Introduced by Representatives Cina of Burlington, Sheldon of Middlebury,
Buss of Woodstock, Chesnut-Tangerman of Middletown
Springs, Christie of Hartford, Cole of Hartford, Cordes of
Lincoln, Farlice-Rubio of Barnet, Headrick of Burlington,
Hooper of Randolph, LaMont of Morristown, Logan of
Burlington, McCann of Montpelier, McGill of Bridport,
Mulvaney-Stanak of Burlington, Patt of Worcester, Priestley of
Bradford, Satcowitz of Randolph, Small of Winooski,
Surprenant of Barnard, and Toleno of Brattleboro

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Government; economic development; climate change; regenerative economy

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to require the State to develop a plan for a regenerative economy by 2026.

An act relating to a regenerative economy
It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

(a) It is the intent of the General Assembly to build a regenerative economy. A regenerative economy is an economic system that works to regenerate natural and human resources. The world is facing climate emergencies, mass extinction, and ecological collapse as a consequence of human economic activity over the past 400 years. These activities did not account for the full impact of the economy on the environment and on society. In order to survive these changes, Vermont must build resiliency and create a roadmap for a just transition from an extractive economy to a new economy that repairs and restores the Earth.

(b) In developing a regenerative economy, Vermont will engage persons in their local communities to solve problems and find ways to combine solutions for existing statutory goals, such as universal recycling, greenhouse gas reduction, and wastewater management. Present and future economic development should always account for social equity and environmental protection and the ecological and social well-being of all persons and all life.

(c) A regenerative economy will transition away from practices that engage in unsustainable extraction of natural resources and will instead advance ecological restoration and protect biodiversity by both protecting and regenerating natural resources. The dynamics of the workforce and the
workplace will shift from exploitation to cooperation as human potential is
nurtured and human resources are regenerated. By relocalizing most
production and consumption, an economy will be built that can withstand and
adapt to environmental, social, and technological changes.

(d) Economic control should be rooted in local communities, and persons
should have increased power over the decisions that affect their lives. The
regenerative economy should retain and restore cultures and traditions, while
recognizing that some cultural practices have been harmful and may need to
adapt for the greater good. There will not be economic justice without racial
justice and social equity, and the new economy must recognize and rectify the
intersection of systemized oppressions. Vermont must build the foundation of
new economic and social systems that create economic opportunity and a high
quality of life for all persons, that build public assets and the commons, and
that empower persons to exercise self-determination and freedom. All can live
well in balance with one another.

Sec. 2. 1 V.S.A. chapter 27 is added to read:

CHAPTER 27. REGENERATIVE ECONOMY PLAN

§ 951. REGENERATIVE ECONOMY

The purpose of this chapter is to facilitate Vermont’s transition to a
regenerative economy. A regenerative economy is an economic system that
works to regenerate natural and human resources. Vermont shall achieve a
90 percent regenerative economy on or before December 31, 2046. In order to build a regenerative economy by 2046, Vermont needs the Regenerative Economy Roadmap. This Roadmap shall be built from the ground up by People’s Assemblies and shall be based on regional and State regenerative economy plans. Local communities need to assess and regularly monitor their strengths, needs, challenges, and goals. The State shall assist local communities in the coordination of plans and shall appropriate resources in ways that support regenerative economy plans and the Regenerative Economy Roadmap. All State investments shall be considered in relation to the Regenerative Economy Roadmap, and funding streams should be adjusted over time to achieve a just transition to a new economy based on the Roadmap.

§ 952. REGIONAL REGENERATIVE ECONOMY PLANS

(a) The State shall be divided into 11 regions based on the geographic areas of the regional planning commissions. Each region shall create a regenerative economy plan. Each region shall form a People’s Assembly to draft the plan.

(b) Each of the 11 regional planning commissions shall assist their respective region by facilitating the People’s Assembly. The regional planning commission shall use a robust public process in the People’s Assembly, engaging all aspects of local communities, including businesses, advocates, activists, nonprofits, government officials, health and human services organizations, education groups, and others.
(c) The plan shall:

(1) Assess the strengths, weaknesses, needs, and resources of the region.

(2) Rectify the impact of systemic oppression and create racial and social equity in the local and State economy by empowering and centering historically marginalized racial, ethnic, and social groups, including Black, Indigenous, and other Persons of Color; LGBTQ persons; and persons with disabilities.

(3) Create incentives for the development of regenerative agriculture that engages and empowers farmers in building healthy soils and integrating solutions for reducing carbon emissions, creating zero waste, and cleaning up waterways.

(4) Cultivate food justice and universal access to healthy local food by addressing food production so that Vermont will be able to feed the State year-round by increasing the productivity of existing land, eliminating food waste, promoting the recycling of food, and developing indoor growing facilities.

(5) Prevent waste from being generated in every sector of the economy.

(6) Incentivize sustainable design through materials management systems that create products that allow the return of component materials back into the manufacturing stream once their useful life is over, with a preference for highest and best uses.
(7) Minimize reliance on waste disposal, landfilling, and incineration and improve waste management plans.

(8) Reduce energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, and other adverse environmental impacts.

(9) Encourage local, publicly owned energy generation and associated waste containment with plans to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

(10) Support the achievement of existing statutory goals regarding environmental protection.

(11) Guide local and State agencies to make all policy and purchase decisions through the lens of reaching the State Comprehensive Energy Plan goal of 90 by 50.

(12) Move beyond the Universal Recycling Law.

(13) Build a circular economy by providing economic and other incentives for the colocation of businesses and manufacturers in designated areas to share resources, reduce waste, and allow more productive use of waste and by-products.

(14) Encourage the adoption of biologically inspired production processes and materials.

(15) Develop land use policy that utilizes old sites first before creating new ones.
(16) Restore ecosystems whenever possible.

(17) Minimize the waste of human resources and potential by increasing opportunities for meaningful employment; providing flexible pathways for education, training, and employment; and identifying underutilized segments of the workforce.

(18) Consider ways to improve population health and provide universal access to health care and wellness support, including a healthy physical, mental, emotional, and social environment.

(19) Create universal child care options that maximize child development and are financially and physically accessible to all families.

(20) Support universal eldercare options that maximize quality of life for persons as they age and that are financially and physically accessible for all families.

(21) Support a robust, lifelong public education system, with opportunities for retraining and reskilling that respond to ongoing workforce and workers’ needs.

(22) Assess ongoing workforce development and education needs for the region and explore ways to guarantee jobs for all who are willing and able to work in the region.

(23) Upgrade and weatherize all existing housing stock before building new units, use all available housing stock before building new units, use land
more efficiently while protecting ecosystems, prevent waste in housing infrastructure, and build systems of housing to the highest environmental standards that ensure access to housing that is affordable based on income level.

(24) Develop transportation options with minimum harm and maximum benefit to the environment and to persons.

(25) Demonstrate flexibility and adaptability to rapid social, ecological, and technological changes.

(26) Prepare for the impact of climate and other ecological emergencies through review of existing disaster planning and through development of greater local resilience.

(27) Suggest priorities for State spending and investment of State resources into a regenerative economy and recommend ways to move towards participatory budgeting on the local, regional, and State levels. As used in this section, “participatory budgeting” means a citizen engagement process through which community members decide how to allocate a portion of a public budget.

(28) Explore strategies for government agencies at all levels to divest their holdings of fossil-fuel-related investments.

(29) Identify possible revenue streams and ways to fund the transition to a regenerative economy, including public banking options.
(30) Create possible incentives to increase productivity, efficiency, and resilience of the local and State economy.

(31) Recommend clear benchmarks to measure progress, with deadlines for various steps.

(32) Take into account existing plans, like regional energy plans and hazard mitigation plans, and consider ways to maximize existing federal benefits and subsidies to build local resilience and independence.

(d) The plan shall identify how the goals will be met on schedule, including achieving a 30 percent regenerative economy by 2030, a 60 percent regenerative economy by 2039, and a 90 percent regenerative economy by 2046.

(e) The plan may be amended at any meeting that has been properly noticed upon a majority vote of Assembly members.

(f) The plan shall either be readopted or amended as part of the regional planning process established in 24 V.S.A. chapter 117.

§ 953. PEOPLE’S ASSEMBLY

(a) Each of the 11 regions shall form a People’s Assembly. The People’s Assembly shall be open to anyone in the region who wants to participate, and it shall be grounded in the principles of direct democracy. Technology shall be used to make the meetings as inclusive as possible. Amenities such as food and child care shall be offered, and scheduling shall include options for
participation by those with different work schedules. The local regional planning commission shall staff the People’s Assembly and facilitate and lead each meeting in a way that centers on the persons in the region, serving as professional support for a community-driven process. Membership of the Assembly shall be open to all residents of the region. The following shall participate as nonvoting advisors to the People’s Assembly:

(1) a representative from local solid waste districts in the regions;

(2) a representative from the regional development corporation in the region; and

(3) a representative from each municipality in the region.

(b) Each People’s Assembly shall hold public meetings in order to develop the regenerative economy plan for the region. Notice of each meeting shall be posted for two weeks before the meeting.

(c) The Assembly shall provide notice of each meeting to each of the following: the local District Environmental Commission, the local water districts, the local municipal energy planning committees, business owners in the region, school boards in the region, faith communities in the region, nonprofit organizations in the region, and community groups in the region.

(d) The Assembly shall meet at least nine times before December 31, 2024 and at least once per year starting in 2025.
(e) The Assembly shall post drafts of the plan to be inspected and reviewed by the public on the website of the local regional planning commission.

(f) The Assembly shall engage in the planning process under section 954 of this title.

(g) The Assembly shall adopt its own rules for conducting meetings, which shall meet the following criteria:

1. ensure that all voices are heard and that historically marginalized persons have power;
2. maximize accessibility and provide accommodations to prevent barriers to participation;
3. use principles of participatory decision making and budgeting to the greatest extent possible; and
4. the final vote on the plan shall include at least two weeks’ public notice and shall allow for in-person and remote voting over the course of several days.

§ 954. STATE AGENCY REGENERATIVE ECONOMY PLANS

(a) Every State agency shall create a regenerative economy plan. The plan shall address the same issues as the regional regenerative economy plans as required under subsection 952(c) of this title.

(b) Each agency shall hold at least two public hearings on the plan.
(c) On or before January 15, 2025, each agency shall submit a draft plan to the House Committees on Appropriations and on Ways and Means and the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on Finance for review and consideration as part of the budget process.

§ 955. REGENERATIVE ECONOMY ROADMAP

(a) The Regenerative Economy Roadmap shall be created by the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies. The Roadmap shall be a 20-year plan, and it shall guide all State investment so that the State obtains a 90 percent regenerative economy by 2046.

(b) The Roadmap shall address the same criteria as the regenerative economy plans as established in subsection 952(c) of this title.

(c) The Roadmap shall be consistent with all of the regional and State agency regenerative economy plans.

(d) The General Assembly shall consider the Roadmap as part of its budget process. The General Assembly shall explore ways to move towards processes of participatory budgeting and include the People’s Assemblies and their ongoing reassessment of regional regenerative economy plans.

§ 956. REGENERATIVE ECONOMY GRANT PROGRAMS

(a) The Chair of the Natural Resources Board shall establish the Circular Economy Grant Program. This Program shall provide grants to encourage site sharing and the development of circular manufacturing.
(b) The Secretary of Natural Resources shall establish the Systems Transformation Grant Program. The Program shall provide grants to State agencies to develop public and private partnerships to solve Vermont’s greatest social and ecological problems.

(c) The Secretary of Commerce and Community Development shall establish the Regenerative Economy Grant Program. This Program shall provide grants to businesses that plan to address the regenerative economy criteria established in subsection 952(c) of this title.

(d) On or before July 1, 2025, the Chair of the Natural Resources Board, the Secretary of Natural Resources, and the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development shall adopt procedures for the content of the grant applications and criteria for making awards for the grants established under this section.

(e) The following sums of money are appropriated from the General Fund in fiscal year 2024 for the grants established in this section:

(1) $1,000,000.00 to the Chair of the Natural Resource Board for the Grant Program established in subsection (a) of this section;

(2) $1,000,000.00 to the Secretary of Natural Resources for the Grant Program established in subsection (b) of this section; and
(3) $1,000,000.00 to the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development for the Grant Program established in subsection (c) of this section.

Sec. 3. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2023.