



**House Commerce and Economic Development Committee
Municipal Economic Development
Vermont League of Cities and Towns
*Tuesday, January 17, 2017***

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about city and town economic development priorities for the 2017 - 2018 biennium.

I have copies of the 2017 VLCT Municipal Priorities Brochure for your information. We look forward to working with you on these issues and any others that might affect local governments as they arise. The brochure has the contact information for the VLCT Advocacy team.

VLCT is committed to working on ways to spur economic development that includes all our cities and towns, especially those that have not benefited from the Chittenden County growth engine.

We endorse the mission of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy to “improve the economic well being and quality of life of Vermonters while maintaining our natural resources and community values”. We do think that if we are to balance economic well being and quality of life with natural resources, there needs to be a reset in terms of distribution of workforce at the state. We note that the Agency of Natural Resources and Natural Resource Board have 571 employees whereas the Economic Development Department has 11 and the entire Agency of Commerce and Community Development, before Governor Scott’s announcement yesterday, had 97. We believe the new Agency of Economic Opportunity will be a significant re-focusing of effort on sustainable, Vermont sized economic development.

We welcome the considerable body of data that has been collected in the Vermont Futures Project and the way in which that data is displayed to provide information on a regional and local basis. The Vermont Futures Project gives us a very good picture of where we need to focus our efforts. Jeff Lewis and Jennifer Stromstein gave a ½ day workshop to the Vermont Town and City Management Association at its spring conference and we are hosting an economic development conference on March 23 to offer success stories and potential tools to local officials.

Municipalities do not themselves start or grow businesses. Rather they are instrumental in putting in place the infrastructure, local regulations and identity that make their communities hospitable places to grow businesses. We cannot do that alone.

Municipalities are more than ready to work with state agencies and the legislature to:

- Provide new funding for centralized water and wastewater in village centers and downtown areas;
- Implementing the provisions of Act 64 (VT Water Quality Act) that does not discourage the development of new or growth of businesses at the local level;
- Assure that all areas of the state have high speed internet;
- Develop a set of tools that provide flexibility to municipalities in pursuing economic development;
- Expand the number of municipalities that may adopt a Tax Increment Financing Program (TIF). Bennington, Rutland, Springfield, Newport, St. Johnsbury and Brattleboro are all interested in TIF. We have a track record now in terms of the development that existing TIFs have generated.
- Assessing the number of home based businesses and “makers” that occupy our hills – they are the enterprises that have produced great ideas for new businesses and many great brews;
- Revising local plans and zoning bylaws to encourage the siting of right sized enterprises for the host community;
- Building on the many unique attributes and festivals of our individual towns (Underhill September Harvest Market, Brattleboro Strolling of the Heifers, Marathons and Fat Bike Races, rail and backcountry trails, farmers markets, breweries, distilleries, and cheese makers all over the state, Festival of Light in Morristown, River of Light in Waterbury, Old Home Days in Plainfield...).
- Working to provide housing for the workforce who are able to stay in Vermont for a job or who we attract to jobs in Vermont.

We are open to innovative ideas and happy to work with the committee!

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