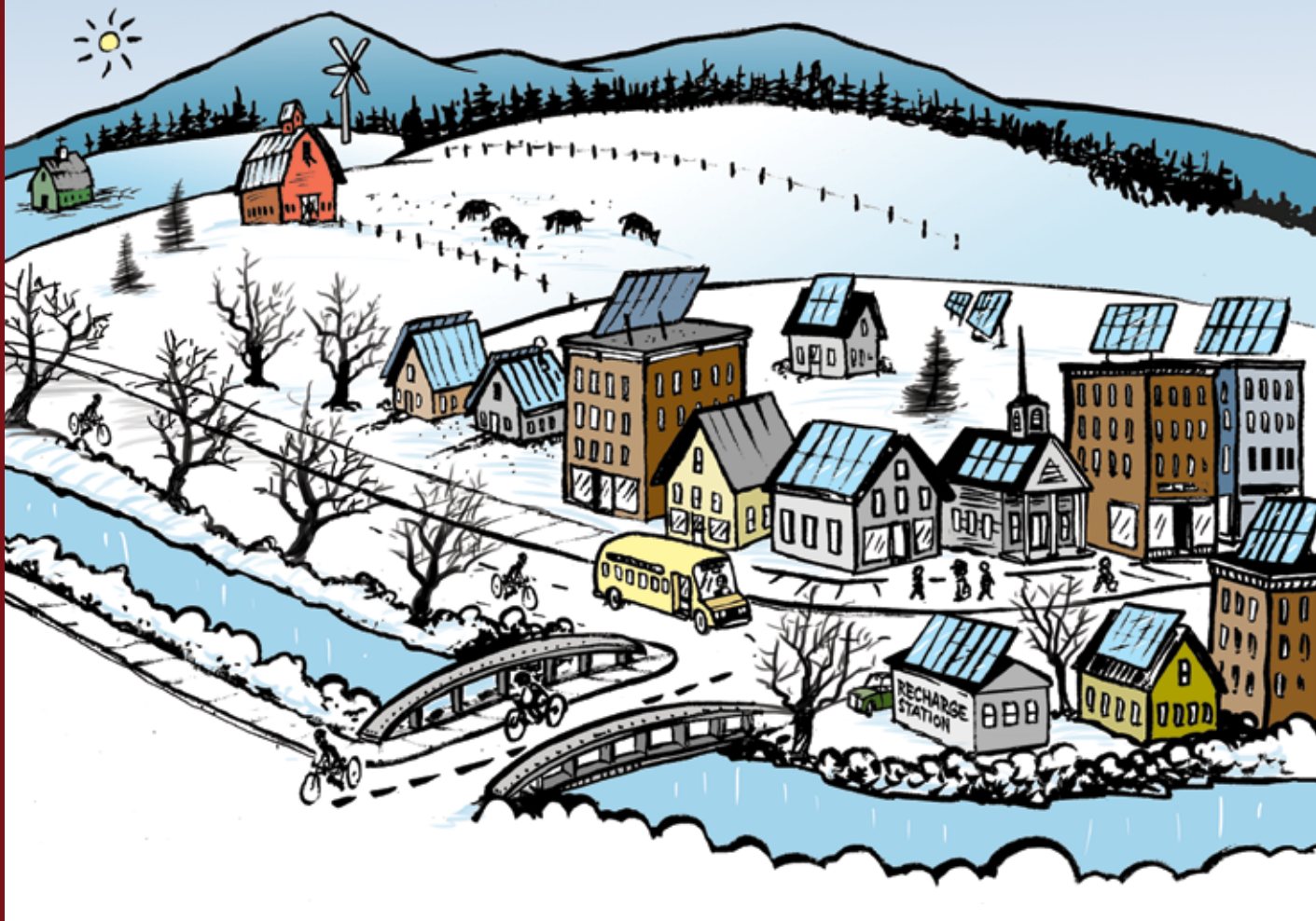


Vermont

Environmental Report

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Natural
Resources
Council, Inc.

Creating Vermont's Climate Economy



John Ewing, an Environmental Icon

On November 25, John Ewing, of Burlington, passed away from cancer at age 85.

John started his career as a lawyer specializing in zoning and municipal planning, before taking a position at the Bank of Vermont and working his way up the ladder to become President. Coinciding with his professional life, he became a vital part of his community and Vermont.

John served as the Chair of the Vermont Environmental Board from 1995–1998, and was appointed by Governor Howard Dean as a member of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board—of which he became the longest serving member in his 15 year tenure. He also helped found the Lake Champlain Land Trust and Winooski Valley Park District, and served on the board of Burlington Parks and Recreation for 12 years. And, most directly related to VNRC, John served as a catalyst for the merger between VNRC and Smart Growth Vermont (SGV) in 2011.

John founded SGV (initially the Vermont Forum on Sprawl) in 1997, along with Beth Humstone. In 2011, they decided that



Dorothy Weicker/Vermont Folklife Center

merging SGV into VNRC would best serve both organizations. Humstone, who refers to Ewing as a “Vermont treasure,” joined and eventually chaired VNRC’s board, while John joined VNRC as an advisory board member.

In 2012, VNRC awarded John with the Arthur Gibb Award for Individual Leadership. This annual award is presented to a Vermont resident who has made a lasting contribution to his or her community, region or state in advancing smart growth policies.

According to VNRC’s Executive Director Brian Shupe, “Perhaps better than anyone, John was able to articulate the interdependency of Vermont’s environment and economy. He understood that you can’t protect the natural environment without caring deeply about the built environment and how our communities grow and develop. He was able to act on his commitment to Vermont with an openness and respect for others that allowed him to build alliances between diverse interests and get things done. While John will be missed terribly, we will all benefit from his legacy for many years to come.”

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Through research, education, collaboration and advocacy, VNRC protects and enhances Vermont's natural environments, vibrant communities, productive working landscapes, rural character and unique sense of place, and prepares the state for future challenges and opportunities.

VNRC is the Vermont affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation.

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Taking Action to Make Progress



By Brian Shupe, Executive Director

Last month, nearly 250 local climate activists gathered at the 10th annual Vermont Community Energy & Climate Action (VECAN) Conference. This is a seminal annual event due to the passion for transitioning to a clean energy economy that attendees bring to the day, and the creativity and commitment that conference organizers put into making it a success – in particular VNRC's Energy & Climate Program Director Johanna Miller.

A highlight of the day was former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Gina McCarthy's keynote address. With a welcomed sense of humor, McCarthy laid out the devastation unfolding in Washington D.C. as the Trump administration dismantles not only the environmental and climate legacy of the Obama administration, but attempts to roll back 50 years of protections of our nation's air, water, public lands, and public health.

To that end, McCarthy made clear that protecting our natural resources and combating climate change is a public health issue, as well as an environmental one. It is also an economic issue. It is increasingly apparent that the inevitable transition away from fossil fuels presents a variety of economic opportunities for those individuals, businesses, and local and state governments who take advantage of them. Failure to transition, however, leaves us vulnerable to a volatile global market; one where the price of gas surged, almost overnight, because of climate-exacerbated Hurricane Harvey this fall.

The point is: We are in the midst of a historic transition regardless of the Trump administration's senseless attempts to slow it down. There is economic opportunity in climate action that may help our communities mitigate the economic, social, and environmental devastation wrought by a warming world. With the federal government's dereliction, state and local governments, businesses, and individuals are stepping up.

In Vermont, municipalities, businesses, and institutions are signing on to the Vermont Climate Pledge Coalition to make it known that we won't turn our backs on a healthy future. However, it's one thing to pledge support for a clean energy future, and it's another thing entirely to enact the policies and take the steps necessary to achieve it. This is especially true in Vermont as the Scott administration sends mixed signals on its commitment to clean energy and climate action.

Despite the uncertainty over whether Governor Scott – or even our state legislature – will follow through and advance solutions that will achieve Vermont's goal of 90 percent renewable energy by 2050, the folks who spent an entire Saturday in early December at the VECAN conference are taking action to make needed progress. Thankfully, they have a lot of company across the nation and, in doing so, they are taking advantage of the economic opportunity that comes with it.

There is economic opportunity in climate action that may help our communities mitigate the economic, social, and environmental devastation wrought by a warming world.



Vermont's Opportunity in Climate Action

In Vermont, we can easily pair outdoor recreation with clean energy solutions.

For more than 50 years, VNRC has been at the forefront of Vermont's efforts to protect our environment and communities. We have known from the start that Vermont's small, compact villages and towns surrounded by working lands, intact forests and clean waterways could enable our state to support a thriving local economy, increase adaptability, and help us weather all manner of storms.

That said, what we may not have counted on when we got our start in 1963 is the scale of the challenges we Vermonters now face. Climate change threatens much of what we hold dear – from the productivity of our farms, to the health of our families, to the integrity of our environment. What remains to be seen, however, is how we draw upon and bolster the ingenuity of our entrepreneurs, the dedication of our citizens, and the creativity of our leaders.

Addressing the impacts of climate change for Vermont will not come down to a single policy or approach; there is no silver bullet. But there is hope to be found in the coalescing of

ideas and partnerships that are creating what is being called the 'climate economy.' Built on the foundational belief that climate action, when done well, can build a more just, equitable, and prosperous future for everyone in our communities, Vermont's climate economy may provide the path forward Vermont needs to weather increasingly strong storms in these volatile times.

The Economy of the Future

"Business as usual is a looming economic and environmental disaster for Vermont," said Johanna Miller, VNRC's energy and climate program director. "There's an urgent need – and a real opportunity – to do something meaningful about climate change that invests in 21st century jobs to move our economy forward, protects public health, and helps insulate Vermonters from the volatility of imported fossil fuels. There's strong momentum, but there is also much more to do."

The momentum Miller references is the ways in which Vermont businesses and individuals are already thinking about

and responding to how we produce and use energy, leading the nation in solar jobs and energy efficiency improvements.

But, what is a climate economy and how do we support it? “It’s a process, really,” said Paul Costello, executive director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD). “The climate economy is not a singular sector, or even the collection of several sectors – it is the economy of the future. It is the nexus between energy, smart growth, wise resource use, working lands, and innovation in technology. Building on Vermont’s history of ingenuity, we can help make it possible for young and creative minds to turn the challenge of climate change into the greatest economic opportunity we have seen to date.”

Fortunately, many Vermonters and Vermont businesses are embracing the climate economy and recognizing the economic opportunity inherent in being on the cutting edge of innovation. This past September, more than 500 entrepreneurs, investors, public officials, and business leaders gathered in Burlington to explore the economic opportunity in the changing and uncertain world of climate change. The three-day Catalysts of the Climate Economy National Innovation Summit, organized by VCRD, was designed to position Vermont as a leader in the budding climate economy.

“The economy is the interface between us and our environment,” said Costello. “By re-creating that relationship, Vermont can become the hub of climate-focused rural economic innovation – what an incredible way to increase opportunity for all Vermonters! The decisions we make today, and the foundation we lay through policy, will be what fosters much of that change. VNRC is an organization that expertly pairs statesmanship and environmentalism, and that work will be essential to the emerging climate economy.”

Seizing this opportunity, however, will require a confluence of good policies, public support, and political will. To help create that needed foundation, VNRC and Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR) this past fall organized a series of five public forums entitled “Everyone’s Economic Opportunity in Climate Action.” The events provided an opportunity for business leaders, advocates for low-income Vermonters, and policy makers to share their perspectives on how all Vermonters can benefit from the climate economy, and to hear ideas from people across the state for building more equitable economic opportunities in their communities. Nearly 300 people came out to offer suggestions and share their stories of adapting to a warming world.

“It’s clear that Vermonters care deeply about taking climate action, and that they want that action to benefit all Vermont communities,” said VBSR’s Public Policy Manager Dan Barlow. “We’re in a shifting moment here in Vermont and in the country, and we need organizations like VNRC and VBSR to bring together diverse stakeholders and citizens, find common ground, and advocate for common sense solutions.”

There is a lot of work to be done to ensure that Vermont meets our ambitious climate and clean energy goals of an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and utilizing 90 percent renewable energy by 2050. However, the public comments offered at the panels VNRC co-hosted with VBSR – as well as those raised at the four public scoping sessions held by Governor Phil Scott’s Vermont Climate Action Commission, on which VNRC’s Miller serves – recognized this,



Nunez Electric & Solar

Vermont’s clean energy sector provides thousands of well-paying skilled jobs.

underscored the need for a diversity of solutions commensurate with the challenge, and hit on some recurring themes.

Smart, Clean Energy: Jobs, Efficiency, and Pricing Pollution

Our northern climate necessitates continued investment in energy efficiency and weatherization not just because it will keep our families warm, but because there are real savings for Vermonters’ wallets. Especially when those efforts are paired with conservation, Vermonters can reduce our state’s demand for electrical generation resulting in millions dollars of savings for residents and businesses as well as dramatically reduce the fossil fuels we import to heat our homes and buildings. Governor Phil Scott even declared Oct. 5, 2017 to be Energy Efficiency Day in recognition that reliable, affordable energy is vital to Vermont’s economic prosperity and that energy efficiency related jobs increased 24 percent over 2016. Continuing to implement clean energy policies and programs will boost Vermont’s economic opportunities and job creation while moving our state towards a sustainable future.

Efficiency and conservation efforts will only take us so far, however. Our state needs a multitude of programs and solutions that meet our energy efficiency and renewable energy goals – and our energy needs. For example, Vermont needs to continue the deployment of distributed renewable-energy generation around the state, while doing a better job using ‘smart grid’ technologies to manage diversified, decentralized electric generation. We need policies that promote cleaner electric generation and continued investment – because it’s not just about the environment, it’s also about building opportunities for skilled workers to be part of our state’s emerging climate economy. Nearly 20,000 Vermonters already work in the clean energy sector, making it possible for Vermonters to make a good living while also doing good by our planet.

To expand and nurture this thriving but still-nascent sector, there is a need to leverage private capital, redirect funds from existing sources and raise new revenue to accelerate the transition to clean energy. Putting a price on carbon pollution, which hundreds of Vermonters recommended to the Vermont Climate Action Commission, is pivotal to changing Vermont and the

nation's energy trajectory. Pricing the fossil fuels that are driving climate change and using the revenue to support clean-energy innovation and investments – while taking particular care to reduce the energy burden and costs paid disproportionately by the most vulnerable Vermonters – is a proven and effective policy that many Vermonters support. VNRC has partnered with low income allies, business leaders, environmental groups and others to explore carbon pricing for Vermont. *To learn more, read Johanna Miller's Putting a Price on Carbon article on page 5.*

Keeping Forests as Forests and Conserving Our Rural Character

Vermont is one of the most heavily forested states in the country, and forests are the backbone of our rural character. In addition to providing valuable habitat for wildlife, improved water quality, and ample amounts of delicious maple syrup and local wood products, our forests and natural areas have an important role to play in Vermont's climate economy.

Our forests also provide a rich array of important ecological functions that insulate communities from the effects of extreme weather events from climate change, such as flooding. According to the Gund Institute for Environment at the University of Vermont, every acre of forestland provides approximately \$318.50 worth of benefits for services like rainfall regulation and flood control. In addition, according to the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation, each acre of privately owned forestland in Vermont reduces the annual emissions of approximately 62 cars, and Vermont's forests remove an estimated 75,000 metric tons of carbon and 1,610 metric tons of other pollutants from the atmosphere each year – a function that would be worth close to \$16 million if we paid for these climate control services out-of-pocket.

As carbon markets become more attractive for forest landowners, part of our climate economy could include encouraging carbon storage through forest conservation and sustainable management to compensate landowners for their climate contribution. And there is an added economic benefit to keeping forests as forests: in Vermont, a healthy environment is directly tied to a healthy outdoor recreation economy. According to the Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation, direct spending at outdoor retailers and service providers (gear outlets, manufacturers, sales reps, guide services, marketing firms that specialize in outdoor recreation, etc.) as well as per trip expenditures (meals, gas, hotels, etc.) add up to a whopping \$2.5 billion annually in consumer spending.

Additionally, there is a growing awareness that the sustainable management of agricultural soils through organic and regenerative

agricultural practices is an important strategy for sequestering carbon. From our forests to our farms, Vermont can be a leader in developing innovative climate-focused approaches to management.

A 21st Century Transportation Sector

“Right now, the transportation sector is responsible for 47 percent of Vermont's greenhouse gas pollution,” notes VNRC Sustainable Communities Program Director Kate McCarthy. “Transportation also accounts for around 40 percent of our state's energy use – there is a lot of opportunity to realize benefits for the health of Vermonters and our environment by tackling this sector.”

In addition to the damage being done to air quality and the climate, too many Vermonters lack affordable, convenient, reliable transportation to schools, jobs, healthcare, and other services. Such access is essential for people's quality of life (at every stage of life), economic opportunity, and health, as well as the state's economy as a whole. Vermont's transportation sector is such a large piece of the pie in part because nearly all vehicles registered in the state are powered by fossil fuels. Moreover, our current transportation infrastructure is predominantly designed to support vehicular traffic – reducing opportunities for healthy, active transportation choices. With this convergence of need and opportunity, the time is right for communities, organizations, and leaders to work together to advance policies, plans, and programs that expand mobility choices for all Vermonters.

To that end, VNRC worked with several partners to form a new coalition: Transportation for Vermonters, or T4VT. VNRC's Kate McCarthy is serving as the Coalition's coordinator. One of their first actions was to participate in the November Vermont Climate and Energy Summit during which groups were asked to

submit pitches to Governor Scott's Climate Action Commission on high-impact ways Vermont can take action on Climate. T4VT proposed replacing inefficient diesel school or transit buses with electric buses proven to work well in cold climates. Currently, diesel transit buses get only 4.5 miles per gallon and emit diesel exhaust that is dangerous for children, drivers, and passersby.

Making investments in a variety of transportation options also helps households spend less on transportation. “Economically vulnerable Vermonters bear a disproportionate amount of transportation costs relative to their income and we're excited to be part of T4VT and to advocate for proven solutions that are good for Vermonters' health and for their pocketbooks,” noted Dan Hoxworth, executive director of Capstone Community Action. “By focusing on increasing the affordability, accessibility and efficiency of our



Amber Collett

whole transportation system, Vermont can set an example for other rural states to follow. In doing so, we can ensure that all Vermonters can successfully transition to a clean energy economy.” *For more on how transportation and land use planning play a role in Vermont’s climate economy, read McCarthy’s Localizing Our Climate Economy article on page 6.*

A Win-Win for Our Future

Implementing policies and programs to seize the economic opportunity in climate action has already paid off for Vermont, helping to grow one of the fastest sectors of our economy, putting people to work in energy-efficiency and renewable-energy jobs, and moving Vermont’s electric rates, on average,

Putting a Price on Pollution

By Johanna Miller, VNRC Energy & Climate Program Director

Vermont has necessarily ambitious statutory greenhouse gas reduction goals; goals that both the Governor and the Legislature have embraced. Unfortunately, we’re not anywhere close to meeting them.

Achieving Vermont’s goals will require policies that change the current trajectory. While not a singular solution, putting a price on carbon pollution is the most efficient, effective, tested policy that would help Vermont bend the curve on carbon pollution reduction. Enacting a price on carbon could change our stagnant trend line and allow Vermont to seize one of the biggest economic development opportunities facing our state, nation, and world.

Recently, a coalition led by business groups, academics, low-income advocates, VNRC, and others, has advanced an approach to carbon pricing that would build off Vermont’s unique assets. The proposal? Put a gradually rising price on carbon pollution in the heating and transportation sectors and use the dollars raised to dramatically reduce Vermonters electric bills – prioritizing and giving additional monthly financial relief to both low-income and rural Vermonters.

The plan – called Economy Strengthening Strategic Energy eXchange, or ESSEX – would deliver Vermonters clean electricity at the lowest cost in the region. Every Vermonter would benefit by seeing significant savings through a climate credit applied monthly on every electric bill.

The proposal would start the pollution fee low, at just five dollars per ton of CO₂. Why? Because \$5 is roughly equivalent to the price a ton of carbon pollution has been selling for through the electric-sector’s Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) program, in which Vermont and other New England states participate. Over the next eight years, the price would rise by five dollars per year until it reaches \$40, meeting what the Obama administration EPA roughly calculated to be the “social cost of carbon.” Additionally, \$40 per ton is the rate

that carbon pricing legislation in neighboring Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut is driving towards.

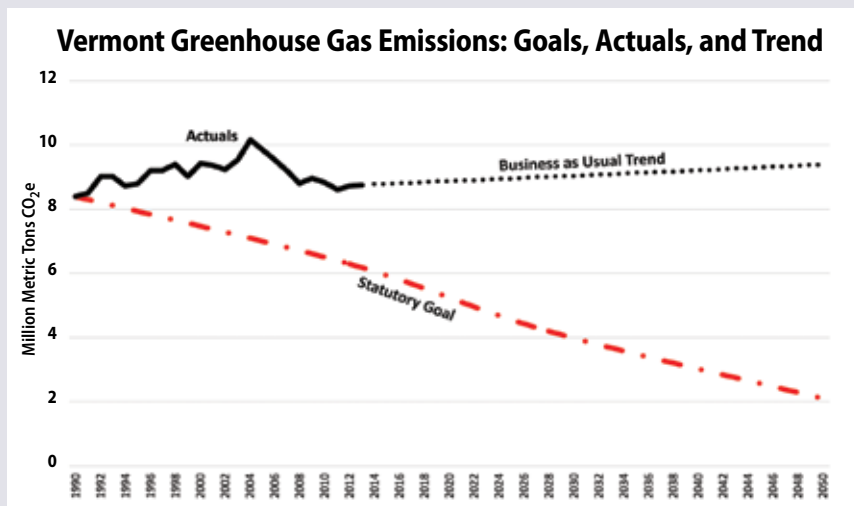
Perhaps most importantly, the ESSEX plan recognizes and responds to the rural nature of our state and prioritizes the most vulnerable, delivering both low income and rural Vermonters additional savings through two specific credit lines on their monthly bill, making Vermont electric rates the lowest in New England.

The ESSEX plan also would work well for Vermont because it builds off our state’s unique and existing low-carbon electricity portfolio. In fact, a big reason the ESSEX plan would be so successful in cutting carbon pollution is that Vermont’s electricity is some of the cleanest in the nation and it is only getting cleaner. Vermont’s utilities have been leading the nation in helping their customers access clean electricity and more renewably powered heating and mobility options, like cold climate heat pumps and electric vehicles. ESSEX would build from and accelerate our state’s clean electricity trajectory, opening up more opportunities for everyone.

If Vermont is serious about the obligation and opportunity to act on climate – and there is consensus on that from the Governor down to the grassroots – then policies that actually make meaningful progress are required. ESSEX is intended to do just that, taking advantage of our state’s unique advantages and helping ensure all Vermonters can participate in the clean energy transition. The policy should be fairly and fully examined through an independent economic analysis, crafted to ensure an affordable, equitable but essential transition away from polluting fossil fuels and combined with other policies

to meet our goals. Otherwise, as the saying goes, “vision without execution is just hallucination.”

To learn more about this plan and get into the details, contact VNRC’s Johanna Miller at 802-223-2328 ext. 112 or jmiller@vnrc.org or visit www.energyindependentvt.org.



from the second highest in the region to the second lowest.

Vermont has a real opportunity to build on that success, attracting and keeping skilled labor, and making Vermont a more affordable and equitable place for families now – and into the future. Seizing on that climate economy opportunity, however, will require an all-in approach, hard work, and collaboration among different issues and interests.

“One of VNRC’s greatest assets is their ability to bring diverse stakeholders together and find common ground,” said Chad Farrell, founder and CEO of Encore Renewable Energy and VNRC board member. “Few groups have such a long and respected legacy of convening conversations that lead to tangible

results. The rapidly advancing climate economy provides the greatest triple bottom line opportunity of our lifetime, and I’m excited to see where VNRC’s work will take us in this new era.”

Across Vermont there is broad consensus around meeting Vermont’s energy and climate goals. Moving beyond rhetoric to actually meeting them, however – through strong, diverse policies, public support and political will – won’t be easy, especially considering how far short we are falling today. VNRC will be at the State House, in communities across the state, at the Vermont Climate Action Commission table and, we hope, working with you, to put Vermont on the leading edge of the climate economy of the future. 🌱

Localizing Our Climate Economy

By Kate McCarthy, VNRC Sustainable Communities Program Director

As an environmental advocate, part of what keeps me motivated is the opportunity we have in Vermont to build strong communities and a vibrant economy. While technology and innovations will certainly be a major part of the new climate economy, another essential ingredient will be how we use one of our most important resources: land.

Many connections between the climate economy and land use are clear: Ensuring that land is available for farming and forestry, for example, means we can source food and fuel locally, reduce the energy and expense of transporting things we need, and retain jobs and dollars in local communities.

We also know that Vermont’s compact villages and downtowns provide options for walking, biking, and transit which reduces household expenses – a situation where what’s good for our climate is also good for our wallets. That is no small thing in a state where we spend a high percentage of our income on transportation. Spending just 15 percent of household income on transportation is considered affordable, but even in relatively compact Chittenden County the typical household spends about 21 percent of its income on transportation. In Grand Isle County, the estimate is closer to 26 percent.¹

Land use patterns may not feel terribly innovative, but our choices about where to live, work, and grow our food, will be fundamental in supporting the economy of the future. Beyond food, fuel, and transportation, there are several other ways compact development supports the climate economy. This past June at the Vermont Downtown and Historic Preservation Conference, Joe Minicozzi, of the consulting firm Urban3, offered one perspective. His talk, “The Dollars and Sense of Land Use,” showed the ‘productivity’ per acre of development in different locations – in terms of property tax, sales tax, and jobs. Just as you’d compare miles per gallon



when buying a car, he argued, you should compare apples and apples when it comes to development.

Minicozzi compared the Asheville Walmart, on 34 acres, with a downtown building on 0.19 acres. The downtown building vastly outperformed the Walmart in terms of productivity per acre. For example, taking into account both property and sales tax revenue, the Walmart brought about \$50,800/acre to the city, while the downtown building yielded \$330,000/acre.²

While the Walmart property brought in more total taxes, its other costs – ones we often don’t account for – included pollution from driving and the loss of undeveloped land. The compact location, on the other hand, was near

housing, used land more efficiently, and was more cost effective for the community to serve with roads, water, and sewer. In other words, developments that reduced climate impacts are also good for a community’s bottom line.

Jon Anderson of the Incremental Development Alliance, who presented at the AARP/VNRC Smart Growth Summit this past June, offered a variation on this theme. He argued that cultivating an ‘ecosystem’ to support small scale developers – including a variety of financing options and updated municipal rules – would yield buildings that contributed to a strong sense of place, a high value per acre, and local ownership. The result would be a robust, ‘anti-fragile’ development pattern of adaptable buildings reinforcing existing communities – making them more resilient to the challenges and open to the opportunities of the climate economy.

1 Based on research by VNRC, VEIC, AARP, NRPC, CCRPC, and CVOEO.

2 Minicozzi, J. as stated at the Vermont Downtown and Historic Preservation Conference. Available at <http://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/events/conference>.

News & Notes

VNRC Executive Director Brian Shupe serving as advisor to Act 250 Commission

Act 250, Vermont's landmark land use law, is nearing its 50th anniversary. A six member commission has been established to review the Act's development rules in light of the current science and issues that have emerged for Vermont since 1970, such as climate change. The Commission will consider changes to Act 250 that increase development density in designated areas which simultaneously provides greater protection for natural resources. VNRC Executive Director Brian Shupe is serving as an advisor to the Commission, and recently presented on the history and impact of Act 250. As the Commission's work advances, we are committed to keeping VNRC members and supporters updated about the group's work and avenues for public engagement.

A fond farewell – thank you, Meredith!

In February 2016, VNRC was pleased to hire Meredith Naughton as our Membership and Database Coordinator. Meredith's dedication, creativity, and tireless efforts have been integral to our success as an organization during her time with VNRC. We wish her all the best as she heads to the island of St. John to participate in hurricane relief work before hopefully enrolling in the Field Naturalist graduate program at UVM.



Meredith Naughton

Broad new transportation coalition launches: Transportation for Vermonters (T4VT)

A diverse group of organizations, businesses, and institutions recently announced the formation of a new coalition to advocate for a more sustainable, accessible, and affordable transportation system in Vermont. "Transportation for Vermonters, or T4VT, is unique in Vermont because our focus is on advancing transportation programs and investments that go beyond getting from point A to point B. Transportation is central to improving air quality, health, affordability, and economic vitality, as well as reducing greenhouse gas pollution," said VNRC Sustainable Communities Director Kate McCarthy, who will be coordinator of the T4VT coalition.

Clean Water Day: February 2018

We all saw the headlines this year: blue-green algae closed beaches, chemical contamination of drinking water wells, and a continued need for a stable, dedicated, and long-term funding strategy to protect our vital waterways and groundwater. It's clear: Lawmakers need to hear from you! Join us in February for an overview of what's happening in the state on clean water, a brief training on how to be a powerful voice in support of clean



Blueberry Lake

Amber Collett

water, and a press event and meetings with legislators at the State House to encourage Vermont to take bold, substantive action to protect and enhance our waters.

Welcome, Aleksander – our 2018 legislative intern!

VNRC is excited to welcome Aleksander Taylor to our office this winter as our 2018 legislative intern! He will assist VNRC and our partner, Vermont Conservation Voters, in tracking legislation moving through the State House during the 2018 legislative year (January through early May). Be on the lookout for Legislative Bulletins arriving in your email inbox each week with updates about our legislative work and how you can help Vermont move forward-looking environmental legislation that benefits all Vermonters.

VCV releases 2018 Environmental Common Agenda of Legislative Priorities

In January, Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV) released the 2018 Environmental Common Agenda, which highlights the top legislative priorities of the environmental community for the current year. This year, the most pressing issues include: authorizing long-term funding for clean water, implementing improved protections for Vermonters from toxic chemicals, enacting policies to better maintain intact forests, and continued action on climate change — including carbon pricing solutions that will help all Vermonters transition to clean energy solutions. Find the full 2018 Environmental Common Agenda at: VermontConservationVoters.org.

Welcome Colin Keegan to the VNRC Team

We're excited to welcome Colin Keegan to the VNRC team as our new Office Associate. Colin brings with him a background in both nonprofit administration and environmental policy work. He recently moved to Vermont from New Jersey and has been working with the Burlington Kids Afterschool Program. Welcome to the team, Colin – we're excited to have you on board!

Program Updates

Below is a brief rundown of VNRC's programs, a few recent highlights of our work, and program director contact information.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE ACTION PROGRAM

Works to advance conservation, efficiency, renewable energy, and transportation solutions that reduce fossil fuel usage and save Vermonters money.

- Successfully hosted the 10th annual Vermont Energy & Climate Action Network conference keynoted by Gina McCarthy, former EPA Administrator.
- Launched the Economy Strengthening Strategic Energy eXchange (ESSEX) plan with partners in the Energy Independent Vermont coalition; a policy that would reduce Vermont's greenhouse gas emissions, slash electric bills, and accelerate our transition to clean, renewable heating and transportation options.
- Serving on the Vermont Climate Action Commission, helping to identify concrete solutions to reduce Vermont's greenhouse gas emissions and achieve our comprehensive energy and climate change goals.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR:
Johanna Miller, jmiller@vnrc.org



FOREST AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM

Works to maintain and enhance the ecological and economic vitality of Vermont's forests with the overarching goal of keeping forests as forests to maintain their overall integrity.

- Developed guidance for towns and regional planning commissions to implement land use planning requirements to maintain forest blocks and habitat connectivity. VNRC supported these requirements as part of Act 171, a comprehensive piece of legislation aimed at maintaining the integrity of forests.
- Partnered with landowners, foresters, conservationists, hunters and anglers, and affordable housing activists to submit comments to the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative.
- Presented at a conference in New Hampshire to promote land use planning strategies to maintain forest and wildlife resources at the regional/landscape level across multiple towns.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR:
Jamey Fidel, jfidel@vnrc.org



SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

Works to protect and promote Vermont's traditional development patterns of compact settlements – with options for transportation, housing, and employment – surrounded by farms, forests, and unique natural areas.

- Coordinated the T4VT coalition's work to launch the coalition, present to the Joint Energy Committee, and deliver a pitch at the Energy and Climate Summit on electrifying school and transit buses.
- Presented with AARP on the Smart Growth Summit at the Vermont Development Conference, and solicited developers' opinions about smart growth options in Vermont.
- Attended the Smart Growth Caucus in Washington, D.C., which included peer learning with smart growth leaders from across the U.S. and visited Congressman Welch's office to advocate for sustainable housing and transportation policy.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR:
Kate McCarthy, kmccarthy@vnrc.org



WATER PROGRAM

Aims to protect and enhance the quality of Vermont's streams, rivers, lakes and ponds, wetlands, and groundwater.

- Pushed back against a Scott Administration report which failed to recommend a long term funding source to restore and maintain the quality of Vermont's waters. VNRC is working to ensure that a proposal to fund the long term management of Vermont's public waters is a top priority this year.
- Continued to advocate for passage of S.103, a bill that will address the harm toxic pollutants cause to public health and environment.
- Continued to move our petition to designate the LaPlatte River Marsh Wetland a Class 1 wetland; advocated to limit the use of high speed boating on Great Hosmer Pond in Craftsbury; and advanced measures that safeguard Vermont's public trust waters.

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Member Profile

VNRC Member Profile: Kelly Coleman

Growing up in Warren, Kelly Coleman always had a strong affinity for Vermont lands. Like many young people, Kelly left Vermont to attend college and explore the world. But when she moved back to Vermont in 2008 and started a family, she knew she wanted to re-engage with the work being done to protect and enhance Vermont's natural environment. And we're lucky she did – Kelly is a thoughtful and impactful leader, and was recently elected Chair of the VNRC board. VNRC's Amber Collett talked with Kelly about her work with VNRC, her hopes for the organization, and her vision for Vermont's future. The following is a condensed version of their conversation.

You have a lot on your plate. Why did you choose to get involved as a member and supporter of VNRC?

It's true, my life is full – at the time I joined VNRC's board, I had a less-than-one-year old and a three-year old. I was impressed with the work VNRC was doing and it felt deeply meaningful to me. The work and the model spoke to me, as well as the opportunity to get involved at a statewide level. VNRC pulls in a lot of people who truly care about the environment, and who are passionate, thoughtful, and careful. Like many with young families, I don't have a lot of spare time and I want to make sure the time I have is used doing important work. Because VNRC has been working on these issues for more than 50 years and understands them from a policy and scientific perspective, their voice at the statehouse is critical. VNRC is doing incredibly important work and having a real impact – it's a good way to plug in with even a small amount of time to contribute to a much bigger effort.

Having grown up in Vermont, how have you seen the state change and what are your hopes for the future?

The eye-catching thing for me is the evolving place agriculture has taken up in the Vermont economy and ethos. I remember passing agricultural fields when I grew up, and when I pass those same places, they are still largely in agriculture. We've been able to maintain our working landscapes and intact forests, and I think that makes Vermont unique. Farmers are stewards of large parts of Vermont's landscape, and they have a role to play in not only producing food, but being on the cutting edge of how agriculture can encourage carbon sequestration. Good and healthy soils sequester more carbon, and I believe there is real opportunity in that work. Moreover, small farms are selling more diversified products directly to their neighbors in ways that didn't exist when I was growing up. The economy has localized and that is really exciting!

In the future, I see Vermont being a real leader in demonstrating responsible action for our environment in a way that works for everyone. I believe Vermont can take the lead on thinking about putting a price on carbon pollution, for example, and addressing some of the water quality issues we've faced in recent years. I think of VNRC as playing a key and important role as a convener of groups that have seemingly disparate but overlapping interests. With the backing of community members – like those of us on the board, and our members – talking to our legislators and our neighbors, together we can really move the agenda forward.

How has VNRC's work affected your life?

Two years ago we finished insulating our house, and put on solar panels and cold climate heat pumps. We were able to do that because the state had a policy that promoted individuals taking action to improve their efficiency. VNRC creates opportunities like that through our work at the legislature and by creating spaces within local communities for individuals to make change. Being able to make those investments in my home was a tangible way for me to feel like I was making a difference, that I was contributing to the world I wanted to see. I couldn't have done that without the years of legwork VNRC had done. Their work is not always up front and center, but it's important.

We just had our board-staff retreat where you were elected board chair – what are you most excited about accomplishing in that position?

What I see when I'm sitting at the table with VNRC is a bunch of really hard working, thoughtful, and smart people who are doing the legwork so that I, as a citizen of Vermont, will be able to live a healthy life. I really love how VNRC has a wealth of program areas that work together. We're not thinking about water in isolation, or forests in isolation, or energy use in isolation. We look at the whole and we know that people are a part of that whole, as can be seen in the work of the Sustainable Communities program. We're working together to address the really big challenges for Vermont's environment. As board chair, it is my goal to make sure that VNRC staff continue to have the support they need to do this incredibly important work into the future.



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Save the Date: Wild & Scenic Film Festival, April 6, 2018

Learn about actions that communities around the globe are taking to combat climate change, and see what your neighbors throughout New England are doing about protecting their waters, forests, and communities. Join us for award-winning films that will inspire outdoor enthusiasts and activists alike. Don't miss the 10th annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival, set for Friday, April 6, 2018 at Main Street Landing Film House in Burlington. More information about ticketing and the special 10th anniversary after-party coming soon!



Remember:
VNRC is a membership organization and we count on members for support!
Please join us!

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