severely disrupted without **investment in the maintenance of current infrastructure and its improvement to meet changes in culture and commerce for the future.**

Many Vermonters believe universal access to affordable broadband Internet and cellular telephone communications networks is essential to realize new opportunities in commerce, arts, and community. But some Vermonters eloquently warned the Council that too much participation in digital communities, games, and networks could actually undermine the sense of community and way of life in Vermont.

Research shows that improvements to Vermont's transportation infrastructure are being made, that public transportation ridership is increasing. Over the past several decades, however, the number of cars registered in Vermont and the number of vehicle miles traveled has continued to increase causing more stress on roads and bridges. Research also reveals that cellular phone service and high-speed Internet access and usage have expanded dramatically. Although almost 90 percent of Vermonters now have access to at least one mass-market broadband service, some of the most rural areas of Vermont are underserved. Some parts of the state, even with access, have surprisingly low numbers of citizens signing up for service.

**People want to see infrastructure built to improve or preserve something special about this place** and mentioned projects such as bike lanes to keep people healthy, trains to cut individual carbon emissions, and high-speed Internet for small local businesses to grow. Vermonters see infrastructure as important, but not at the expense of other things they value such as education or environment. Interestingly there were not many comments made about the water, sewer, and wastewater infrastructure systems in the state, although municipal officials and state experts who were interviewed told the Council of the major long-term challenges associated with these necessary and expensive projects.

### Energy

Vermonters use energy primarily for transportation, heating and electricity. While the state is somewhat unique in the mix of sources it uses for heating and business processing (such as wood, nuclear, biomass, and large-scale hydroelectric), Vermont energy use has been rising at a rate greater than the average national energy use. Vermont is vulnerable to price fluctuations and uncertainties in the regional and global marketplace for fossil fuels. **Many Vermonters see a huge opportunity for the state to do something new and innovative in clean energy generation because of the size, scale, and natural resources of the state.** Its sun, wind, water, farm, and forest resources are seen as key components of the solution. While many believe the state is facing a crisis, both today and in the future, they think that Vermont has an opportunity to come together and to be a leader in finding new solutions.

Vermonters are very sensitive to the environmental impacts of energy generation – whether from windmills, nuclear power plants, water turbines, or coal-burning power plants. Vermonters' passionate connection to the landscape and environment means that any proposed power generation source will go through tough public scrutiny. **Vermonters express the desire for creativity and self-sufficiency of local energy solutions, but also want the cost efficiency of large-scale energy sources.**

Because of its rural nature and lack of public transportation, Vermont is more dependent than other places on imported fuels for transportation; this plus cold winters and its dependence on oil for heating makes it extremely vulnerable to fluctuating oil prices. **Many Vermonters believe the best energy solutions for Vermont will be developed in Vermont and want to see significant growth in efficiency and in local and distributed energy systems.** They spoke in support of optimizing the sustainable resources for energy generation that are available and cost efficient, especially those that can be found close to home and could generate jobs in state.

Vermonters are concerned as they see an increasing share of family budgets leaving the state and supporting unfriendly foreign regimes to support our energy consumption. In public testimony, the Council heard about the ideal of **increasing energy independence and expanding local sources with associated local economic benefits.** Vermonters' goals for energy development in the state connect directly to common hopes for an affordable and sustainable future in the short-term and for the next generation.



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## Conclusions of the Council on the Future of Vermont



**T**he conclusions presented below represent the findings of the Council on the Future of Vermont about the crucial priorities Vermonters should pursue to meet the future with confidence. We contribute them as the summation of one dialogue and the beginning of another in the ongoing definition of our common direction. We respectfully submit them to all who put themselves on the line for the cause of Vermont, all who lead state, local, private, and public efforts to improve their community and their state, and to all the people united by a love for Vermont and a commitment to its future.



The conversations that the Council on the Future of Vermont hosted with thousands of Vermonters revealed that Vermonters share a powerful positive belief about the state. There is a prevailing sentiment that Vermont is much more than a place. It is a profound idea. Embodied in the words of the state motto, “Freedom and Unity,” it is an idea about the freedom of the individual and the trust and inter-dependency among members of a community. It is about shared values

and responsibilities. It is about stewardship of natural, cultural, and historical resources. It is about achieving economic and social well being for the benefit of current and future generations.

This idea of Vermont unifies us, native and newcomer, north and south, across our mountains and in all our diversity. It helps bind us together, community by community and statewide, and provides a basis for the common purpose we share as a people in advancing the public good.

Vermonters place great value on their access to nature. Conflicts arise, but at the most basic level there is consensus that Vermont must preserve and enhance its natural resources of clean water and air, its mix of forest and open land, and the availability of abundant areas of public and private land open to public access.

At the same time, there is a continuing tension between Vermonters’ desire for a thriving economy with good jobs and modern amenities and their desire for the preservation of Vermont’s traditional working landscape and small towns. We are not willing to abandon either.

Despite or perhaps because of a strong feeling of commitment to the state, many Vermonters from across the geographic and demographic spectrum express concern and anxiety about the future of Vermont, particularly its long-term economic health. This sense of unease is fueled in part by the perceived lack of a comprehensive economic vision for the future. Economic development and job creation command a high priority for action, although most Vermonters, regardless of economic standing, also give high priority to values associated with community, education, diversity, and environment. These should not be unduly compromised or forfeited for the sake of economic or political expediency.

Vermont is increasingly affected by outside influences, regional and global commerce, and ecological trends. Addressing these issues through common action is essential to maintaining and advancing Vermont in the future. To address external challenges, Vermonters emphasize self-reliance and local economic activity not only for their social and environmental advantages but for their possible economic benefits as well. Vermont is not an island, but many look at its history of relative isolation and the challenges of living here and assert that we have always been a hardy, independent and resourceful people.

There is an ideal of Vermont that helps unite us. Unfortunately the ideal does not always coincide with reality. Many expressed deep concern that the facts and ideal of Vermont are diverging. If not addressed, the discrepancy between our vision for Vermont and the challenges we face – such as decaying infrastructure, increasing incarceration rates, and decreasing affordability of housing and other essential good and services – can lead to the destruction of what we say we love most about the state.

Is Vermont really special? Are our people more resilient, our land more beautiful, our community stronger than those in other places in the world? Vermonters believe the answer is a resounding “yes.” Because we believe our land, our people, and the communities we form are unique, we value them. Because we value them, we think they are worth protecting, preserving, and nurturing. We invest; we debate; we engage. We respond to local, national, and global challenges in distinctive and creative ways. Our positive beliefs in the idea of Vermont as a place and of Vermonters as a people give us optimism and confidence, despite the dramatic challenges ahead. In overwhelming numbers, Vermonters say we have a lot to work with and can set our sights high.

## The Vermont Community

### **Affirming Vermont Identity**

Despite changes and fluctuations in demographics, the Vermont identity remains strong today. We are still a people. We share a broad set of values about ourselves and the place where we live.

### **Promoting Community**

Vermonters are dedicated to community but worry that trends toward the social, economic, and cultural separation of community members threaten to undermine that community in future. Vermonters don't like the idea of “two Vermons,” of divisions between rich and poor, of gated communities and low-income enclaves. Vermonters want community that is not divided by differences: racial, ethnic, economic, or social. We need to invite participation across social and demographic differences to keep community strong for the future. We need to rededicate ourselves to the Vermont ideal of community.

### **Building Vermont Unity**

It's time Vermonters get over some of our feelings of division – natives and “flatlanders,” rural and urban, Chittenden County and the rest of Vermont. It is destructive of Vermont's future that these divisions exist. All of us should know with certainty that our voices and our votes are important and all of us should feel empowered to make a difference in our communities.

### **Celebrating Diversity**

Vermonters should stand together in upholding historic ideals of tolerance and acceptance of diversity within the state's communities. By recognizing our differences and celebrating the positive resources contributed by the diverse membership of the Vermont community, we will act more effectively together to address the challenges ahead.

### The Vermont Economy

#### **Building A Vermont Economic Strategy**

Vermonters want good jobs. To advance innovation and create the jobs of the future, Vermont needs to build, adopt, and invest in economic development strategies that are rooted in the values, skills, natural assets, and brand identity of the state. That will require creative small businesses, compatible large businesses, tourism, artistic enterprises, green technologies, manufacturing, non-profit organizations, education and health sectors, and the natural resource economy working together toward a diverse economy that can be sustained even through unexpected global downturns.

#### **Using and Protecting the Vermont Brand**

The Vermont brand identity is attractive to many people, both in and outside the state. The brand brings tourists and new residents; it provides advantages to Vermont businesses. To ensure the viability of the brand, Vermont must preserve and protect the public assets it is built on, from the working landscape to product quality. Vermonters should use the brand benefits for commerce but at the same time ensure that the land and people of Vermont remain authentic and are not distorted by a commercialized definition of this special place.

#### **Planning for Development**

Many Vermonters perceive the state as a place where it is hard to advance needed infrastructure and economic development projects. Many worry that we rally against projects more readily than we pull together for them. Vermont needs to build a publicly supported development strategy in line with its values, assets, and brand identity – one that unites business, government, community, and non-profits under a shared set of goals. A strong plan with community consensus behind it can establish development priorities that serve the public good and minimize NIMBYism (“not in my back yard”). It will also serve the private good by ensuring consistency and regularity in planning for development. Leadership should rally to make it so.

#### **Improving Affordability**

The costs of housing, health care, energy, transportation, and education are central challenges affecting many Vermont families. This problem defies a simple short-term solution. Vermont’s future prosperity depends on its hard-working people, its educational system, economic innovation, and the maintenance of those core assets that attract people and businesses alike: community, authentic downtowns, natural beauty, and working landscape. Vermonters need to develop a comprehensive focus and united leadership to improve affordability in housing, education, health care and other areas of concern to families today.

#### **Advancing In-State Energy Development**

In Vermont today there is a sense of urgency about changing the current levels of fossil fuel usage for heat and transportation. Vermont is highly dependent on energy sources outside the state and extremely reliant on imported fuels for heating and transportation. The decline in the availability of low cost oil is inevitable, and Vermonters are increasingly concerned about the state’s growing carbon emissions. Vermont should dramatically expand conservation in all state facilities. The State government should lead the way in expanding renewable energy generation and fuel development to meet its institutional needs. Public efforts that support energy conservation and alternative, renewable fuel use in private homes and businesses should be expanded. While the trends facing the state are global in scope and severity, Vermont should take action to enhance energy security by encouraging in-state options, developing energy generation and fuels in state for an energy mix that is clean, green, and economical.

#### **Promoting Downtown Vitality**

Vermonters celebrate the character of town centers, but the distinctiveness of Vermont is endangered by the commercial homogenization seen in so many other areas of the country today. Vermont is threatened by commercial and residential development that are out of context with the small scale of the state. To preserve working downtowns, and to remain an attractive place for tourists and locals alike, local arts and cultural activities, local purchasing, local economic development, and the expansion of Vermont markets should be supported through measured policy and investment.



### **Strengthening the Creative Economy**

Both Vermont's identity and ability to innovate rely on active artistic expression and presentation. The cultural strength of the state spans its traditional heritage and more contemporary expressions of the imagination. In times of economic pressure, the cultural sector should be recognized as integral to the state's community, educational, imaginative and economic life.

## **Youth and Education**

### **Engaging Young Vermonters**

Young Vermonters need to see that there are opportunities for creativity, innovation, success, and prosperity here in Vermont, as well as outside the state. Vermont must provide educational opportunities to meet the needs and goals of all of Vermont's youth through workforce training, education in the trades and technologies, and college and advanced degrees. The state should celebrate the youth who stay, welcome those who move to or return to Vermont, and support their development as leaders in defining the future of the state.

### **Renewing Public Education**

Vermonters cherish their local schools and overwhelmingly desire to retain them as the centers of their communities, but they are increasingly concerned about declining enrollments and unsustainable current rates of growth in spending for K-12 schools. While most Vermonters are proud of our excellent schools, many are concerned that the goals and structure of education need to change for the system to address meaningfully the needs of students and the changing world they face today and into the future. Vermonters also need to recognize the different capacities and learning styles of students to ensure that all have an opportunity to succeed. Together, Vermonters should build a process to establish a strategic and unifying vision for the renewal of excellence in public education for the twenty-first century and build a common strategy to achieve it in a cost-effective manner.

### **Supporting Higher Education**

Higher education and workforce training are key to economic prosperity and civic engagement. Vermont imports more college students than it exports. In addition to increasing an individual's chance for economic prosperity and the social benefits of an educated workforce, higher education is a key economic sector in its own right and an engine for innovation and entrepreneurial activity. Vermont's array of public and private institutions of higher education should be recognized for its social and economic impact, and supported in the long term especially for its ability to incubate the next generation of innovative entrepreneurs.

## Vermont's Landscape and Natural Resources

### Vermont's Natural Resource Economy

The conservation of the working landscape is a high priority for Vermonters and is associated with their love of outdoor recreation, closeness to nature, and the beauty of the state. We need to recognize that the working landscape depends on a strong farm and forest economy, and that unless this economy prospers, Vermont could lose the working landscape in the next generation. Though the great majority of Vermonters say they want to see the working landscape prosper, public strategy and investment have not lived up to the challenges facing the rural enterprises that have built and sustain much of that landscape, especially forest-based enterprises. Vermont's communities and the natural resource industries, such as agriculture, forestry and forest products, and tourism and recreation need to work together with a unified vision and set of economic and regulatory strategies to ensure that the working landscape is cared for into the future.

### Advancing Vermont Agriculture

- ***Expanding Agricultural Partnership.*** Agricultural organizations and associations need to partner in common purpose around a long-term vision for the future of agriculture and value-added production in the state, then act to realize it.
- ***Preserving Vermont Farmland.*** In addition to advancing the agricultural economy, Vermont needs to rededicate itself to the preservation of its valuable prime agricultural soils to maximize our capacity to feed ourselves in future.
- ***Expanding Local Food Production, Consumption and Export.*** Vermont should devote resources and invest in infrastructure to advance local food production, processing, and consumption, town by town, region by region. When faced with potential threats from global warming, disease, and the decline of the oil-based economy, many Vermonters support the expansion of local and regional food systems. There is an opportunity for local food system planning and development to expand local sales, reduce dependence on imports, expand agricultural diversity, and broaden the variety of fresh and value-added markets for local Vermont foods. The State of Vermont should provide leadership by setting measured and cost-effective policies to dramatically expand institutional purchases from local farmers. To the best of our individual capacity, we should support local agriculture and buy locally produced products.
- ***Diversifying Agriculture.*** More than any other state in the union, Vermont's agricultural economy depends on a single product. Today and for the future, the success of family dairy farms is of tremendous value to the state; but there are dangers to the dairy economy, such as price volatility in national and international markets, the high costs of production, the aging of farmers and uncertainty over the next generation of farmers. While Vermonters appreciate the heritage of dairy and its central role in the agricultural economy, the diversification of agricultural enterprises is essential. Along with dairy, diverse and value-added enterprises are a cornerstone of the future of Vermont's agricultural economy, and a foundation for the economy as a whole. They should be supported and encouraged.

### Coordinating Land Use Planning

Vermont's natural environment, working landscape, and typical pattern of development with villages and open countryside are in danger. Coordinated strategic planning at local, regional, and state levels needs to balance the needs of transportation, economic development, energy, and natural resource assessment and land use planning as a comprehensive whole. Currently, the absence of coordination among levels of planning undermines its utility and effectiveness. It is time for Vermont to advance a better-coordinated regional and statewide land-use strategy.

### Guiding Growth

Everywhere Vermonters continually reaffirm their love for the small scale of the state, its peacefulness, and its open landscape. We want to see Vermont build on its assets, and expand its local economy, but not do so at the expense of its small-scale communities or environment. We recognize the concept of limits to growth. Vermonters need to find new ways and compromises that allow for economic development without undermining the essential character of communities and countryside. We want to achieve efficiency in the regulatory process without losing or undermining local identity. Vermont will suffer if the choice is either unrestrained growth or the status quo.

## Health, Transportation and Public Safety

### Valuing Vermont Seniors as Resources

While we recognize the challenges inherent in an aging population, Vermont should seize upon the opportunities presented by the increasing number of older Vermonters. Vermont's retirees come with skills and resources earned in productive careers; these are sometimes underutilized assets for local communities. Seniors hold the sense of tradition and community and can lead by sharing their knowledge and experience with young Vermonters and newcomers. Preparing for an older population will mean supporting various strategies for senior housing, co-housing, and aging in place. It will mean more jobs in elder care. It could mean a major increase in volunteerism and philanthropy. Vermont should prepare for an aging population with optimism about their contributions, care for their dignity, security, and quality of life and invest in the support systems that an aging population will need.

### Moving Vermont's Health Care System Forward

Vermonters are calling for a health care system that provides access for all to good care at affordable prices. While recognizing the challenges inherent in a rural healthcare system, Vermonters see that, because of our scale, this is a major opportunity for the state. While it supports the development of a national program for universal health care access, Vermont should identify the reasonable changes that are achievable in Vermont, some of which include the location of rural health centers, incentives for medical professionals, advancing preventative care, using and sharing best practices, and increasing tele-health options.

### Advancing Vermont's Transportation System

- **Investing in Infrastructure.** Vermont needs to invest fully to meet its long term infrastructure and maintenance needs, and develop the resources and strategies to support and advance the entire system of transportation for the future.
- **Expanding Public Transportation.** Vermont's transportation infrastructure is in need of critical investment. As Vermonters look to the future, however, we see a priority for expanding options and services for public transportation throughout the state. Rural transportation networks for commuters could join with municipalities and schools to provide bussing services, allowing students greater mobility, seniors more access to more events, and working Vermonters alternative transport to their jobs. Vermont needs to devise an efficient public transportation system that provides all of us with reasonable and affordable service routes, connects and coordinates the needs of schools, elders, and commuters, reduces our dependence on fossil fuel-based personal transportation, and reduces the number of vehicle miles traveled.

### Promoting Safe and Healthy Communities

Vermont needs to ensure that the most vulnerable Vermonters are protected, that all Vermonters have the food, shelter, clothes, heat, and medicine they need. No child should be left hungry, no family homeless. Vermont must systematically evaluate and reduce "benefit cliffs" that can undermine initiative, weaken opportunity, and negatively condition family decisions toward dependence. But in doing so, Vermont must ensure appropriate services and support so that no one falls through the cracks, and the social services system protects the most vulnerable and then efficiently and effectively helps individuals and families make their way out of poverty.

### Reducing Crime and Incarceration

Vermont needs to lead in providing social services, prevention and drug treatment to break cycles of substance abuse, crime, and incarceration. Vermont needs to expand its leadership in developing alternatives to incarceration when appropriate, ways for those guilty of offences to make amends and restitution, treatment for those whose substance abuse separates them from the community and contributes to lawlessness and violence, and education and training to help individuals find productive vocations as contributing members of society.

## Vermont's Civic Culture

### Rationalizing Governmental Service Territories

Throughout our history Vermonters have organized the state around local and regional systems for a variety of governmental services. Overlapping and non-congruent regional and local systems for transportation, human services, economic development, land use planning, courts, public safety, education and local and regional governance are now the norm. This unsystematic structure results in unnecessary complexity and undermines the coordination and efficiency of services. It is time for Vermont to give serious study to the basic restructuring of the State's service areas. Vermont's regional systems need to be reorganized so that all service and planning boundaries also are coordinated within a set of defined regions. This will make resource sharing, decision-making, and long term planning more rational, effective, and efficient.

### Strengthening Democratic Participation

- **Promoting Democracy.** Vermonters are proud of the tradition and practice of democracy and volunteer citizen involvement in the civic infrastructure of our communities. Every Vermont child should be educated in participatory democracy. Every newcomer to Vermont should be invited into local civic life. The state should provide leadership to help cities, towns, and communities advance telecommunications networks that inform citizens and directly engage their participation in civic and community life.
- **Affirming Town Meeting.** While some communities have chosen to do away with Town Meeting, there are many reasons to continue and revitalize this tradition of direct participatory government at the local level throughout Vermont. Town Meeting Day should continue into the future, but embrace new technologies to further local community participation and dialogue, including web casts, web-based interaction, or online and cell phone voting. It is time to bring Town Meeting into the twenty-first century.

### Fostering Ongoing Civic Dialogue and Engagement

The people of Vermont and the democratic and egalitarian values we share form the foundation of a healthy, prosperous future. Vermont must continue to value and practice intentional civic dialogue about the future of the state and enhance democratic participation in civil civic engagement as an active driver in community life. Protecting and preserving the formal and informal places where people gather and connect with each other is crucial in maintaining and advancing the civic and community dialogue.

### Acting in Leadership

With its small scale and strong values, Vermont is an incubator of ideas, a center of innovation, and a laboratory for creative solutions. A history of ingenuity allows Vermont to respond to local, national, and global challenges in a unique way, and Vermonters want to embrace that leadership potential in many areas – the environment, arts and culture, education, agriculture, social issues, and civil rights. Vermont should be intentional in developing itself as a laboratory of innovation in public policy, education, energy and the economy, civic and community life, and act as a model and a leader for the nation.



## Vision Statement



**W**hile the Council has drawn many conclusions from all the information it has analyzed and has identified important directions for the future from that material, no outcome is guaranteed. Several sweeping questions about the future of the state have emerged from our process over the past eighteen months: Will Vermont retain the farm fields and open spaces of its working landscape and the natural beauty of its forested mountains, lakes, and streams that Vermonters value so universally? Will its communities be vital and prosperous? Will the Vermont economy be invigorated by an entrepreneurial spirit and new innovative businesses? To what extent will Vermont move toward greater self-sufficiency in food and energy production? Will this be an affordable, safe place for young families? Will it be a place where a person can find good paying and meaningful work? Will state government remain accessible, and will volunteer civic engagement

and civil discussion remain the hallmark of Vermont communities? Will there be a balance of the private, non-profit, and public sectors such that each contributes to prosperity and the public good?

While the Council cannot know the answers, the following vision statement grows directly from the hopes and aspirations of Vermonters and the conclusions we developed as a result. This vision embraces the values that Vermonters told us they hold in common, and the challenges and opportunities they expressed, not just for themselves and the current generation, but also for their children and the state as it moves well into the twenty-first century.

**We recognize that this vision represents an ideal and sets a high bar for achievement.** Realizing this vision can only be possible through a combination of local, regional and state leadership, as well as millions of actions on the part of individual Vermonters.

## A Vision for the Future of Vermont

### The Vermont Community

Vermont is a place of vibrant, safe community centers, villages, and downtowns, where young families with children and senior citizens make their homes in decent, affordable housing. It is not economic circumstances that determine status, but rather personal integrity and the level of engagement in the public affairs of the community that earns respect. Diversity of all kinds – economic, racial, ethnic, artistic, religious, sexual orientation, age, gender, and ability – is accepted and celebrated for the richness it brings to the common experience.

In addition to their pride in and sense of belonging to their local communities, Vermonters – both those who have arrived recently and those whose families have been here for generations – share a strong sense of love for and identity with the state as a whole.

This Vermont identity, based in its strong communities and characterized at its heart in the state motto – “Freedom and Unity” – provides a solid core for the state's integrity and progress.

### The Vermont Economy

Vermont has a clear, detailed, and unifying economic development strategy that is consistent with the values that Vermonters hold dear. Moreover, the strategy is regularly updated through a process that engages the public. The implementation of the plan has resulted in increasing numbers of good jobs for Vermonters of differing skill sets. Many of these jobs have been generated by a new wave of creative educators, business owners and entrepreneurs who are driving job creation; by a positive business climate in the state; and by new enterprises in green technology, clean energy development, engineering, and technical industries.

Vermont has successfully fostered a prosperous private sector consisting of a diverse range of large and small businesses and industries, without sacrificing its environment, community centers, landscape, or the integrity and cohesion of its communities. The Vermont brand, the economic aspect of the Vermont identity based on the state's well-deserved clean and green reputation, provides a distinct advantage to Vermont's natural resources, small businesses, and all who produce high-quality products in the state.

The economy of the state is also significantly supported by vibrant non-profit and public sectors, especially in the health care and education arenas. More traditional economic sectors of recreation and tourism, as well as the natural resource areas of agriculture, silviculture, and mining, are also thriving. With regard to agriculture in particular, diverse quality products from fresh to value-added operations in Vermont are strongly supported locally and are available beyond Vermont in regional, national and global markets.

The arts are a vibrant and dynamic part of life throughout the state. Artistic and creative endeavors of all kinds – music, theater, celebrations, museums, and cultural events – are supported by Vermont communities and Vermont businesses, large and small. Artistic crafts are a small but vital part of the state's economy and brand identity; artistic and creative businesses, activities and centers thrive in communities as well as in tourism centers.

One particular area crucial to Vermont's future economy is energy generation. Local and renewable alternatives to fossil fuel-based energy have already been developed and are increasingly coming on line. This is providing a wide range of careers and securing the supply of clean, reliable and economically viable fuels, electricity sources and efficient technologies, and has resulted in increasing energy self-reliance for the state as a whole.

The vitality of the Vermont economy has eliminated one of the most widely held concerns of the first decade of the twenty-first century: affordability has ceased to be a pressing concern for the vast majority of Vermonters.

### The Vermont Environment

Vermont has natural and working landscapes that have been preserved through responsible private stewardship, wise land use policy and responsible private and public investments. The state has conserved its natural environment that provides clean air and water, as well as recreational opportunities. Diversified agriculture and forestry are anchors of the rural economy and landscape. In addition, Vermont has retained a built environment that includes healthy downtowns and a successful mix of historic buildings and new development. Together these enhance the state's prosperity while affirming the Vermont character. Vermont is a place where people live and come to enjoy, appreciate and steward the land and natural resources.

## Vermont Quality of Life

Most observers look to education, health, and accessible public and social services as benchmarks of basic to a good life. Vermont measures up well in these areas and is vigilant in maintaining and improving upon its strengths.

Vermont's students of all ages perform well because they are invested in their own educations. Most young Vermonters successfully make the transition from public school to a range of higher education options, from liberal arts to sophisticated technical and professional degrees. Many adults participate in ongoing education, from workforce certificate programs to retraining and lifelong learning. Vermont is a location of choice for young people, both its own and those from elsewhere. In addition to excellent schools, dynamic community life, a range of career opportunities, and activities in the natural environment, young people are actively invited to be a part of the ongoing conversation about the future of our state.

A society can be measured by the way it responds to its young people and to those who violate the social compact – the laws by which we agree to be bound in community. Vermont has successfully reduced its prison population and crime rate. For those citizens who have broken laws, restorative justice mechanisms are firmly in place across the state that, where appropriate, support offenders in paying back their victims and the community and effectively reintegrating into society.

Vermont's social services are successfully reducing the effects of generational poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic and sexual violence. Through public, private, and state partnerships, human and social services are provided in an effective and coordinated manner.

Personal responsibility for good health is supported by a healthcare system that is both affordable and accessible to all, from the most rural to those living in village centers and larger communities.

Communities come together regionally to share costs for transportation, public safety, schools and other areas of common interest in ways that have benefited small towns, while preserving local engagement and leadership.

Vermont has an integrated public transportation system, like the healthcare system, that is convenient, accessible and affordable; as a result personal vehicle travel on Vermont's roads and bridges has been reduced and with it, reliance on imported fossil fuels.

Vermont has a vibrant population of seniors. They are found on boards, serving roles in local and state government and engaged in their communities in both volunteer and paid positions. The resources that the seniors have are celebrated and tapped in Vermont communities through partnerships, collaboratives and business ventures.

## Vermont's Civic Life

Vermont remains a place committed to democratic and egalitarian principles and practices. Every person is valued and the many differences among citizens are seen by all as strengths to be accepted. A cornerstone of that commitment is dedication to civic dialogue that is characterized by civility as the basis for public policy and self-government. All members of the community are encouraged to be active in this process, which is the foundation of strategic planning at both the local and state levels.

Vermont has taken advantage of multiple options and technologies to increase social networking within the state without losing the face-to-face interactions that bind our communities together. Because of the small scale of Vermont, the use of new and innovative community decision making tools has become common and has expanded public engagement and civic involvement in ongoing dialogue and in advancing projects that serve the public good.

Vermont's culture and politics remain personal and intimate; the state's small scale continues to make it a place where one person can make a positive difference. There is a high rate of citizen involvement and volunteerism in local and regional government, which contributes to making Vermont government at all levels accessible and truly "of the people." Vermont government also embraces new ideas, whether from within the state or elsewhere, and supports innovations from individuals, businesses, non-profits and communities.

The strength of Vermont's small scale and active civic life is a hallmark of the state in the 21st century. Vermont leaders in business, policy, non-profit and philanthropy all recognize that the state is not insulated from the trends and effects of the nation and the globe. Vermont responds dynamically to conditions beyond its borders and acts as a leader and a model of innovation and experimentation to advance democratic processes, sustainable economic development, and the well being of all its all its citizens.



## Reflections from the Council on the Future of Vermont



**T**he members of the Council on the Future of Vermont are profoundly honored to have been part of the historic process of listening to Vermonters and gathering their best ideas for the long-term direction and goals for the state.

It was inspiring to see the enthusiastic involvement of so many in this project, from all the individuals who participated to the organizations that devoted time to thinking forward with us. We thank all who turned out for the public forums and focus groups and those who shared their ideas as speakers or on-line contributors. It has been a privilege to see the love that Vermonters have for this special place and the dedication they have to its future. Without them, and the sponsors and funders who contributed, this project would not have been possible.

One of the heartening aspects of this endeavor has been how often participants thanked us. Whatever their differences of opinion, Vermonters in forums or stakeholder groups said, “Thank you for doing this,” or “Thank you for asking.” This process struck a chord with many, in large part because it exemplifies the value that Vermonters place on civic dialogue and public participation in democracy. Democracy is never done. It needs constant participation and Vermonters are dedicated to it.



We recognize that our eighteen months of gathering, synthesizing, and analyzing information does not, in itself, chart the course of Vermont's future. We are proud, however, to have created the opportunity for dialogue for Vermont citizens as they continually re-define Vermont's place in the world. We hope that this project will encourage Vermonters to consider their common goals and to move forward in common purpose.

The specific circumstances of the times will change the public testimony for any project of this nature. The Council on the Future of Vermont took testimony when fuel prices were extraordinarily high, and the loss of young people from the state and challenges to affordability were on everyone's minds. Nonetheless, in everything we gathered, there is a continuity that goes far beyond the short-term context.

We look back to the 1929 report and see many values we share and challenges that confront us still. We also see that the state has undergone significant cultural and physical changes yet stayed true to something essential in its nature and people.

When we look to past efforts of this nature, we note that our process was less political and held fewer predetermined ends than some of the previous attempts to document the values and visions of Vermonters. We asked fundamental questions and held to the principle of diligent and honest listening. This effort has not been designed to achieve particular conclusions or form a political platform for the future. We hope and intend that it may be useful to all parties in the work ahead, but it aimed to serve none in particular.

We understand that times and circumstances change, and we recommend that a similarly comprehensive, statewide conversation on the future

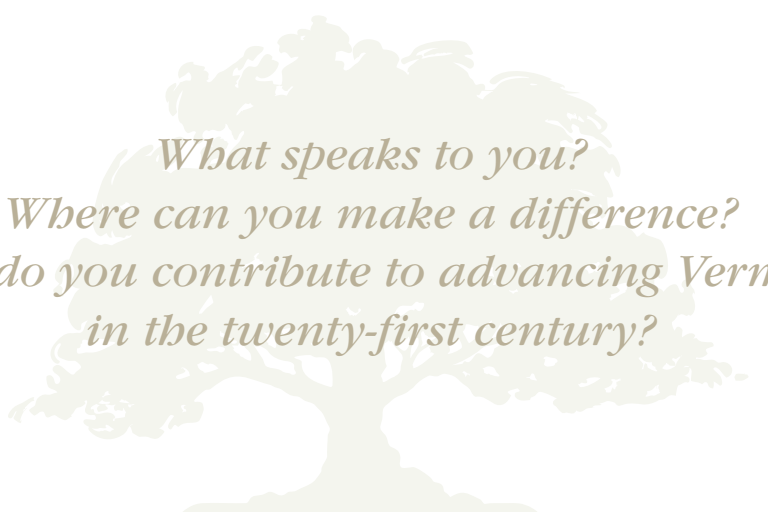
of Vermont happen at least once every twenty years. We see our effort as part of an historical cycle; following past efforts from the Commission on Country Life to the Commission on Vermont's Future. We believe that every generation should be asked what it means to be a Vermonter and what our common values and priorities are, and we encourage the renewal of this endeavor when Vermont approaches 2029.



The Council on the Future of Vermont was charged to identify points of unity. We have attempted to do so with full understanding of our diversity and the richness of political, social, and individual differences. People on different ends of the political or social spectrum in Vermont share many of the same values. By standing apart from politics, and being disconnected from any one particular interest, we hope that we have succeeded in identifying common interests and common directions that can help to unite the efforts of those with similar dedication to this special place.

We encourage wide use of this report, and understand that the dialogue and actions that will follow are much more powerful than the publication itself. We ask readers to evaluate the facts, opinions, and directions expressed in the report and consider: **What speaks to you? Where can you make a difference? How do you contribute to advancing Vermont in the twenty-first century?**

With this publication, the findings of the Council on the Future of Vermont become no longer ours alone. The report is a contribution toward action. It is for the people of Vermont to use to move Vermont forward as they see fit.



*What speaks to you?  
Where can you make a difference?  
How do you contribute to advancing Vermont  
in the twenty-first century?*

## Acknowledgements



**W**ithout the support, knowledge, time and the passion of thousands of Vermonters, and hundreds of partners, presenters, and colleagues, this book could not have been written. VCRD and the CFV appreciate all gifts of time, energy, and dedication that have contributed to the Council on the Future effort. **The funders for this project deserve special thanks and can be found on the inside of the back cover of the book.**

### Presenters

We are grateful for the thoughtful advice, ideas and vision of presenters at the Council on the Future of Vermont monthly meetings: Governor James Douglas, Paul Gillies, Chuck Ross, John Cohn, Daniel Hecht, Roberta McDonald, Andrew Meyer, Bill Stenger, Melinda Moulton, Joseph Fusco, Chris Dutton, Jim Keyes, Paul Cillo, John McClaughry, Peter Espenshade, Senator Douglas Racine, Joshua Farley, Tom Kavet, Jeffrey Carr, Art Woolf, Enid Wonnacott, John Bramley, Secretary Jonathan Wood, Jackie Folsom, Curtis Koren, Paul Stearns, Warren Kimble, and Mayor Mary Hooper.

### County Public Forums

The Council on the Future of Vermont thanks all Vermonters who provided testimony in public sessions throughout the state. Participants were old and young, native and newcomer, working and retired. Sessions were held at Vermont Technical College (Randolph), Paramount Theater (Rutland), Southern Vermont College (Bennington), the Old Labor Hall (Barre), VFW Post 2571 (White River Junction), Robert H. Gibson River Garden (Brattleboro), City Hall Auditorium (Burlington), North Hero United Methodist Church (North Hero), North Country High School (Newport), St. Johnsbury Middle School (St. Johnsbury), Green Mountain Tech and Career Center (Hyde Park), Unitarian Universalist Church (Middlebury), Brighton Elementary School (Island Pond), and Bellows Free Academy (St. Albans).

### Focus Forums

In addition to the large evening forums, the CFV held focus forums with the following groups throughout the state. Local community leaders helped to set up these meetings and we deeply appreciate their help and the time of the following forum host organizations.

Addison County Relocalization Network (ACoRN)  
 ALANA (Asian-American, Latino, African-American  
 & Native American) Community Center, Brattleboro  
 Association of Africans Living in Vermont  
 Barre Area Clergy Association  
 Barre Granite Association  
 Bellows Falls artists and Bellows Falls Development Corporation  
 Ben and Jerry's Homemade staff  
 Bennington County Industrial Development Corporation  
 Bennington District Leadership Council  
 Bennington Project Independence  
 Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council  
 Better Bennington Corporation  
 Big Heavy World  
 Black River Produce  
 Brattleboro Arts Initiative and guests  
 Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation and guests  
 Brattleboro District Energy Corporation and guests  
 Brighton Community Forum  
 Brighton Select Board  
 Burlington City Commissioners  
 Burlington Legacy Project Social Equity Committee  
 Burlington Community Economic Development Office  
 Burr and Burton Academy students  
 Caledonia Community Work Camp  
 Center for Cartoon Studies  
 Central Vermont Adult Basic Education staff and students  
 Central Vermont Public Service Corporation employees  
 Champlain Housing Trust  
 Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission  
 City of Rutland, Office of the Mayor  
 Community College of Vermont (Newport)  
 Community Supported Enterprises group (North Hero)  
 Concept 2 employees  
 Conservation Study Institute  
 Council on Aging for Southeastern Vermont  
 COVER Home Repair  
 EarthTurbines, Inc./NRG Systems  
 Elderly Services, Inc. (Middlebury)  
 Emergency services volunteers in Lamoille County  
 Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium  
 Farmers' Watershed Alliance  
 Franklin County Community Action and human services providers  
 Franklin County Senior Center and board  
 Gilman Housing Trust  
 GRACE (Grass Roots Art and Community Effort) staff and business  
 leaders in Hardwick  
 Grafton Natural Resources/environment group and guests  
 Green Mountain College students and professors  
 Hildene Foundation staff  
 Home Health Care of Franklin County  
 Island Arts  
 Islands Rotary Club  
 Institute for Sustainable Communities  
 Jay Peak Ski Resort/Jay Peak Area Association

Kingdom Trails  
 Lake Champlain Basin Partnership  
 Lake Region Union High School students  
 Lamoille County Association of Sugar Makers  
 Laraway Youth and Family Services students  
 Manchester-Dorset Interfaith Council  
 Maple Landmark Woodcraft  
 Marlboro College Graduate Center and regional higher education leaders  
 Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Park and Billings Farm and Museum  
 Matteson Associates  
 Middlebury Global Warming Action Committee  
 Newport City Renaissance Project/ONECP/Connections  
 Northeast Kingdom Information Associates (NEK Info)  
 Northeastern Vermont Development Association/NEK Travel and Tourism  
 Northwoods Stewardship Center  
 Poulney Downtown Revitalization Committee and students  
 Randolph Area Chamber of Commerce  
 Randolph Municipal employees and officials  
 Randolph Union High School classes  
 Refugee and Immigrant Service Providers Network  
 Ridge Protectors  
 Rockingham Area Museum Program  
 RU12? Community Center, Outright VT & the Right to Gay Marriage representatives  
 Rutland Area Farm to Food Link  
 Rutland Regional Planning Commission and area officials  
 South End Arts and Business Association  
 South Hero Land Trust  
 Springfield Regional Development Corporation  
 St. Albans Community Justice Center  
 St. Albans Cooperative Creamery  
 St. Albans for the Future/Chamber of Commerce  
 St. Johnsbury Academy staff  
 St. Johnsbury Athenaeum  
 Stark Mountain Woodworking  
 Sterling College and the Center for Northern Studies  
 Two-Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Planning Commission  
 Unified Towns and Gores of Essex County  
 United Way of Windham County and regional human services  
 Upper Valley Haven  
 Valley Futures Steering Committee  
 Vermont Community Foundation staff  
 Vermont Folklife Center  
 Vermont Law School  
 Vermont Soap Works  
 Vermont State Police in New Haven  
 Vermont Studio Center  
 Vermont Tiger  
 Veterans of Foreign Wars (Hyde Park, Post 7779)  
 WDEV Radio Audience: The Mark Johnson Show  
 Waitsfield & Champlain Valley Telecom  
 Washington County Youth Service Bureau  
 Weston Priory  
 Yesterday Design/Build School

### Organizational Interviews

At the conclusion of the regional meetings the Council held interviews with the following leadership groups:

Associated Industries of Vermont  
 Association of Vermont Independent Colleges & the Vermont Higher Education Council  
 Central Vermont Community Action Council – Headstart Policy Council  
 Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation and Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce  
 Green Mountain Club  
 Northeastern Organic Farming Association (NOFA)  
 Orton Family Foundation  
 Rural Vermont  
 Smart Growth Collaborative Board  
 Spectrum Youth and Family Services  
 State Association of Conservation Districts  
 The Consortium of Vermont Colleges  
 University of Vermont students  
 University of Vermont, Office of the President  
 Vermont artists, Arts Advocacy Day  
 Vermont Association of Conservation Districts  
 Vermont Association of Home Health Agencies  
 Vermont Association of Planning & Development Agencies  
 Vermont Association of Regional Development Directors  
 Vermont Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition  
 Vermont Business Roundtable  
 Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility  
 Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger  
 Vermont Center for Independent Living  
 Vermont Commission on the Future of Economic Development  
 Vermont Downtown Program  
 Vermont Hospitality Council  
 Vermont Housing & Conservation Board  
 Vermont Humanities Council  
 Vermont Interfaith Council  
 Vermont Land Trust  
 Vermont League of Cities and Towns  
 Vermont Natural Resource Council  
 Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence  
 Vermont School Boards Association  
 Vermont Ski Areas Association  
 Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative  
 Vermont Software Developers Alliance  
 Vermont Superintendents Association  
 Vermont Supreme Court  
 Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund  
 Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association  
 Vermont Woodlands Association  
 Vermont Workforce Development Council  
 Vermont Youth Conservation Corps  
 Yankee Farm Credit

### Additional Contributors

We are grateful for the following special contributions and partnerships. In partnership with Geoff Gevalt and the Young Writers Project and with sole support from the Northfield Savings Bank, the Council on the Future of Vermont Writing Contest drew contributions from 350 students from all over Vermont. We thank all the young authors.

Green Mountain College's 2008 "Sustainable Development" class, led by Dr. Jacob Park, contributed a platform on sustainability and student essays on the future.

The Vermont Arts Council and Lyman Orton established the Art of Action project, which commissioned visual artists to create works of art that address issues identified by Vermonters as essential to the state's future. Using the Council's materials (notes, reports, and research) these artists proposed their brilliant productions of visions for the future of Vermont, which will be completed in Fall 2009.

### Research and Surveys

VCRD commissioned experts in the fields of social science research and economic analysis at the University of Vermont and St. Michael's College to complement information from public and stakeholder forums with polling and trend line research.

The Center for Rural Studies at University of Vermont conducted an in-depth telephone and on-line poll of the major challenges, concerns and priorities of Vermonters and published findings for the CFV in *Looking Ahead: Vermonters Values and Challenges*. Led by Dr. Fred Schmidt, Jessica Hyman, and Michael Moser, the polling data provided invaluable context and testing of themes from the public sessions.

Dr. Herb Kessel and Dr. Vincent Bolduc of the Center for Social Science Research at St. Michael's College were the primary authors and researchers of *Vermont in Transition, A Summary of Social, Economic, and Environmental Trends*. They led a team of writers and researchers who delved into the topics that had emerged from the public forums and focus groups. Useful to all who are concerned with public policy in Vermont, this companion book is an invaluable addition to the polling and public testimony of the Council.

### Partners in Production

Flywheel Communications' Michael Levine has provided wonderful leadership in communications and strategic media work, building and implementing a systematic state-wide outreach and information campaign. Vince Franke of Peregrine Productions led in the development of the CFV's video products, joining the Council members in the field and at their monthly meetings to capture video footage.

The Vermont Community Foundation, in addition to being a financial contributor for the project, sent staff members to listen at focus groups and public forums; each deserves our thanks for their dedication to the project. Staff and board members of Vermont Public Television joined the Council on the Future of Vermont as a community partner – both in the field and by advertising the public forums for Vermonters. Staff of USDA Rural Development also joined Council members on listening teams in the field, and many organizations provided

active listeners at the Council's forums, such as Resource Conservation and Development staff, local town managers and local reporters. The *Barre-Montpelier Times-Argus* and *Rutland Herald* deserve recognition for their comprehensive coverage of public sessions, for their sense of history, and for their dedication to Vermont's ongoing civic dialogue. Michael Sherman provided manuscript and line editing for this book. His experience, command of style and generosity are greatly appreciated.

### The Board of the Vermont Council on Rural Development

The Council on the Future of Vermont was founded and supported by the Vermont Council on Rural Development. The VCRD has spent much of the last two years designing the structure, raising funds, building partnerships, and planning for policy and program follow-up. We need to thank the incisive CFV Steering Committee of the VCRD Board, which designed the structure and work of the council: Jeff Francis, Chris Hart, Tony Elliott, Catherine Dimitruk, Chip Evans, and Jonathan Wood.



VCRD Office Manager, Margaret Gibson McCoy, contributed immeasurably to the smooth operation of the project with her diligent management, support for all the materials and research, and leadership in development of the Summit on the Future of Vermont.

Sarah Waring, indispensable and outstanding Project Director for the Council on the Future of Vermont, provided dynamic leadership for every aspect of the work. She balanced the enormous variety of practical details of the project with vision, clarity, insight and special recognition of the value and uniqueness of each contribution to the dialogue.

The Board of the Vermont Council on Rural Development deeply appreciates the dedication, passion and care that the Council on the Future of Vermont members contributed to this historic project. Council Chair Tom Debevoise led the process with humor and dedication. Council members are grateful for Tom's balance and fair minded treatment of all opinions. In addition, Council members dedicated additional time to work on specific projects in committees; in particular, the Writing Committee spent weeks together editing, synthesizing, writing and revising this final report of the Council on the Future of Vermont and we gratefully acknowledge their work. We thank all the Council members for putting themselves on the line, in the spirit of the values and priorities they enumerate, for the good of the people and place we all care so much about.

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Casella Waste Systems



Green Mountain Coffee Roasters



High Meadows Fund



Johnson Family Foundation



J. Warren and Lois McClure Foundation

National Life Group



NRG Systems



Union Mutual of Vermont



Vermont Community Foundation



Vermont Mutual Insurance





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