Vermont Council on Rural Development

Unleashing the power of Vermonters to create a better future

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February 13, 2026

Dear Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees,

My name is Denise Smith, and I serve as Executive Director of the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD). I am writing to request the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to include $500,000 in the FY'27 budget to strengthen coordinated technical assistance and direct support for Vermont's rural towns and villages.

VCRD is an independent, non-partisan, statewide nonprofit that has partnered with rural communities for more than 30 years. We provide facilitation, convening, leadership development, and technical assistance to towns across Vermont, always by invitation and always in collaboration with a strong network of state, regional, nonprofit, and private partners.

Through our work and our involvement in the Vermont Economic Resilience Technical Assistance (VERTA) initiative, we have seen clearly what rural towns are asking for: coordinated and simplified access to information and navigation, flexible and patient funding, and support across all phases of project development. They also need Vermont's technical assistance providers to be well coordinated and adequately resourced to work together in service of locally defined priorities.

The FY'27 appropriation we are requesting would allow the State and its partners to respond directly to these needs by providing backbone coordination, technical assistance capacity, and direct grant support to rural towns for community-driven economic development projects. These projects may include housing, infrastructure, childcare facilities, climate resilience, and related priorities.

This proposal builds on proven models such as the Municipal Technical Assistance Program and reflects recommendations from the VERTA report. We see the impact of this approach in towns like Bridport, Windham, Roxbury, and Plainfield, where local leaders have made meaningful progress when supported with coordinated expertise and flexible resources.

Rural towns are being asked to do more than ever, even as resources decline and challenges grow more complex. This appropriation represents a practical, high-impact way to support local leadership and help rural communities turn ideas into action.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

Denise Smith, *Executive Director*