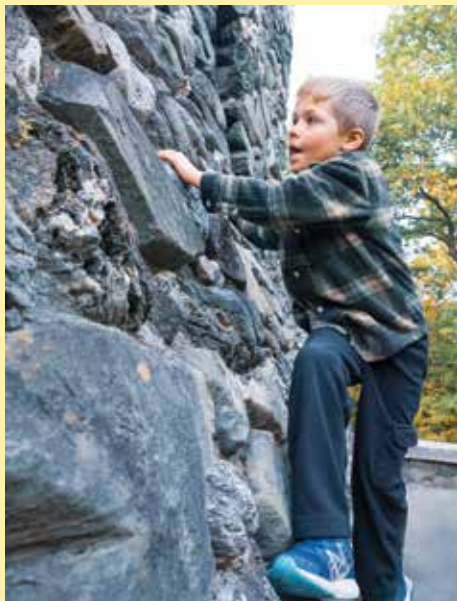


Vermont

Environmental Report



Building Smart Growth Communities for All Ages



Member Profile

John Adams and Carolyn Wesley

Why are you members of VNRC?

We value that VNRC sees the big picture when it comes to protecting Vermont's environment, especially recognizing the role of vibrant and sustainable communities.

How is your concern for the environment reflected in your professional work?

John works to bring people the information they need to understand and be good stewards of our natural world at the Vermont Center for Geographic Information. Carolyn recently started a new role at the Energy Action Network, helping partners work better together in our shared efforts to reach Vermont's renewable energy goals.

Has your outlook on the future of Vermont's environment and communities changed since you became parents?

It's a cliché that it takes a village to raise a child, but having caring friends, neighbors, and businesses in close proximity, as well as access to the natural world, has improved our health and well-being as a family. In the challenging and often isolating days of early parenting, we can take an evening walk and run into half a dozen friends and acquaintances who know our daughter's name. And we have lulled her to sleep with the natural white noise of the North Branch of the Winooski!



John Adams and Carolyn Wesley live in downtown Montpelier with their infant daughter Azalea.

You're a single-car household. What changes do you think or wish communities could make to encourage more families to follow suit?

We are able to make it work with one car because we were able to find affordable housing within walking distance of our downtown and public transportation. We got to a point where it didn't make economic sense to maintain the second car that was getting so little use.

If we want to reduce the environmental impact of motor vehicle use in Vermont, we need to help make the economics easier for families, starting with increasing housing in and around our downtowns and centers and continuing to ensure those downtowns are vibrant places where people want to live.

What else do you value about living downtown?

When you pick a place to live, you pick a daily schedule; in Montpelier we are never more than a 15-minute walk from work, groceries, gelato, beer, historic sites, recreational trails, and amazing friends. In fact, we walked to our wedding in downtown Montpelier!



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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.

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The Inside Word

The Whole Story



By Brian Shupe, Executive Director

Conversations about growth and change in Vermont, including those about our state's demographic trends, are often loaded with negativity. There's considerable anxiety over how to manage our aging population and replenish a shrinking workforce. We hear phrases like "brain drain" and "the greying of Vermont." But that's not the whole story.

First of all, while the narrative goes that so many young Vermonters leave the state for good, we know that many young people move back to Vermont to put down roots after spending

time exploring other places.

I feel fortunate that several of VNRC's staff, all under the age of 35, recently moved to – or back home to – Vermont specifically for greater access to the outdoors, walkable communities, a culture of sustainability, and the opportunity to be involved with issues that are important to their lives and our future.

Moreover, Vermonters of all ages have similar wants and needs. Both the aging adults who make up a growing segment of our population, and young adults building their careers and families, are increasingly attracted to walkable, vibrant communities. Vermont already has these, and can build on them. We have a major opportunity to create environments that people in key demographics are looking for. (More on this in the main article.)

This year, with AARP Vermont, VNRC updated the Smart Growth Report Card, which evaluates whether state investments in infrastructure, transportation, economic development, and affordable housing support smart growth or encourage sprawl. The analysis provides perspective and useful insights on where we're headed when it comes to developing our communities in ways that nurture our diverse and changing population, while protecting Vermont's open land and natural resources. You'll find a preview of the results of our 2019 Report Card update on pages 7-8.

As we think of our opportunities, we cannot rest on our laurels – whether those laurels be our reputation as a "green" state, a "progressive" state, a beautiful historic place, or anything else. Like other rural places facing very real challenges, we need creative solutions for fostering a sustainable economy and providing housing and transportation choices for Vermonters of all ages and abilities.

Read on for ideas about building smart growth communities. In addition to concrete steps you can take to improve your town, we offer a focus on diverse types of housing, and a case study in placemaking out of Bethel, Vermont. We hope you'll be inspired by the stories and tips we provide.

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Smart Growth Communities for All Ages



What does the redevelopment of the Putnam Block in downtown Bennington have to do with Vermont's changing demographics? The historic block is undergoing a dramatic revitalization that will renovate three historic buildings and create housing, retail, and office space within Bennington's walkable core ("Diversity and Walkability Benefit Everyone!" touts the project's website). Phase one of the project includes thirty mixed-income apartments and expects to attract 50 new residents to the downtown, and includes an option targeted at downsizing older adults, complete with support services if needed.

Jim Brown, president and CEO of the Bank of Bennington, who has helped lead the push for the redevelopment, said in a press release at groundbreaking: "Our businesses struggled to not only attract workers but retain the ones they had. It became obvious to us that the only way to reverse our negative trend was to be bold and invest in ourselves – the community and its future generations – by re-imagining the downtown."

The revitalization of the Putnam Block is a community-led development that exemplifies how smart growth can entice workers and residents of all ages to an area while also providing opportunity for the people who already live and work there.

Smart growth is an approach to land use that prioritizes compact development and provides a range of housing and transportation choices while protecting environmental, natural, and historic assets.

This collaborative solution is an important one given the amount of conversation (and sometimes, hand wringing) about Vermont's future – specifically, how to support aging Vermonters while attracting younger residents to replenish our population and workforce.

In Vermont, one in four residents will be over 65 by 2025. In 2018 our median age, 42.9, was the third highest in the nation. Meanwhile, in 2017 the number of Vermont births was at a 160-year low, raising questions about how to "deal with" the aging of the state and its need for a larger workforce.

Unfortunately, in this public conversation, few seem to acknowledge that these goals are actually complementary, not at odds, and that there are opportunities for our communities inherent in addressing these changes. People of all ages have similar wants and needs from their communities. In one survey, baby boomers (born roughly between 1946 and 1964) and millennials (born in the eighties through the mid-nineties) reported they would trade off a shorter commute for a smaller home.¹ Both groups value safe, walkable neighborhoods; a complete range of services nearby, including

¹ National Association of Realtors, 2017: *2017 Community Preference Survey*

health care and supermarkets; an opportunity for civic engagement; adequate transportation options; and affordable housing.²

All of these characteristics are attributes of smart growth, an approach to land use that prioritizes compact development and provides a range of housing and transportation choices while protecting environmental, natural, and historic assets. Many of Vermont's communities, small and large, already have smart growth features that can enable independence and connectivity for aging adults in rural states such as Vermont. That same range of housing types and transportation choices, not to mention places that are walkable and have space for interacting, can also help retain and attract families and young professionals to our "greying" Green Mountain State. (Find more information about smart growth in the inset.)

A focus on housing

A key smart growth principle entails providing residents with a range of housing options. Well-designed, high-quality housing at a variety of price points in our downtowns and villages – where stores, services, and jobs are closer together – makes it easier to walk or take transit and fosters opportunities for social and civic engagement. Downtown and village housing also provide an important alternative to more land-consumptive development on farm and forest land, not to mention a potentially appealing option for older Vermonters, who may wish to downsize while remaining independent in a location that provides transportation options.³

AARP reports that most Americans age 65 and up will outlive their ability to drive safely by as many as ten years. Since most seniors nationwide, but especially in Vermont, live in areas that lack public transportation options, "not driving means not being able to get to the doctor, go grocery shopping, visit friends, and participate in other activities around the home."⁴ Those who become homebound run the risk of suffering from isolation. "When older adults are forced to stop driving, to hang up their keys, the majority of them don't know what to do," says Kelly Stoddard Poor, Director of Outreach at AARP Vermont.

It should come as no surprise, then, that six out of ten Americans surveyed by the National Association of Realtors in 2017 said they would spend more money to live in a community where they could walk to parks, services, and restaurants.⁵ Housing options in locations where residents are not required to have a car, or where households can have just one car, frees up resources otherwise spent on personal transportation.

And transportation affordability is an important issue, particularly in a rural state with an aging population that may be on fixed incomes. Research by VNRC and partners modeled transportation costs as a percent of income for Northwest Vermont, and found that even in our most compactly developed communities – Burlington and Winooski – households were still spending an estimated 17% of income on transportation (15% is considered the "affordability" threshold for transportation). Chittenden County-wide, the estimated percentage of income spent on transportation is high at 21%, but still lower than the more rural Franklin (24.4%) and Grand Isle (26%) Counties.⁶

Spending more than 45% of income on housing and transportation is considered unaffordable, so spending less on transportation by finding a walkable, bus-able place to live is one way to reduce costs.⁷ However, for reasons ranging from

lack of wastewater infrastructure to outdated zoning to the complexity of renovating older buildings, dwellings within walking proximity to amenities are hard to find. "Many adults in Vermont want to downsize, but they have nowhere to move," says Stoddard Poor.

Rethinking home

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and co-housing offer potential solutions. Also known as in-law suites or garage apartments, ADUs are small, self-contained residences with their own kitchen or kitchenette, bathroom, and living/sleeping area, that share a single-family lot with a larger primary dwelling.⁸ ADUs allow older adults to age in their existing homes with room for live-in care, or for families with children to live alongside aging parents or grandparents, achieving childcare and eldercare in one. ADUs are also amenable to single adults seeking a smaller living space, and they allow homeowners to bring in rental income.

In co-housing arrangements, residents have their own homes but enjoy access to common areas. Burlington Co-Housing in Burlington, Vermont optimizes its five acres with 32 diverse residential units (apartments, townhouses, and single-family homes) into six energy-efficient buildings. Residents can bike, walk, take public transit, or share car trips to nearby downtown Burlington, and take advantage of a nature preserve just steps away. Bristol Village Cohousing in Bristol, Vermont, another smart growth exemplar, equally offers a diverse set of Vermonters the flexibility to live comfortably at all stages of life, offering fourteen energy-efficient units with solar energy, access to a common house, and a central location in walking distance to daily needs in downtown Bristol.

Co-housing is an innovative way to provide people of all ages with the space they need, be they older retirees or families with children, while ADUs increase choice by adding new options to existing homes. Both arrangements provide flexibility to the status quo of American housing. Single-family homes, which most of our communities were zoned for at the expense of multi-family housing, were built with nuclear families in mind: two parents and multiple children. Yet only 20% of today's households are structured this way. Adults living alone account for nearly 30% of American households, and 27% of children live with a single parent, compared to 9% of children in 1960.⁹

With more than 80 percent of the nation's apartments and houses containing two, three or four bedrooms, American housing no longer fully reflects the realities of our changing culture and demographics.¹⁰ Even if we ignore these stark

2 American Planning Association, 2011: *Multigenerational Planning: Using Smart Growth and Universal Design to Link the Needs of Children and the Aging Population*

3 Smart Growth Report Card, 2019

4 AARP, 2018: *Where We Stand: Driving Toward the Future*

5 National Association of Realtors, 2017: *2017 Community Preference Survey*

6 2015 Housing and Transportation Research: VNRC, AARP-VT, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity's Fair Housing Project, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, Northwest Regional Planning Commission, Vermont Energy Investment Corporation.

7 VNRC, 2016: *Vermont Environmental Report: Building on the Past to Create Vermont's Transportation Future*

8 AARP, 2019: *The ABCs of ADUs*

9 AARP, 2019: *Making Room: Housing for a Changing America*

10 ibid



Bethel Revitalization Initiative and Team Better Block

Downtown Bethel, Better Block 2016.

societal shifts, there is an inherent tension in the fact that most houses in America were built solely with younger adults in mind, and not for the older adults they would all one day become. “Most American housing built since the 1940s was designed to accommodate people whose families are growing, but not for the same people once their children grow and they need to downsize,” says Kate McCarthy, Sustainable Communities Program Director at VNRC.

Despite this, most Americans want to “age in place,” or “in community,” or live in their homes and communities safely, affordably, and independently as they get older. The baby boomers are living and working longer than their parents did, and they want to stay put. A 2018 study by AARP found that 76% of Americans age 50 and older would prefer to remain in their current residence, and 77% would like to live in their current community as long as possible.¹¹ Rural adults were more likely to say they want to stay in their community or current home for as long as possible.¹²

Creating new housing in smart growth locations with an eye towards universal design – with features like zero-step entryways, wide doorways, and at least a half-bathroom on the first floor – not only helps older Americans “age in place” more safely by making homes easier to move around in. “It works for people with differing physical abilities. It works for the busy parent who needs to bring in a stroller and groceries,” says Stoddard Poor. It works for everyone.

Placemaking: Spotlight on Bethel

Smart growth is about more than just buildings – it’s also about the spaces in between. And it’s about more than just “growth.” Even towns without a growing population, and which

Smart growth is about more than just buildings – it’s also about the spaces in between.

are not expecting an influx of new residents or workers, can use smart growth approaches to be purposeful about any development that does occur. One aspect of this, placemaking, pays particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and uses them to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces.¹³

Consider what is happening in Bethel, Vermont. In 2016 Better Block—an organization that allows “rapid prototyping in the service of creative placemaking”—worked with the Bethel Revitalization Initiative, AARP Vermont, and the Town of Bethel to implement significant temporary changes to Main Street. These included a multipurpose “blue” lane for bikes and other non-car vehicles; pedestrian bulbouts to improve street-crossing safety; pop-up shops in vacant storefronts; pocket parks; and much more. The commuter transit provider, formerly transporting passengers only to and from other towns, even piloted a local route to go through Bethel itself.

Bethel’s experimental weekend had big results. Business owners, catalyzed by the success of the pop-ups, opened up permanent shops in previously-vacant storefronts. Bulbouts at two crosswalks reduced traffic speeds from an average of 27 mph before Better Block to 15 mph during the event, and measurably dropped the noise level. Their success drove AARP Vermont to fund a bulbout pilot program two years later. These temporary, movable rubber features continue to encourage downtown pedestrian access in the summer months by slowing down traffic and improving visibility – at no cost to the Town of

11 AARP, 2018: *2018 Home and Community Preferences Survey*

12 *ibid*

13 Project for Public Spaces: *What Is Placemaking?*

Bethel.

Lylee Rauch-Kacenski is a member of the Bethel Revitalization Initiative (BRI) and has been one of the actors in Bethel's self-improvement journey. She cites Better Block as a low-stakes way to pilot change, and explains the value of quick improvements in giving residents a visual and visceral idea of what it can look like to have a vibrant downtown, "without scaring anyone away." Like any good placemaking effort, the Better Block Project generated social capital alongside the physical changes – which was part of the community's long recovery from devastation in the wake of Tropical Storm Irene. But the work didn't begin there.

During a community festival in 2013, the organization asked people of all ages to imagine what they wanted and needed from Bethel. Someone wrote "BU" on a flip board of suggestions. Nobody knew what to make of it, but they came together to create it anyway. Later that year, Bethel University (BU) was born: a pop-up learning experience that allows anyone to teach or take "courses" for free, during the month of March each year.

Since its first annual "semester," Bethel University has educated community members of all ages on everything from permaculture to vehicle maintenance; tofu preparation to sign language. In five years, the project has grown from a tight-knit experiment among Bethel residents to a region-wide attraction



Bethel Revitalization Initiative

Participants in a "Little Library" building workshop at the Arnold Block.

that draws more than 1,000 participants yearly from across Vermont and New England.

Bethel University holds courses at Town Hall, the school, the library, churches, and the Bethel Village Sandwich Shop, drawing participants to Bethel's walkable downtown core: a great example of using community assets more fully, while giving people of all generations a place to connect. It also holds organizational meetings and some classes at the Arnold Block, a community space in downtown Bethel that Rauch-Kacenski co-owns with her wife Lindley Brainard and another couple, Lisa and Tom Warhol.

Since the four Bethel residents bought the historic building

What is Smart Growth?

Smart Growth is a pattern of land development that creates compact, walkable, transit-accessible communities with a range of housing opportunities and choices. Smart growth uses land efficiently, shaping change in a way that preserves our working lands and natural areas. In Vermont, it builds on and maintains the state's traditional settlement pattern of higher-density community centers surrounded by open space and critical environmental areas.

Smart growth operates on the premise that communities do not just "end up" a certain way; they make deliberate decisions that influence how they grow. Consider an imaginary town in Vermont – let's call it Greenmount – that wishes to accommodate a changing population by developing new housing and commercial opportunities.

Greenmount could

encourage developers to build new single-family homes a few miles outside town and place low-density commercial centers and shops along the highway. This growth pattern is known as sprawl. It fragments open spaces, has a "scattered" appearance, and requires residents to have a car to meet basic needs.

Conversely, Greenmount could adhere to smart growth principles by developing multi-purpose housing and businesses within its village or downtown area, where residents are

able to walk or bike (or skateboard) to services, and access public transportation.

Smart growth in Vermont recognizes that we can protect our farm, forestland, and open spaces if we develop in a "smart" way: encouraging community vitality and livability while preserving our environmental, natural, and historic features.



Burlington bike path

Bob LoCicero

in December 2017, the Arnold Block has served as a multi-use community hub with four main components: a co-working area; a fitness studio; professional meeting and community event space; and a commercial kitchen. But its operating principle is much broader. “Come with an idea and we’ll figure out how to make it work,” says Rauch-Kacenski, even though she and her business partners all hold other full-time jobs while helming the space.

With an open-minded approach for making work, play, and exercise more appealing for all segments of the community, the Arnold Block naturally attracts a multigenerational audience and clientele. Parents bring their toddlers to tumbling class

Improving communities with an eye towards smart growth and livability can make them into places where all generations can thrive.

in the same studio that hosts yoga and guided meditation in the evenings. In 2018, as part of a reboot of Better Block called Mini Better Block, the Arnold Block hosted “Stories of Bethel,” an evening of reminiscing from older adults that connected newer residents with Bethel’s history. An AARP Vermont-sponsored “Little Library Build” recently brought people of all ages together to build little libraries to put up in a public space in their community.

The Arnold Block’s reliable, high-speed wireless Internet access not only makes it convenient for remote workers and small businesses on a daily basis, but also a safe haven and public resource during power outages, which can be especially

Making Space for Community

On a sunny day in July, I visited Lylee Rauch-Kacenski, co-owner of the Arnold Block, in Bethel. After a tour of the building, she showed me a pocket park that the Bethel Revitalization Initiative had transformed in 2014 from a litter-strewn lot between shops on Main Street into a welcoming spot to view the White River.

We had spent the morning talking about the importance of utilizing public space to meet the community’s needs, and I’d been meaning to ask her more about the way the Arnold Block, as a meeting space for the Bethel community, had touched lives more individually. But I didn’t need to.

Along came Katie O’Neill, coffee in tow, and she and Rauch-Kacenski embraced. O’Neill is a Bethel resident, Vermont Law School student, and Bethel Conservation Commission member who had lost her home just weeks earlier to a lightning fire. She was now staying with friends, older adults who lived near downtown Bethel, while she worked on her law degree.

O’Neill told me that the community’s kindness had been indispensable after the fire. Rauch-Kacenski and her wife and business partner, Lindley Brainard, offered her a place to stay and storage for her things at the Arnold Block, and gave O’Neill their farm share while they were out of town. O’Neill received massage work from Hand Mind Heart, a salon across the street from the Arnold Block, that was critical to her healing process.

O’Neill had been familiar with the Arnold Block long before tragedy struck. While working at the Energy Clinic at Vermont Law School the previous summer, she had rented



Lylee Rauch-Kacenski, left, and Katie O’Neill in front of the Arnold Block.

a coworking space where she could study when productivity was elusive on campus or at home. When the Bethel Conservation Commission needed to learn a natural resource mapping system and Town Hall could not offer adequate Internet connectivity, O’Neill brought the group to the Arnold Block.

One night, on a study break, she met a local artist there who let O’Neill try on her wearable artwork, and during the winter she enjoyed music at the space on the first Friday of the month. O’Neill told me there are constant

opportunities for Bethel residents to enrich their lives by connecting at the Arnold Block.

The Arnold Block takes pride in “being here when people need things,” explained Rauch-Kacenski. She means this literally: by providing gathering spaces, and Internet access during catastrophic weather. And figuratively, by attracting people who are looking to give their time and resources to the community.

Rauch-Kacenski told me about Jeffrey Slayton, a meditation instructor with the Shambhala Meditation Center of White River in White River Junction who taught a Bethel University course in 2019. Participants liked the instruction so much that they told Slayton about the Arnold Block and requested he teach a series there. He did – and then donated his proceeds back to the space.

“It speaks a lot, the investment in Bethel [Jeffrey] felt simply by teaching a class here. The Arnold Block brings it out in people,” she says. “People see the vision and they want to give.”

— Stephanie Gomory

debilitating in rural areas. Rauch-Kacenski says that when other carriers in Bethel experience outages, the Arnold Block's fiber-optic Internet connection usually remains strong, and drop-in office rentals increase.

The Arnold Block and the Bethel Revitalization Initiative build on and enhance the assets of a smart growth village, putting historic buildings to work, making the road safer for all users, and doing it all in a way that enhances Bethel's sense of place. Bethel shows how people of all ages can come together to build their communities in smart, efficient ways.

How is Vermont Doing?

Improving communities with an eye towards smart growth and livability can make them into places where all generations can thrive. Bethel might be on its way there. With the Smart Growth Report Card, we aim to determine how Vermont is performing overall.

The Report Card was first issued in 2003 and again in 2007 by the Smart Growth Collaborative, a group that included VNRC, Smart Growth Vermont, the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF), the Preservation Trust of Vermont, and other organizations. It evaluates whether state investments advance smart growth, with particular focuses on housing, transportation, economic development, and capital construction. VNRC will soon release an update to the Report Card in collaboration with AARP Vermont, but we are previewing some of the results here.

For housing, the Report Card tracks projects funded by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB), which was established by the Legislature in 1987 to pursue the smart growth goals of conserving farmland, forestland, and natural areas; creating perpetually affordable housing; and historic preservation.

The prognosis for VHCB-funded housing is good. Between July 2012 and December 2017, the Report Card shows that all new housing development funded by the VHCB took place in smart growth locations—places where stores, services, and jobs are closer together, and transit options are available. Of the total invested in housing, 79% was spent on projects in smart growth locations, and some of the

Small Grants for Smart Growth

In 2018, VNRC launched Small Grants for Smart Growth to provide seed money for local, community-based smart growth initiatives in Vermont. As of October 2019, the program has granted seven awards, the most recent being a second grant to the Rich Earth Institute in Brattleboro.

Rich Earth Institute is researching a community-scale urine recycling program where urine is collected, pasteurized, and used as a certified-grade fertilizer. This intriguing project is helping residents of two small, unsewered villages in Windham County install urine diversion systems to reduce pressure on aging septic systems.

In 2019, VNRC awarded the Vermont River Conservancy (VRC) with a Small Grant to support a feasibility study and conceptual design process of Confluence River Park, where the North Branch and main stem of the Winooski rivers join in downtown Montpelier. VRC surveyed passersby outside Montpelier's City Hall in June, and participants at a public meeting in July, on their priorities for the park. VRC encouraged community members to rate several proposed designs based on considerations like gathering space, bike path placement, river access, and more.

"The Confluence River Park addresses many smart growth principles, in particular with its potential to enhance Montpelier's bike path, provide green space in our downtown, and provide access to the river," said Kate McCarthy, Sustainable Communities Program Director at VNRC, who administers the Small Grants program.

Other recipients of Small Grants include the Danville Village to Village Steering Committee, to support the revitalization of the 1871 Historic Danville Railroad Station by engaging the community around a placemaking exercise, and the South Hero Land Trust, which planned the creation of a non-motorized, multi-use trail network to connect important community resources and natural areas in the core of South Hero.

Small Grants for Smart Growth reward ideas that support efficient land use and improve access to housing and transportation within compact downtown areas. Find out about all grantees and learn how to apply for a Small Grant of your own at vnrc.org. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis.

The Small Grants for Smart Growth Program is made possible with assistance from Beth Humstone, co-founder of the Vermont Forum on Sprawl and former VNRC board chair, and her son, Chris Gignoux.



Steve Libby, Richarda Ericson, and Stephan Syz of the Vermont River Conservancy

Kate McCarthy

non-smart growth spending helped retain previously-built affordable units, including making many of them more energy efficient. Of the 18 projects designed to serve older adults, all were in smart growth locations, which bodes well for fostering independence and social connectivity, plus opportunities for active, healthier lifestyles.

As for transportation investments, it is positive to see increasing percentages of the budget going toward walking, biking and transit, with decreasing amounts going toward roads and road expansion. The report also notes the important role that forward-thinking Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) leadership played during the study period (2013-2017). Less clear is how successful the state has been in creating Complete Streets (streets designed for all users and abilities). Despite the passage of the Complete Streets law in 2011, there is no system for establishing benchmarks or goals related to implementation. This makes it difficult for the public to know how many roads are now considered “complete streets” versus those that have received an exemption from complying with the law.

Of the 18 projects designed to serve older adults, all were in smart growth locations, which bodes well for fostering independence and social connectivity, plus opportunities for active, healthier lifestyles.

“Two options”

Even when we succeed in building and growing smart growth communities, people’s attitudes remain mixed. In 2018, the Vermonter Poll asked respondents to consider the following hypothetical choice:

Your income is high enough to purchase a home. You have two options: buying a home in an urban area or village close to public transportation, work, and shopping; or purchasing a larger, single-family home of equivalent value in an outlying area, with longer commutes to work but with more yard space. Which option would you choose?

Only 32.5% of respondents said they would choose the village option, while 64.1% opted for the larger home further from work and amenities. While the 2018 percentage of aspiring village-dwellers is up from 1998-2003, it is lower than, or at least the same as, the rate from surveys taken in 2004 onwards. Preferences – and the habit of driving, which many of us have grown up with – run deep. What’s more, despite the



Bob LoCicero

The Marble Works District, seen in the background, is a former marble factory located just steps from downtown Middlebury that was re-adapted for housing, shops, restaurants, and service providers. This mixed-use development enjoys views of scenic Middelbury Falls and can be accessed by a historic pedestrian footbridge.

long histories of our villages and downtowns, the strength of Vermont's brand might draw people to live in places with a rural feel. This has the benefit of connecting people to the natural places they love, but the unfortunate consequence of requiring households to have multiple cars.

Perhaps it is worth considering that if our communities were easier to move around in the first place, had a variety of well-designed housing choices with a sense of privacy, provided comfortable public and open spaces, and were better at connecting us to the services we need, fewer Americans would feel the need to retreat from them. If we had more attractive places for older adults to relocate to, especially in rural states like Vermont, more of them would be able to downsize while staying in their home towns.

What's next?

Fortunately, there are things we can do to build smart growth communities across Vermont that allow people of all ages to thrive [See the inset for some examples].

McCarthy explains that we need to view Vermont's demographic changes not as a "death sentence for the wellbeing of the state, but as a wakeup call to reexamine who our communities are serving, and how, so that we can work together to improve them." This includes older adults, but also people who do not or cannot drive, single people, young families, and more. "If Vermont does not start to see its growing population of older adults as an asset, instead of a liability, we will miss our chance to improve our communities to work for all ages," adds Stoddard Poor.

How Do We Build Smart Growth Communities for All Ages?

The case for building communities for all ages seems clear, but where do we start? "Developing a community vision, building housing, building community connections – none of it happens overnight," says Kate McCarthy, Sustainable Communities Program Director at VNRC (and everyone who's ever worked on a local project). But given what we have to gain, it's worth starting now, and there are a variety of steps we can take to get the ball rolling.

- **Try out a placemaking popup or pilot project** – Turn a parking spot into a mini-café with hay bales and picnic tables. Use chalk paint for a temporary bike lane. Use planters with flowers to "bump out" the curbs so that the distance across the street is shorter for pedestrians. Work with community members and your road crew to see what is possible!



Bethel Revitalization Initiative and Team Better Block

- **Review your regulations** – Regulations help shape development, but sometimes don't get us the outcomes we seek. Work with your planning commission to review the zoning and ask: Are accessory dwelling units easy to

permit? Are a mix of housing types (single family, duplex, multi-family) allowed in appropriate zoning districts throughout town? Do the areas where you want compact development have small lot sizes?

- **Establish a local Complete Streets policy** – Complete Streets are built for users of all ages. Whether sidewalks in a village, longer pedestrian crossing times at stoplights, or wider shoulders on rural roads, streets can be made complete at all scales. Develop a local policy or ordinance to guide local and state construction projects.
- **Show up to say "yes" to housing** – When housing is proposed in your community – whether a duplex, a house on an infill lot, or a larger project – gather your neighbors and attend hearings to express why more smart growth housing is important to you. Local energy committees can be a great partner, since smart growth housing reduces energy use from transportation.
- **Look for ways to update your town plan** – A municipal plan has sections for many smart growth topics: land use, housing, transportation, and natural resources. Review your community's plan – particularly the future land use map, which shows where different uses should happen in the future, and the goals and policies in the sections mentioned above. Do they promote smart growth? Could they be better? Talk with your local planning commission on how you can help make improvements.
- **Browse the Community Planning Toolbox** – Developed by Smart Growth Vermont and maintained by VNRC, the toolbox provides overviews of smart growth issues, information about tools that advance smart growth, and case studies from communities that have done it. Find it at vnrc.org.

Recent Highlights of Our Work

Energy and Climate Action

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



- Worked with partners and policy makers to push for critical climate and clean energy solutions during the 2019 legislative session – and set the stage for bold progress in 2020 – including exploring potentially powerful programs like the Transportation & Climate Initiative and a Global Warming Solutions Act. Find our policy priorities at vnrc.org.
- Joined youth-led Climate Strike demonstrations in Montpelier and Burlington and issued a statement with other environmental organizations in support of Vermont's young people taking a stand.
- Partnered with a University of Vermont study abroad program, helping to lead a two-week immersion course for 14 UVM students in Copenhagen, Denmark on Denmark's innovations in energy and sustainability, and sharing key lessons learned with pivotal Vermont partners.
- Continued to support and start community energy committees and grassroots action in the Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network by co-organizing regional events in Bennington and Rutland counties, though our new monthly webinar series, and through ongoing one on one collaborations with committees.

Forests and Wildlife

Maintains and enhances the ecological and economic vitality of Vermont's forests, and healthy wildlife populations.



- Supported efforts in the Vermont Legislature to improve Act 250 to address forest fragmentation and support the conservation of intact forest blocks and wildlife habitat connectivity.
- Helped lead a collaborative effort among conservation and outdoor recreation organizations to develop a proposal for a new environmental review program to support sustainable trail development in Vermont.
- Raised concerns and filed a formal objection with the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) over its decision to approve a large timber harvesting and roadbuilding project on the southern half of the national forest without allowing public comment on the environmental assessment. This is the first time the GMNF disallowed the public to comment on the environmental impacts of a large proposed management project.

Smart Growth

Promotes and protects Vermont's smart growth development pattern of compact settlements – with options for transportation, housing, and employment – surrounded by farms, forests, and natural areas.



- Continued coordinating the Transportation for Vermonters Coalition, which with other partners helps establish a clean vehicle incentive program for lower-income Vermonters, while fighting a proposal to reduce emissions regulation.

- With AARP, developed an update to the Smart Growth Report Card, an analysis of state spending on housing and conservation, economic development, transportation, and capital spending that assesses how well Vermont is advancing its smart growth goals through public funding.
- Celebrated conclusion of the Exit 4 Project, when this winter the property was put under a conservation easement restricting development, and ownership was officially transferred from Preservation Trust of Vermont (PTV) to Randolph Community Orchards, LLC. In July, the project was graced with the installation of the beautiful Whale Dance sculpture by Jim Sardonis.

Clean Water

Protects and enhances the quality of Vermont's streams, rivers, lakes and ponds, wetlands, and groundwater.



- Advocating to strengthen Vermont's wetland protection program and tracking a legislative group that is required to address potential changes to Vermont's wetland protection laws before the next Legislative Session begins in January.
- Following closely the implementation of PFAS surface and groundwater protections passed by the 2019 Legislature.
- Reviewing a proposed settlement for compliance with the Vermont Water Quality Standards (VWQS) between ANR and Green Mountain Power (GMP) to improve the flow of water in the Upper Winooski River based on the operation of a dam on the Molly's Falls reservoir in Marshfield. The dam is not currently regulated, and its operation



Johanna Miller
Energy and Climate Action Program Director/VECAN Coordinator
jmiller@vnrc.org



Jamey Fidel
Forest and Wildlife Program Director
jfidel@vnrc.org



Kate McCarthy
Sustainable Communities Program Director
kmccarthy@vnrc.org



Jon Groveman
Policy and Water Program Director
jgroveman@vnrc.org



Lauren Hierl
Vermont Conservation Voters Executive Director
lhierl@vermontconservationvoters.org

significantly affects water quality and habitat.

- Continuing to monitor and comment on regulations and actions proposed by ANR to implement Act 64 of 2015, the Vermont Clean Water Act, and tracking ANR's efforts to implement the water funding bill that passed last Legislative Session.

Toxic-Free Environment

Advocating for policies that protect Vermonters' health by reducing exposure to hazardous chemicals, holding toxic polluters accountable for the harms they cause, and ensuring our waters are clean and safe.



- Urging that legislators vote to override

Governor Scott's veto of S.37, a bill that would help Vermonters harmed by toxic contamination, when they return to the State House in January 2020.

- Working with the Department of Health to ensure successful implementation of S.55, legislation that improved Vermont's program to protect our kids from toxic chemicals in children's products.
- Watchdogging the implementation of S.40, a bill that requires testing and cleanup of lead contamination in drinking water in all Vermont schools and childcare facilities, to ensure that children, teachers, and staff are drinking safe water where they learn and work.
- With ANR, pushing for a robust PFAS testing and monitoring program

for all drinking water supplies, and enhanced testing in areas at particular risk of PFAS contamination, as well as ensuring swift adoption of health-protective PFAS drinking water regulations, as required by a new law (S.49) enacted earlier this year.

- Ensuring successful implementation of new legislation, S.113, that begins to address the dramatic rise in single-use plastics and the associated harms to human health and the environment. The law restricts the use of single-use plastic bags; requires that plastic straws only be offered on demand; bans expanded polystyrene foam (what is often called styrofoam); and creates a working group to look at additional steps the state should take.

Dam Removal at Mill Pond

VNRC, with support and assistance from partners including the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Lake Champlain Basin Program, the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department's Watershed Grants Program, and The Nature Conservancy, broke ground in July on the removal of Mill Pond Dam. This dam on Indian Brook in Colchester has not served a purpose since the last mill it powered burned down in 1941.

In August, crews began to remove 30,000 cubic yards of sediment and load the material (known to contain an estimated 17 tons of phosphorus, which was contributing to algae blooms and excessive aquatic plant growth in Lake Champlain) into trucks to be hauled away.

By the end of the fall, the dam will be completely removed and the new stream channel and floodplain will be graded and seeded.

Learn more about dam removal efforts at freevtrivers.org.



B.T. Fitzgerald

The 2019 Legislative Scorecard is Here

Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV) developed its Legislative Scorecard to track Vermont legislators' voting records on key environmental issues. The Scorecard highlights the most significant environmental votes from the past legislative session: on climate solutions, long-term clean water funding, reducing exposure to toxic chemicals in drinking water and consumer products, and more. A full Scorecard for the 2019-2020 session will be released next summer to follow this interim, mid-season report. Find it at vermontconservationvoters.org/legislative-scorecard.

Are you interested in leaving a gift in your will?

Over the years, donors have informed us of their intention to include a gift to VNRC in their wills. You can join these supporters. A planned gift to VNRC represents a commitment by donors to protect Vermont's environment beyond their own lifetimes, and to ensure that our communities are best equipped to nurture us for generations to come.

For more information on planned giving, contact Stephanie Mueller at (802) 223-2328, x113 or email smueller@vnrc.org.

News & Notes

Remembering Paul Bruhn

We were deeply saddened by the death of Paul Bruhn on September 19. Paul led the Preservation Trust of Vermont since 1980 as its first executive director and served on VNRC's Board from 1992-1998. "Few individuals have done more to protect and enrich the character of Vermont than Paul. This is a devastating loss for the state," said Brian Shupe, Executive Director of VNRC. "We'll deeply miss our partner, mentor, and friend."



Meg Campbell

Welcome, Shelden Goodwin

VNRC and Vermont Conservation Voters (VCV) were pleased to welcome Shelden Goodwin, our new Outreach Coordinator, in May. Shelden recently graduated from Simmons University with a master's in public policy and a focus on municipal policy. Before joining our team, she was a field organizer on the Vermont Democratic Party's coordinated campaign helping to elect state representatives and state senators in Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle counties. Shelden has been working with VNRC and VCV to educate voters on environmental issues facing Vermont, and we're thrilled to have her!



Madeleine Kunin Receives 2019 Arthur Gibb Award

VNRC presented this year's Arthur Gibb Award for Individual Leadership to Madeleine Kunin, former Governor of Vermont. We can thank Governor Kunin for much of what we enjoy in Vermont today, including the critical work of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB), which Kunin established while in office. VHCB promotes smart growth in Vermont, conserves farms and natural areas, and develops affordable housing. Kunin is also a famed advocate for climate solutions and environmental health, and a tireless champion for women in politics. She accepted the Art Gibb award at VNRC's Annual Meeting, held at Shelburne Farms on September 12. Find a history of award recipients at vnrc.org.



Board member Kesha Ram, Governor Kunin, and former Board Chair Beth Humstone

Welcome, Alex Baad

Alex Baad joined VNRC as our new AmeriCorps Member and Community Energy Coordinator in September. He attended the University of Michigan, where he received his B.A. in Political Science and International Studies, focusing on environmental issues and policy, both domestic and international. Since then, Alex has worked with nonprofits in Chicago, Ann Arbor, and Melbourne, Australia. He grew up in Shelburne and is excited to return to his home state to help serve communities across Vermont. We're glad to have him here!



Johanna Miller Wins Award from Energy Action Network

The Energy Action Network (EAN) presented Johanna Miller, VNRC's Energy and Climate Action Program Director, with this year's Anne and Arthur Berndt Award at EAN's annual conference in September. The award recognizes EAN members who have demonstrated vision, leadership, and commitment to a clean energy future for Vermont. Congratulations, Johanna, for this well-deserved honor!

Get to Know Our New Website!

Have you noticed anything different about vnrc.org? We just completed a redesign! The new site makes it easier to learn about our current projects, keep up with our priorities, and see what we're doing around Vermont. We hope you'll enjoy it as much as we enjoyed working on it!

Out and About

Fall came quickly this year. Here's some of what VNRC staff did over the summer.

VNRC Visits Snowberry Farm

Farmer Jesse Poe of Snowberry Farm in Brookfield, Vermont delivers a CSA of fresh veggies, eggs, and canned goodies to a handful of VNRC staff. In July, we got to see where our yield comes from. An after-work visit taught us lots about organic farming, and we enjoyed some quality time with Poe's pig, chickens, and ducks. Local eating doesn't get better than this.



Jesse Poe gives Kelsey Gibb, Ian Hitchcock, and Colin Keegan the lay of the land

Kate McCarthy Tries an Electric Cargo Bike

When Sustainable Communities Program Director Kate McCarthy learned of Local Motion's traveling e-bike lending library, she enthusiastically loaned a pedal-assist cargo bike. Kate, her husband Tom Leahey, and their son Will are a single-car family. With the addition of an electric bike for several days, they replaced their car and walking trips to school and work, enjoying the ease of riding alongside cars at a higher speed, and the decreased travel time compared to traveling on foot. Will, 5, enjoyed cruising along in the passenger seat. Kate told Local Motion for a blog post: "If we get to the point where we're contemplating a second car, I think we'd seriously consider a cargo bike instead."



Kate McCarthy

Jon Groveman Joins 150+ State Legislators in Nashville

VNRC's Policy and Water Program Director presented to the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators, who convened in Nashville in August, on what Vermont and other states are doing to address toxic chemicals like PFAS. "It was a privilege to be there with these thoughtful, dedicated lawmakers committed to fighting for clean air and water and to address climate change," said Groveman.



Jon Groveman

Vermont legislators Rep. Michael Yantachka, Rep. Amy Sheldon, Sen. Christopher Bray, Rep. Mari Cordes, Rep. Becca White, Rep. Kimberly Jessup, Rep. Curt McCormack, and Rep. Kathleen James.

Kelsey Gibb Learns about Beekeeping

It all began at VNRC's annual Wild and Scenic Film Festival in April, when Kelsey Gibb, our Operations Coordinator, bid on and won a pint of honey and a private beekeeping workshop at our silent auction. After waiting patiently for the bees to awake from their winter slumber, Kelsey ventured to Duxbury on a sunny afternoon in June, suited up, and got ready to enter the hive.

She witnessed drones being born and tasted fresh honeycomb as Kim Greenwood, beekeeper and former Water Program Director at VNRC, explained the complex behavior of the bees.

Kelsey was particularly impressed by the intricate system of body movements ("wiggles", if you will) that allows the bees to communicate specific directions, and by their "democratic" ability to make decisions that benefit the entire colony.



Ian Ormon



9 BAILEY AVENUE
MONTPELIER VT 05602

Email: info@vnrc.org

Web: www.vnrc.org

Twitter: @VNRCCorg

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Save the Date: VECAN Conference

The 12th annual Community Energy and Climate Action Conference is coming up on December 7 at Lake Morey Resort in Fairlee. Join energy leaders, business innovators, nonprofit thinkers, and policy makers for a day of learning, networking, and inspiration around clean energy in Vermont and beyond. To register for the conference, visit vecan.net. We hope to see you there!



Tip of the Hat to Lawson's Finest

Lawson's Finest Liquids in Waitsfield pays its staff living wages and generous benefits. In lieu of tips, they invite their guests to support the Sunshine Fund to benefit local nonprofits that support the people and environment of the Mad River Valley and Washington county. Between November 1 and 15, all Sunshine Fund donations will go to VNRC! Plus, join us at Lawson's Finest on November 13, 5-7pm, for a very special announcement.



Lawson's Finest Liquids



Members are crucial to our success. Thank you for your support!
If you haven't already, please join us by visiting vnrc.org/donate.

vnrc.org