

Tourism Day 2023

Testimony before the joint hearing of Senate Economic Development and House Commerce Committees

Good morning.

I'd like to thank everyone from the Senate Economic Development and House Commerce Committees for this opportunity to speak to you today.

I am Karen Nevin, Executive Director of Revitalizing Waterbury. We are a community development non-profit focused on supporting our local businesses, ensuring our town is livable and welcoming and promoting our town to encourage people to visit. We are also the coordinating organization for Waterbury's Designated Downtown.

Today I'd like to share a story about partnerships, resiliency and the pandemic. In March 2020, sitting upstairs in my new makeshift office at home, I took a call from Carrie Simmons, Executive Director of the Stowe Area Association. Businesses in both of our communities were panicking and we knew we had to figure out how to help them. Not a day later, I spoke with Eric Friedman, Executive Director of the Mad River Valley Chamber of Commerce. It was obvious to the three of us that if we worked together, we'd be able to do more than if we worked apart.

This partnership was unimaginable to our communities before the pandemic. We all behaved like we were in silos, trying to keep bicyclists in the Valley, or skiers in Stowe, or kayakers in Waterbury. Reality is that we have similar assets in all three communities and visitors didn't see boundaries when they drove up and down Route 100. In each of our communities, the visitor economy is critical to all of our success – for our residents, business owners, employees, stores, restaurants – and as you know, it came to a screaming halt in early 2020.

As a group, we decided to apply for the ACCD Restart Vermont Regional Marketing Grant, \$10,000 each for a total of \$30,000. Working together we created a new brand – The Best of Route 100 – made a website and created a locally focused marketing program to encourage shopping during the holidays.

After a successful launch, we continued our interconnected marketing strategies with shared blogs, links on websites and other promotions. The new partnership was incredibly well received by businesses in all three communities.

The Best of Route 100 partnership sought a second \$30,000 Tourism & Economic Recovery Marketing grant from the Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing last year. For this grant we wanted additional assets for promoting the Best of Route 100 to summer visitors as well as new photography and video featuring underrepresented people in our community.

This was a fun project! We hired a local production company, Moving Pictures Division, and created eight promotional videos. We identified two audiences – the adventurer type and families. I'd love to show three of them to you here.....(show videos: Happiness, Adventure, Beauty). We started our marketing campaign a few weeks ago and are currently promoting our region with these videos on social media, using our new Best of Route 100 Facebook and Instagram pages.

Promoting Vermont and Waterbury is what Revitalizing Waterbury does. Vermont's Downtowns are an important destination for visitors who seek an experience that includes small town charm, delicious and creative dining experiences, famous libations and other tasty treats, special shops and boutiques, inspiring art and events and of course all of our welcoming people. Everything is connected. Visitors spend their money at our businesses. Businesses are open, enlivening our downtowns. Residents have a more vibrant place to live and work. At RW, we call it the "circle of community."

Thank you for letting me tell you the story of The Best of Route 100 partnership. I'd be happy to answer any of your questions.

Best of Route 100 Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/@bestofvtroute100>