



**STATE OF VERMONT**  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE  
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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**MEMORANDUM**

To: Rep. Mitzi Johnson, Chair  
House Committee on Appropriations

From: Rep. Bill Botzow, Chair  
House Committee on Commerce and Economic  
Development

Date: February 18, 2016

Subject: FY 2017 Program Review – Commerce and Economic Development Programs

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and guidance concerning State programs within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Committee on Commerce and Economic Development.

**Process**

The Committee began its program review process with an introduction to Vermont's Population-Level Quality of Life Outcomes and Indicators, as codified in 3 V.S.A. § 2311 and as proposed to be amended by S.198, and a review of Speaker Smith's letter to committee chairs, in which the Speaker presented his request and guidance to undertake a review of State programs and activities.

Based on the Speaker's guidance, the Committee resolved to hear directly from the Secretaries, Commissioners, and other program administrators on what they do, how well they do it, and if anyone is better off. Over the first several weeks of the 2016 legislative session, the Committee took testimony from: the Agency of Commerce and Community Development; the Department of Public Service; the Department of Financial Regulation; the Department of Labor; the Office of the Attorney General; the Vermont Economic Progress Council; Regional Planning Commissions; Regional Development Corporations; the Vermont Economic Development Authority; the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund; the Public Service Board; the University of Vermont; the Vermont Captive Insurance Association; and the Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies.

Considering this testimony and the Population-Level Quality of Life Outcomes and Indicators, the Committee initially identified four categories in which to classify each State program or activity: (1) Most Critical; (2) Very Important; (3) Good to Do; and (4) Not Do. Additionally, the Committee determined whether each program or activity should continue as currently structured, or whether—and why—it should be designated as Rethink.

### **Results**

The Committee classified each of 34 programs and activities within its jurisdiction as Most Critical, Very Important, or Good to Do. The Committee did not classify any program or activity as Not Do. The Committee also designated 14 programs and activities as Rethink. The results of the Committee's review and classification follow.

Programs and activities are organized first by classification and grouped by State administrator. Within each classification, programs and activities designated as Rethink are grouped together and the Committee includes its rationale for the designation.

The Committee recognizes the potential organizational and educational value of this exercise. If the General Assembly chooses to repeat the process in future years, given the considerable number of agencies and departments within its jurisdiction, the Committee has interest in exploring steps to streamline the process, which might include a more in-depth exploration of select programs and activities.

The Committee stresses that the results of this process are not limited to its recommendations to continue funding these programs and activities, to prioritize them, and in some cases, to rethink certain elements of them. In addition, the Committee better understands the impact these programs and activities have on our Population-Level Quality of Life Outcomes and Indicators, and has a foundation for a long-range work plan to improve further both the programs and activities, and the Outcomes and Indicators.

**(1) Most Critical**

The Committee finds that it is most critical for State government to continue to fund and to provide the services available to Vermonters through the following programs and activities:

1. Department of Financial Regulation
2. Agency of Commerce and Community Development
  - A. Mobile Home Parks Program
  - B. Vermont Community Development Program (CDBG)
  - C. Municipal Planning Grants Program
  - D. Captive Insurance Marketing and Services
  - E. Vermont Economic Progress Council
  - F. Regional Development Corporations
  - G. Regional Planning Commissions
3. Next Generation Fund - Education Programs
  - A. Dual Enrollment
  - B. Adult Technical Education
4. Division of Connectivity - Department of Public Service

***Most Critical - Rethink***

The Committee finds that it is most critical for State government to continue to fund and to provide the services available to Vermonters through the following programs and activities, but for the reasons and to the extent provided, the State needs to consider further the structure or implementation of the program or activity:

1. Agency of Commerce and Community Development
  - A. Department of Tourism and Marketing

The Committee designates this Department as Rethink because both tourism marketing and economic development marketing are, and will continue to be, critically important to the State. As the only state without an economic development marketing specialist, and in light of Vermont's need to compete effectively with other states for both employers and employees, the

Committee finds that the Department is under-resourced. Further, the Committee recommends that the State adequately fund efforts to design and implement an economic development marketing strategy.

B. Chief Marketing Officer, Agency of Commerce and Community Development

The Committee designates this position and its duties, mission, and authority as Rethink because the Committee finds the State should consider whether the Chief Marketing Officer has sufficient authority within State government and with other marketing partners to ensure consistent use of the Vermont brand and safeguard the brand identity of Vermont. The Committee questions whether the position is properly housed within the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, or should be placed elsewhere, potentially within the Agency of Administration.

2. Public Service Board – Telecommunications Siting

The Committee designates the Public Service Board as Rethink because of issues concerning municipal participation in the 248a telecommunications siting process. The Committee finds that the principle of “substantial deference” applicable to municipal siting recommendations to the Public Service Board requires more clarity and that municipalities should have clear authority to participate more meaningfully in the process.

3. Workforce Education and Training

A. Workforce Education and Training Fund Grants - Department of Labor

B. Vermont Training Program - Agency of Commerce and Community Development

The Committee broadly designates programs and activities related to workforce education and training as Rethink because the State, through the Commissioner of Labor working in collaboration with stakeholders within and outside government as contemplated in 10 V.S.A. chapter 22A, must provide an integrated workforce education and training system that efficiently and effectively meets the needs of students, employees, prospective employees, and employers using limited resources.

**(2) Very Important**

The Committee finds that it is very important for State government to continue to fund and to provide the services available to Vermonters through the following programs and activities:

1. Consumer Assistance Program - Office of the Attorney General
2. Agency of Commerce and Community Development
  - A. Vermont Life Magazine
  - B. Vermont Center for Geographic Information
  - C. Vermont Procurement Technical Assistance Center
  - D. Vermont Global Trade Partnership
  - E. Brownfields Initiative
3. Next Generation Fund - Vermont National Guard Educational Assistance

***Very Important - Rethink***

The Committee finds that it is very important for State government to continue to fund and to provide the services available to Vermonters through the following programs and activities, but for the reasons and to the extent provided, the State needs to consider further the structure or implementation of the program or activity:

1. Department of Labor
  - A. Workers' Compensation and Unemployment Insurance

The Committee designates these activities as Rethink because the State needs to refine its approach to independent contractors.

- B. Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration

The Committee designates this program as Rethink because certain conforming statutory changes required by federal law are necessary to ensure Vermont has the continuing legal authority to administer the program.

2. Agency of Commerce and Community Development

A. Department of Housing and Community Development

i. Growth Center Designation Program

ii. Downtown Designation Program

The Committee broadly designates as Rethink programs and activities related to land use and business growth because the Committee finds, through testimony concerning the Growth Center Designation Program and other State Designation Programs, and the continuing issues arising from the implementation of Act 250 Criterion 9(L), the State must address further the persistent tension between new development and historic development patterns.

3. Next Generation Fund

A. Vermont Student Assistance Corporation – Nondegree Grant Program

The Committee designates this program as Rethink because it finds more data are necessary to evaluate the efficacy of the program.

B. University of Vermont – Tech Transfer

This activity involves funding in two streams: one stream through the University of Vermont to the Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies, and the second stream directly to the University of Vermont. The stated purpose of each is “for patent development and commercialization of technology and to enhance the development of high technology businesses and Next Generation employment opportunities throughout Vermont.” The Committee designates this activity as Rethink, specifically with respect to the direct UVM transfer, because more testimony and data are necessary to evaluate the efficacy of the activity.

**(3) Good to Do**

The Committee finds that it is good for State government to continue to fund and to provide the services available to Vermonters through the following programs and activities:

1. Agency of Commerce and Community Development

A. Department of Housing and Community Development - State Designation Programs

B. Division for Historic Preservation

2. Tax Increment Financing Districts

The Committee notes that under current law no new TIF Districts are authorized.

3. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Employee Incentive

The Committee notes that the STEM Employee Incentive is unavailable as of 5/31/2014.

**Rethink (otherwise without classification)**

1. Vermont Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program - Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets

The Committee designates this program as Rethink because the Committee finds that the State should explore ways to partner with the private sector to provide supplemental or match funding for veterinary loan repayment.

2. Vocational Rehabilitation - Agency of Human Services

The Committee designates this program as Rethink because it questions whether the workers' compensation component of the program should be relocated to the Department of Labor.