July 02, 2025

VCRD Builds Community in Sunderland

On Wednesday, June 18, residents of the Town of Sunderland gathered to brainstorm ideas for the future of their town. The meeting was the first step in the Vermont Council on Rural Development's (VCRD) community visit, which the Sunderland Selectboard requested. Over the next few months, Sunderland will meet two more times with VCRD to select priorities from this initial visioning session, form task forces, and build action plans.

"There was such a strong sense of pride and enthusiasm among our residents," Selectboard Chairman Todd Lawrence told VLCT. "Hearing so many thoughtful ideas about how to improve Sunderland reminded me how invested our community is in its future."

For some attendees, the community visit allowed them to newly connect with town officials and fellow residents. Together, all those attending generated pages of project ideas ranging from a trail map to a community center.

VCRD comes only when invited and works free of charge, with towns solely responsible for covering the costs of mailing and a community dinner. Since 1996, the organization has conducted over 85 visits like that in Sunderland. Notably, towns like Guilford and Montgomery have each launched successful multimillion dollar development projects from their community visits, with Guilford renovating a historic

building into a community center and Montgomery revitalizing its wastewater infrastructure.

VLCT is committed to supporting VCRD's work. Executive Director of VLCT, Ted Brady, serves on VCRD's Board of Directors and has attended dozens of community visits as a member of the Visiting Team. This team is assembled for each community visit and serves as a sounding board for town residents, listening and providing reflections at the end of each meeting. Brady, alongside VLCT Intern Julia Keeton, formed part of the Visting Team in Sunderland. Director of Municipal Operations Support, Katie Buckley, represented VLCT the same week at a community visit in Windham.

You can read more about this process and request a community visit on VCRD's website.