

1 Introduced by House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

2 Referred to Committee on

3 Date:

4 Subject: Commerce and trade; workforce development; economic

5 development

6 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to adopt

7 miscellaneous proposals to enhance workforce and economic development

8 opportunities.

9 An act relating to enhancing workforce and economic development  
10 opportunities

11 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

12 \* \* \* Education Workforce; Forgivable Loan Incentive Program \* \* \*

13 Sec. 1. 16 V.S.A. chapter 87, subchapter 6 is added to read:

14 Subchapter 6. Forgivable Loan Incentive Programs

15 § 2871. VERMONT TEACHER FORGIVABLE LOAN INCENTIVE

16 PROGRAM

17 (a) As used in this section:

18 (1) “Corporation” means the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

19 established in section 2821 of this title.

1           (2) “Eligible individual” means an individual who satisfies the eligibility  
2           requirements under this section for a forgivable loan.

3           (3) “Eligible school” means an approved postsecondary education  
4           institution as defined under section 2822 of this title.

5           (4) “Forgivable loan” means a loan awarded under this section covering  
6           tuition, which may also include room, board, and the cost of required books  
7           and supplies for up to full-time attendance at an eligible school.

8           (5) “Program” means the Vermont Teacher Forgivable Loan Incentive  
9           Program created under this section.

10          (b) The Vermont Teacher Forgivable Loan Incentive Program is created  
11          and shall be administered by the Corporation. The Program provides  
12          forgivable loans to students enrolled in an eligible school who commit to  
13          working as a teacher in a Vermont public school and who meet the eligibility  
14          requirements in subsection (d) of this section.

15          (c) The Corporation shall disburse forgivable loan funds under the Program  
16          on behalf of eligible individuals, subject to the appropriation of funds by the  
17          General Assembly for this purpose.

18          (d) To be eligible for a forgivable loan under the Program, an individual,  
19          whether a resident or nonresident of Vermont, shall satisfy all of the following  
20          requirements:

21               (1) be enrolled in teaching program at an eligible school;

1           (2) maintain good standing at the eligible school at which the individual  
2           is enrolled;

3           (3) agree to work as a teacher in Vermont employed directly by a public  
4           school located in Vermont for a minimum of one year following licensure for  
5           each year of forgivable loan awarded;

6           (4) have executed a credit agreement or promissory note that will reduce  
7           the individual’s forgivable loan benefit, in whole or in part, pursuant to  
8           subsection (f) of this section, if the individual fails to complete the period of  
9           service required in this subsection;

10           (5) have completed the Program’s application form, the Free  
11           Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and for Vermont residents, the  
12           Vermont grant application each academic year of enrollment in accordance  
13           with a schedule determined by the Corporation; and

14           (6) have provided such other documentation as the Corporation may  
15           require.

16           (e) Students attending an eligible school in Vermont shall receive first  
17           priority for forgivable loans.

18           (f) If an eligible individual fails to serve as a teacher in a Vermont public  
19           school for a period that would entitle the individual to the full forgivable loan  
20           benefit received by the individual, other than for good cause as determined by  
21           the Corporation, then the individual shall receive only partial loan forgiveness

1 for a pro rata portion of the loan pursuant to the terms of the interest-free credit  
2 agreement or promissory note signed by the individual at the time of entering  
3 the Program.

4 (g) There shall be no deadline to apply for a forgivable loan under this  
5 section. Forgivable loans shall be awarded on a rolling basis as long as funds  
6 are available, and any funds remaining at the end of a fiscal year shall roll over  
7 and shall be available to the Corporation in the following fiscal year to award  
8 additional forgivable loans as set forth in this section.

9 (h) The Corporation shall adopt policies, procedures, and guidelines  
10 necessary to implement the provisions of this section, including maximum  
11 forgivable loan amounts. The Corporation shall not use more than seven  
12 percent of the funds appropriated for the Program for its costs of  
13 administration and may recoup its reasonable costs of collecting the forgivable  
14 loans in repayment.

15 Sec. 2. VERMONT TEACHER FORGIVABLE LOAN INCENTIVE

16 PROGRAM; APPROPRIATION

17 In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$2,500,000.00 is appropriated from the  
18 General Fund to the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation for forgivable

1 loans through the Vermont Teacher Forgivable Loan Incentive Program  
2 created in 16 V.S.A. § 2871.

3 Sec. 3. PEER REVIEW SUPPORT GRANT PROGRAM; REPORT

4 (a) Purpose. The purpose of this section is to encourage and support the  
5 development and retention of qualified and effective Vermont educators. To  
6 combat the growing educator shortage throughout the State and meet the needs  
7 of Vermont students, it is necessary to invest in nontraditional educator  
8 training programs.

9 (b) Grant program.

10 (1) Program creation. In fiscal year 2024, there is established the Peer  
11 Review Support Grant Program, to be administered by the Agency of  
12 Education, to provide grants to expand support, mentoring, and professional  
13 development to prospective educators seeking licensure through the Agency of  
14 Education’s peer review process, with the goal of increased program  
15 completion rates.

16 (2) Program administration. The Agency shall adopt policies,  
17 procedures, and guidelines necessary for implementation of the Program  
18 described in subdivision (1) of this subsection.

19 (3) Eligibility criteria. The Agency shall issue grants to organizations or  
20 school districts with programs designed to provide prospective educators in the

1 peer review program the support necessary for successful completion of the  
2 peer review process by providing:

3 (A) support through the Praxis exam process;

4 (B) local, educator-led seminars designed around the Vermont  
5 licensure portfolio themes;

6 (C) local educator mentors;

7 (D) support in completing the peer review portfolio and licensing  
8 process; and

9 (E) continued professional development support within the first year  
10 of licensure.

11 (4) Report. On or before January 15, 2024, the Agency of Education  
12 shall report to the Senate and House Committees on Education on the status of  
13 the implementation of the Peer Review Support Grant Program and a summary  
14 and performance review of the programs to which grants were awarded. The  
15 report shall include any metrics used in the performance review, the number of  
16 program participants, endorsement areas of participants, feedback from  
17 participants and mentors, and any recommendation for legislative action.

18 Sec. 4. TEACHER LICENSING FEES; SUSPENSION

19 (a) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, teacher licensure  
20 fee requirements under 16 V.S.A. § 1697(a) are suspended during fiscal years  
21 2024–2029.

1       (b) In fiscal year 2024, the estimated fees that would have been collected  
2       under 16 V.S.A. § 1697(a) shall be accounted for through an appropriation to  
3       the Agency of Education from the General Fund.

4       Sec. 5. TEACHER LICENSING PORTABILITY

5       In order to address demand for qualified teachers and a declining educator  
6       workforce, on or before January 1, 2024, the Agency of Education shall issue a  
7       written report to the House and Senate Committees on Education, the House  
8       Committee on Commerce and Economic Development, and the Senate  
9       Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs assessing  
10       the costs and benefits of participation in licensure reciprocity agreements and  
11       licensure compacts for teachers. In writing the report, the Agency shall consult  
12       the Standards Board for Professional Educators and other interested  
13       stakeholders.

14       Sec. 6. PEER REVIEW SUPPORT GRANT PROGRAM; APPROPRIATION

15       Notwithstanding 16 V.S.A. § 4025(d), the sum of \$712,500.00 is  
16       appropriated from the Education Fund to the Agency of Education in fiscal  
17       year 2024 for the purpose of funding the Peer Review Support Grant Program  
18       established by Sec. 2 of this act.

19       \* \* \* Career Technical Education Students; Admission Preferences \* \* \*

20       Sec. 7. 16 V.S.A. § 2181 is added to read:

21       § 2181. VERMONT CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION STUDENTS





1                   ADVANCE VERMONT: APPROPRIATION

2                   (a) Advance Vermont shall create a three-year climate workforce-focused  
3 public education campaign that engages current and prospective employees,  
4 Vermont youth, adults interested in changing careers, and individuals yet to  
5 earn a postsecondary credential, or those who are looking to upskill.

6                   (b) The campaign shall include:

7                   (1) targeted external communications to support awareness of climate  
8 pathways in Vermont, including partnership and collaboration with direct  
9 service organizations;

10                  (2) engagement through workshops, webinars, and trainings;

11                  (3) information about climate sector career and education pathways  
12 through centralized and easy to access resources, such as MyFutureVT.org and  
13 other websites and applications; and

14                  (4) video series and other media featuring opportunities with employers  
15 and employee success stories.

16                  (d) In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$1,800,000.00 is appropriated from  
17 the General Fund to Advance Vermont to implement this section over a three-  
18 year period.

19                  Sec. 12. VERMONT SUSTAINABLE JOBS FUND;

20                         BUSINESS COACHING; APPROPRIATION

1       (a) In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$180,000.00 is appropriated from the  
2       General Fund to the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund for a three-year period to  
3       expand its Business Coaching program to focus on working with a group of  
4       existing energy services businesses interested in adopting a climate-centered  
5       mission and working with a group of younger trades people looking to start  
6       their own climate-centered business.

7       (b) The Fund shall recruit a cohort of up to twelve existing companies and  
8       a cohort of up to twelve trained tradespeople to receive advanced business  
9       assistance to enable them to either pivot their existing business or start a new  
10       business that will expand the State’s ability to deploy renewable energy and  
11       efficiency technologies to more homes and businesses across the State.

12       \* \* \* Higher Education; Workforce Investments; Curricula Expansion \* \* \*

13       Sec. 13. UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT;

14               PSYCHIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH NURSE PRACTITIONERS;

15               APPROPRIATION

16       In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$1,068,136.00 is appropriated from the  
17       General Fund to the University of Vermont to increase the number of  
18       Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners and expand access to mental  
19       health and substance abuse providers in this State.

20       Sec. 14. UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT; OFFICE OF ENGAGEMENT;

21               APPROPRIATION

1        In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$2,500,000.00 is appropriated from the  
2        General Fund to the University of Vermont Office of Engagement, in  
3        consultation with the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, for additional  
4        forgivable loans of \$5,000.00 per graduate for recent college graduates across  
5        all Vermont higher education institutions who commit to work in Vermont for  
6        two years after graduation.

7        Sec. 15. VERMONT STATE UNIVERSITY; RESTORATIVE JUSTICE BA;  
8                APPROPRIATION

9        In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$700,000.00 is appropriated from the  
10       General Fund to the Vermont State University to establish a Bachelor of Arts  
11       program in restorative justice.

12       Sec. 16. VERMONT STATE UNIVERSITY; VERMONT POLICE  
13                ACADEMY; STUDY

14       On or before January 15, 2024, the Vermont Criminal Justice Council and  
15       representatives of Vermont State University campuses and other public and  
16       private postsecondary institutions that offer a degree program in criminal  
17       justice shall review, consider, and take steps necessary to standardize the  
18       curricula offered and avoid redundant requirements for obtaining certification  
19       by prospective criminal justice personnel, and shall submit a report of its  
20       actions to the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

1 and the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General  
2 Affairs.

3 Sec. 17. VERMONT STATE UNIVERSITY; CERTIFICATE IN 3-D  
4 TECHNOLOGY; APPROPRIATION

5 In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$1,500,000.00 is appropriated from the  
6 General Fund to the Vermont State University to establish a Certificate in 3-D  
7 Technology program offered as a full-time, six-week, intensive residential  
8 summer program at the Randolph and Castleton campuses, which will:

9 (1) offer knowledge and hands-on experience that appeals to a wide  
10 range of interests from science and engineering to the arts and humanities;

11 (2) position students for greater success in college and with an  
12 employable edge upon completion;

13 (3) attract diverse types of learners from high schools and CTE centers;

14 (4) foster interest in STE(A)M with learners across different disciplines;

15 (5) leverage the latest 3-D technology available at the Advanced  
16 Manufacturing Center located at Vermont State University; and

17 (6) build local and national awareness of Vermont State University's  
18 innovative, experiential learning methodology and technical expertise.

19 Sec. 18. VERMONT STATE UNIVERSITY; CRITICAL OCCUPATIONS  
20 SCHOLARSHIPS; APPROPRIATION

1       In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$3,800,000.00 is appropriated from the  
2       General Fund to the Vermont State University to provide Critical Occupations  
3       Scholarships for eligible students with a household income of \$125,000 or less  
4       enrolled education programs that lead to a career in an occupation with critical  
5       need, including early childhood occupation, clinical mental health counseling,  
6       and all levels of nursing.

7       Sec. 19. UPSKILL VERMONT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM;  
8                APPROPRIATION

9       In fiscal year 2024, the amount of \$3,000,000.00 is appropriated from the  
10       General Fund to the University of Vermont to provide additional free classes  
11       through the Upskill Vermont Scholarship Program for Vermont residents  
12       seeking to transition to a new career or to enhance job skills.

13               \* \* \* Vermont Trades Scholarship Program \* \* \*

14       Sec. 20. VERMONT TRADES SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM;  
15                APPROPRIATION

16       In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$1,000,000.00 is appropriated from the  
17       General Fund to the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation to provide  
18       additional scholarships through the Vermont Trades Scholarship Program  
19       created in 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 183, Sec. 14.

20               \* \* \* Vermont Training Program \* \* \*

21       Sec. 21. VERMONT TRAINING PROGRAM; APPROPRIATION



1           (3) assist or coordinate with stakeholders, such as educational, business,  
2           governmental, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations, in activities that seek  
3           to align the delivery of high-quality education and training opportunities with  
4           career advancement and support the policy priorities outlined in 10 V.S.A.  
5           § 546;

6           (4) collect and display publicly available, nonconfidential information  
7           about postsecondary credentials available to Vermonters;

8           (5) facilitate conversations or provide information about the national  
9           best practices in aligning, recognizing, measuring, tracking, and promoting  
10           postsecondary credentials of value to the Vermont Department of Labor, the  
11           Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the State Workforce  
12           Development Board, and the Agency of Education when requested;

13           (6) maintain web-based resources that provide information about  
14           opportunities to obtain a postsecondary credential of value, in coordination  
15           with State partners;

16           (7) support the Vermont Department of Labor and Agency of Education  
17           transition or integration of Advance Vermont’s web-based resources and  
18           collected information referenced in subdivisions (4) and (6) of this subsection  
19           into a State-supported system in a coordinated way; and

20           (8) meet on a quarterly basis with the Vermont Department of Labor and  
21           Agency of Education about activities described in this subsection.

1        (b) Outreach. The contractor may use funds awarded by the State to:

2            (1) create and distribute public-facing communications and resources  
3 related to the duties described in this section; and

4            (2) offer support to career and education counselors, employment and  
5 training counselors, jobseekers and their families, and other stakeholders,  
6 consistent with best practice and State policy and programs, to help them better  
7 understand the postsecondary education and training landscape.

8        (c) Reports. The contractor shall provide written reports to:

9            (1) the Vermont Department of Labor and Agency of Education about  
10 anticipated work and activities using a simplified reporting template jointly  
11 developed by the contractor and the State entities on a quarterly basis; and

12            (2) on or before December 15, 2023, the House and Senate committees  
13 of jurisdiction regarding the use of funds, activities performed, and outcomes  
14 achieved pursuant to this section.

15                            \* \* \* United Way; Working Bridges \* \* \*

16        Sec. 23. WORKING BRIDGES; APPROPRIATION

17            In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$255,026.00 is appropriated from the  
18 General Fund to the United Way to expand resource coordination for employee  
19 stability through the Working Bridges program.

20                            \* \* \* Healthcare Workforce \* \* \*

21        Sec. 24. EMS TRAINING; APPROPRIATION



1       In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$1,000,000.00 is appropriated from the  
2       General Fund to the Department of Health to provide training for emergency  
3       medical services personnel.

4       Sec. 25. VERMONT MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL FORGIVABLE  
5                LOAN INCENTIVE PROGRAM; APPROPRIATION

6       In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$1,500,000.00 is appropriated from the  
7       General Fund to the Department of Health to provide forgivable loans through  
8       the Vermont Mental Health Professional Forgivable Loan Incentive Program  
9       created in 18 V.S.A. § 38.

10       Sec. 26. VERMONT NURSING FORGIVABLE LOAN INCENTIVE  
11               PROGRAM; APPROPRIATION

12       In fiscal year 2024, the following amounts are appropriated for forgivable  
13       loans for nursing students under the Vermont Nursing Forgivable Loan  
14       Incentive Program established in 18 V.S.A. § 34:

15               (1) the amount of \$3,000,000.00 in Global Commitment funds is  
16       appropriated to the Department of Health for forgivable loans for nursing  
17       students under the Program;

18               (2) the amount of \$1,304,400.00 is appropriated from the General Fund  
19       to the Agency of Human Services, Global Commitment appropriation for the  
20       State match for the Program; and

1           (3) the amount of \$1,695,600.00 in federal funds is appropriated to the  
2           Agency of Human Services, Global Commitment appropriation for the  
3           Program.

4           Sec. 27. AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES; POSITION;  
5                            APPROPRIATION

6           In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$170,000.00 is appropriated from the  
7           General Fund to the Agency of Human Services to provide one additional year  
8           of funding for the classified, three-year limited-service Health Care Workforce  
9           Coordinator position created in the Agency of Human Services, Office of  
10           Health Care Reform, pursuant to 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 183, Sec. 34(a).

11                            \* \* \* Economic Development; Technical Assistance \* \* \*

12           Sec. 28. 10 V.S.A. § 2 is added to read:

13           § 2. RURAL BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EXCHANGE

14           (a) There is created the Rural Business Technical Assistance Exchange, a  
15           business assistance program through which the regional development  
16           corporations shall provide small- and mid-sized businesses with professional  
17           and technical assistance:

18                            (1) through in-house Business Navigators;

19                            (2) through partnerships with organizations specializing in outreach to  
20           historically underserved populations; and

1           (3) through grants to private providers for professional services,

2           including:

3                   (A) business operations, financial management, and grant writing;

4                   (B) digital strategies;

5                   (C) architecture and physical space design;

6                   (D) reconfiguring manufacturing equipment and processes and

7           incorporating safety measures;

8                   (E) technology and software consulting;

9                   (F) legal and other professional services; and

10                  (G) other technical assistance.

11           (b)(1) Through the Exchange, the regional development corporations shall  
12           maintain a directory of, and build connections to, Vermont technical assistance  
13           providers who have demonstrated the ability and expertise to assist businesses  
14           with critical tools to grow and adapt their businesses to the everchanging  
15           business climate.

16           (2) The Exchange shall award technical assistance grants of not more  
17           than \$5,000.00 per business for technical services from approved providers.

18           (3) To be eligible to receive technical assistance through the Exchange,  
19           a business:

20                   (A) must be a for-profit entity located in a rural area of Vermont; and

21                   (B) must have at least \$5,000.00 in average annual revenue.

1           (4) A business whose owner’s income is higher than the federal labor  
2           market area in which the business operates shall provide a 50 percent match for  
3           the costs of professional services funded by a grant.

4           (c) The regional development corporations shall operate the Exchange to  
5           produce benefits for both the client companies as well as the vendors providing  
6           the assistance, and to expand the capabilities of the regional development  
7           corporations to serve an even larger portion of the rural business community,  
8           including historically underserved populations.

9           (d) The regional development corporations shall publish a report on the  
10           activities and performance of the Exchange on or before January 15 and July  
11           15 each year.

12           Sec. 29. RURAL BUSINESS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EXCHANGE;  
13                            APPROPRIATION

14           In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$1,500,000.00 is appropriated from the  
15           General Fund to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development for a  
16           subgrant to provide services and assistance through the Rural Business  
17           Technical Assistance Exchange created in 10 V.S.A. § 2.

18                            \* \* \* Economic Development; Vermont Arts Council \* \* \*

19           Sec. 30. VERMONT ARTS COUNCIL; APPROPRIATION

20           In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$72,000.00 is appropriated from the  
21           General Fund to the Vermont Arts Council to provide a State match for

1 National Endowment for the Arts funding to enable the Council to continue its  
2 work boosting the creative economy in Vermont.

3 \* \* \* Economic Development; Brownfields \* \* \*

4 Sec. 31. [Brownfields “edit notwithstanding language?”]

5 \* \* \* Community Recovery and Revitalization Grant Program \* \* \*

6 Sec. 32. 2021 Acts and Resolves No. 74, Sec. H.18, as amended by 2022 Acts  
7 and Resolves No. 183, Sec. 46, is further amended to read:

8 Sec. H.18. COMMUNITY RECOVERY AND REVITALIZATION  
9 GRANT PROGRAM

10 \* \* \*

11 (b) Eligible applicants.

12 \* \* \*

13 (3) The following are ineligible to apply for a grant:

14 (A) a State or local government-operated business, unless affiliated  
15 with, or representative of, an applying municipality's water district;

16 (B) a business that, together with any affiliated business, owns or  
17 operates more than 20 locations, regardless of whether those locations do  
18 business under the same name or within the same industry; and

19 (C) a publicly traded company.

20 \* \* \*

21 \* \* \* Rural Industry Development Grant Fund \* \* \*

1 Sec. 33. 10 V.S.A. § 6 is added to read:

2 § 6. RURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT GRANT PROGRAM

3 (a) Creation; purpose.

4 (1) A Rural Industry Development Grant Program is created within the  
5 Agency of Commerce and Community Development to provide grant funding  
6 through local development corporations for business relocation and expansion  
7 efforts, including the purchase, demolition, and renovation of property for  
8 industrial use.

9 (2)(A) There is established a Rural Industry Development Special Fund  
10 comprising amounts appropriated to the Fund, contributions from other  
11 sources, and the return of principal from the sale of any property invested  
12 through the Program.

13 (B) Monies in the Fund shall be available to Agency to make grants  
14 through the Program to assist local development corporations with business  
15 relocation and expansion efforts throughout Vermont.

16 (C) Notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, interest  
17 earned and any remaining balance at the end of the fiscal year shall be retained  
18 by the Fund and carried forward in the Fund.

19 (b) Grant considerations. In making grant awards, the Agency shall  
20 consider:

1           (1) the real estate needs of growing and relocating businesses, including  
2           nonprofit organizations, in the applicant’s region;

3           (2) the ability of the proposed project to meet the site-specific needs of  
4           businesses considering whether to expand or locate in this State;

5           (3) the funding that the applicant has identified, or secured, to leverage a  
6           grant award; and

7           (4) the readiness of an applicant to move a project forward.

8           (c) Eligible applicants; priority.

9           (1) To be eligible for a grant, an applicant must be a local development  
10           corporation, as defined in subdivision 212(10) of this title, located within this  
11           State.

12           (2) The Secretary of Commerce and Community Development may  
13           designate projects and agreements as first priority based on rural communities  
14           who continue to experience insufficient economic and grand list growth as per  
15           the rural index.

16           (d) Eligible activities. A grant recipient may use funding for the following:

17           (1) to purchase land for potential industrial use;

18           (2) for the costs of site development, permitting, or providing  
19           infrastructure for property the recipient owns;

1           (3) for the equity investment required for a loan transaction through the  
2           Vermont Economic Development Authority under 10 V.S.A. chapter 12,  
3           subchapter 3; or

4           (4) for the matching requirement of another State or federal grant  
5           consistent with this section.

6           (e) Application; market assessment.

7           (1) An applicant shall include in its application a local and regional  
8           market assessment that demonstrates reasonable need for the proposed  
9           development and identifies imminent, potential, or existing business growth  
10           opportunities.

11           (2) An applicant shall submit the following to demonstrate a readiness to  
12           begin and complete the proposed project:

13           (A) community and regional support for the project;

14           (B) that grant funding is needed to complete the proposed project;

15           (C) an ability to manage the project, with requisite experience and a  
16           plan for fiscal viability; and

17           (D) a description of the permitting required to proceed with the  
18           project and a plan for obtaining the permits.

19           (f) Awards; amount.

20           (1) An award shall not exceed the lesser of \$1,000,000 or 20 percent of  
21           the total project cost.



1           (2) A recipient may combine grant funds with funding from other  
2 sources.

3           (3) The Agency shall release grant funds upon determining that the  
4 applicant has met all application conditions and requirements.

5           (4) A grant recipient may apply for additional grant funds if future  
6 amounts are appropriated for the Program and the funds are for a separate but  
7 eligible use.

8           (g) Deed restrictions; property sales. The Agency shall include deed  
9 restrictions that require the return of the principal amount of the grant to the  
10 Special Fund and may require the payment of a percentage of the sales profit.

11       Sec. 34. RURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT GRANT FUND;

12                APPROPRIATION

13           In fiscal year 2024 the amount of \$10,000,000.00 is appropriated from the  
14 General Fund to the Rural Industry Development Grant Fund created in 10  
15 V.S.A. § 6.

16                               \* \* \* RPC and RDC Funding \* \* \*

17       Sec. 35. RPC AND RDC FUNDING MECHANISMS; REPORT

18           On or before January 15, 2024, the Agency of Commerce and Community  
19 Development shall review and consider any necessary changes to the funding  
20 amounts, allocations, and formulae for funding the regional planning  
21 commissions and regional development corporations, including whether

1 funding should be allocated on the basis of population served, number of  
2 municipalities served, administrative capacity, size of geographic region  
3 served, or other basis, and shall report its findings and recommendations to the  
4 House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development and the Senate  
5 Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs.

6 \* \* \* Better Places \* \* \*

7 Sec. 36. 24 V.S.A. § 2799 is amended to read:

8 § 2799. BETTER PLACES PROGRAM; CROWD GRANTING

9 (a)(1) There is created the Better Places Program within the Department of  
10 Housing and Community Development, and the Better Places Fund, which the  
11 Department shall manage pursuant to 32 V.S.A. chapter 7, subchapter 5.

12 (2) The purpose of the Program is to utilize crowdfunding to spark  
13 community revitalization through collaborative grantmaking for projects that  
14 create, activate, or revitalize public spaces.

15 (3) The Department may administer the Program in coordination with  
16 and support from other State agencies and nonprofit and philanthropic partners.

17 (b) The Fund is composed of the following:

18 (1) State or federal funds appropriated by the General Assembly;

19 (2) gifts, grants, or other contributions to the Fund; and

20 (3) any interest earned by the Fund.

1 (c) As used in this section, “public space” means an area or place that is  
2 open and accessible to all people with no charge for admission and includes  
3 village greens, squares, parks, community centers, town halls, libraries, and  
4 other publicly accessible buildings and connecting spaces such as sidewalks,  
5 streets, alleys, and trails.

6 (d)(1) The Department of Housing and Community Development shall  
7 establish an application process, eligibility criteria, and criteria for prioritizing  
8 assistance for awarding grants through the Program.

9 (2) The Department may award a grant to a municipality, a nonprofit  
10 organization, or a community group with a fiscal sponsor for a project that is  
11 located in or serves a designated downtown, village center, new town center, or  
12 neighborhood development area that will create a new public space or  
13 revitalize or activate an existing public space.

14 (3) ~~The Department may award a grant to not more than one project per~~  
15 ~~calendar year within a municipality.~~—[Deleted.]

16 (4) The minimum amount of a grant award is \$5,000.00, and the  
17 maximum amount of a grant award is \$40,000.00.

18 (5) The Department shall develop matching grant eligibility  
19 requirements to ensure a broad base of community and financial support for  
20 the project, subject to the following:

1 (A) A project shall include in-kind support and matching funds raised  
2 through a crowdfunding approach that includes multiple donors.

3 (B) An applicant may not donate to its own crowdfunding campaign.

4 (C) A donor may not contribute more than \$10,000.00 or 35 percent  
5 of the campaign goal, whichever is less.

6 (D) An applicant shall provide matching funds raised through  
7 crowdfunding of not less than 33 percent of the grant award.

8 (e) The Department of Housing and Community Development, with the  
9 assistance of a fiscal agent, shall distribute funds under this section in a manner  
10 that provides funding for projects of various sizes in as many geographical  
11 areas of the State as possible.

12 (f) The Department of Housing and Community Development may use up  
13 to 15 percent of any appropriation to the Fund from the General Fund to assist  
14 with crowdfunding, administration, training, and technological needs of the  
15 Program.

16 \* \* \* Downtown Development \* \* \*

17 Sec. 37. 24 V.S.A. § 2792(d) is amended to read:

18 (d) The Department shall provide staff and administrative support to the  
19 State Board, ~~and~~ shall produce guidelines to direct municipalities seeking to  
20 obtain designation under this chapter, and shall pay per diem compensation for  
21 board members pursuant to 32 V.S.A. § 1010(b).

1 Sec. 38. 24 V.S.A. § 2793(b) is amended to read:

2 (b) ~~Within 45 days of receipt of a completed application~~ Upon the first  
3 meeting of the State Board held after 45 days of receipt of a completed  
4 application, the State Board shall designate a downtown development district if  
5 the State Board finds in its written decision that the municipality has:

6 \* \* \*

7 Sec. 39. 24 V.S.A. § 2793a(b) is amended to read:

8 (b) ~~Within 45 days of receipt of a completed application~~ Upon the first  
9 meeting of the State Board held after 45 days of receipt of a completed  
10 application, the State Board shall designate a village center if the State Board  
11 finds the applicant has met the requirements of subsection (a) of this section.

12 Sec. 40. 24 V.S.A. § 2793b(b) is amended to read:

13 (b) ~~Within 45 days of receipt of a completed application~~ Upon the first  
14 meeting of the State Board held after 45 days of receipt of a completed  
15 application, the State Board shall designate a new town center development  
16 district if the State Board finds, with respect to that district, the municipality  
17 has:

18 \* \* \*

19 Sec. 41. 24 V.S.A. § 2793e(d) is amended to read:

20 (d) ~~Within 45 days of receipt of a completed application~~ Upon the first  
21 meeting of the State Board held after 45 days of receipt of a completed

