

**Samantha Sheehan**

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Communications Manager, *Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility*

Four County Zone Agent, Steering Committee Member, Sustainability Overseer and Executive Committee, *The Vermont Creative Network*

School Board Member, Town of Hancock

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Bill S.94. According to my research and experience improved remote and remote-flexible work opportunities in the state of Vermont have immediate and real impact on local economic development and the quality of living for working Vermonters.

**Valley.Works (L3C) is a coworking space located in Waitsfield, Vermont. The mission of Valley.Works is to create a diverse economic landscape within the Mad River Valley to ensure prosperity for future generations of entrepreneurs within our community.**



Valley.Works opened March 1st 2016. I own Valley.Works and opened the business with an initial 10k investment prior to opening, and an additional 4k contribution to cash-flow in the first year. Today the space is less than 350 square feet, we have 9 desks total, 3 full-time members and 4 part-time members. I plan to add another 3 desks in March of 2018. We occupy 3 rental office units on the second floor of a historical building on Main Street in Waitsfield, adjacent to the Bridge Street shops. We have reliable high-quality high-speed fiber internet (100 mbps) through our locally owned telecommunications provider.

We host professional development workshops and networking events throughout year on topics such as women's business ownership, business planning, pricing, branding, email marketing, cloud storage, social media marketing, management, hospitality and customer service, and iPhone photography.

### **Valley.Works Membership**

- 3 Full-Time Members, 4 Part-Time Members
- 2 Self-Employed, 1 Independent Contractor, 4 Full-Time remote workers (employed out of state)
- 2 Members are local business owners
- 3 Males, 4 Females
- 5 Members under 35 years old, All members under 50 years old
- 3 Members have elementary and preschool age children

- Current Members Job Titles: Marketing Director, Non-Profit Director, HR Consultant, Insurance Sales Agent, E-commerce Specialist, Copyeditor/Translator, Yoga Therapist, Communications Manager
- Past Members Job Titles: Landscape Architect, 3D Modeling Freelancer, Digital Marketing Freelancer, Web Developer, Project Manger (Environmental Compliance), Business Consultant

**I estimate the average income of a Valley.Works member to be over \$62,000. To the best of my knowledge every member of V.W is either a single person or the primary earner for their family. The average household income in the Mad River Valley in 2016 was \$73,101\*, with 50% of residents\* who are locally employed working in Leisure & Hospitality with annual wages of \$19,560\* and \$24,159\*. The estimated average income of a remote worker using Valley.Works coworking space is roughly twice that of the average full-time resident in the Mad River Valley. (\*Data from 2017 MRVPD Housing Study)**

## **The Impact of Coworing**

**(Data according to my own records)**

- Each member spends between \$32 and \$147 a week, up to about \$4,000 a month as a membership, in Waitsfield as a result of coworking
- The monthly revenues at V.W are between \$800 and \$1200
- We have hosted over 40 workshops, and 3 community wide events in 2 years
- We have had 12 members and retained 7
- Members report improved productivity, job/work satisfaction, and work/life balance

## **Living in the Mad River Valley**

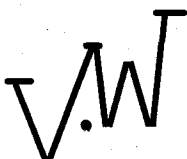
**(Data from 2017 MRVPD Housing Study and 2014 MRV Economic Survey)**

In the Mad River Valley today, a worker would need to make \$22.22 for 40 hours a week in order to afford an average 1 bedroom apartment. A minimum wage worker would need to work 93 hours a week to afford the same unit.

- There was a 55% decrease in the number of people <35 years old who owned homes between 2000 and 2014.
- Median value of owner occupied housing in the MRV (49% of all housing) is \$317,467 - however the median cost of single family homes (not condos or mobile homes) is actually \$438,300.
- 51% of homeowners are part-time residents
- Median household income was \$73,101 in the MRV in 2014, but 50% of jobs are in the Leisure & Hospitality and Retail sectors that offer annual wages between \$19,560 and \$24,159.
- 68% of full-time residents under age 30 make less than \$1,200 a month
- Roughly 500 residents live in and are employed in the Mad River Valley
- Average gross rent is \$994 a month, the number of units available for less than \$749 decreased by roughly half between 2001 and 20015.

*"Migration rates are sharply negative for persons aged 20 - 34 years old. Recent High School Graduates, College Graduates, and 'Starter House Holds' are likely to move out of the area".*

- 2014 MRV Economic Study



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## Remote Work & My Career

I moved to Vermont in November 2011 with my partner, intent of living and working for a single ski-season. The following summer I took a full-time position at the locally owned restaurant as a Marketing Manager and Business Administrator. In 2015, for a number of reasons, the business owners made the decision to transition to a seasonal operating schedule and I faced losing my full-time position. It was then that I chose to open Valley.Works and I transitioned into full-time freelance work as a Digital Marker and Designer. One of my early clients was an education technology company headquartered in California whose Marketing Director works remotely from Valley.Works. In April of 2017 I accepted a half-time position as a Program Manager for VBSR, and was able to do so only because they offered a remote-flex work schedule. Without the opportunity to work remotely the part-time pay rate, excessive 95 minute commute, and lack of complete benefits would have made the job unsustainable. By working remote-flex I was able to balance the half-time position with my freelance portfolio intact to make ends meet and continue to grow my business. In January of 2018 I accepted a full-time position with VBSR as the Communication Manager, again with ability to work a remote-flex schedule, at a significantly higher pay rate and with complete benefits.

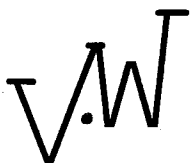
In addition to expanded career opportunities and a \$20,000 salary increase in 3 years, remote work has also afforded me the flexibility to pursue professional development and volunteer opportunities that I was unable to accommodate before. Last year I completed an 80-hour certificate course in Non-Profit Management with the Marlboro College Center for New Leadership and a number of online-courses in Grant Writing and Marketing. I have also stepped into a leadership roll with Vermont Creative Network and joined my town School Board. Working remotely contributes to an overall improved quality of life and mitigates the expense of a long commute. The ability to work remotely as a freelancer and as a full-time employee of a Vermont company has been essential on my path to full-time Vermont residency and businesses ownership.

2017 MRV Housing Study, available at [mrvpd.org](http://mrvpd.org)

[http://mrvpd.org/documents/MadRiverValleyHousingStudy2017\\_OverviewDoc\\_FINAL%20DRAFT.pdf](http://mrvpd.org/documents/MadRiverValleyHousingStudy2017_OverviewDoc_FINAL%20DRAFT.pdf)

2014 Mad River Valley Economic Study, available at [mrvpd.org](http://mrvpd.org)

[http://mrvpd.org/pdfs/MRVPD\\_ECONSTUDY\\_FINAL\\_JUNE2014.pdf](http://mrvpd.org/pdfs/MRVPD_ECONSTUDY_FINAL_JUNE2014.pdf)



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