

“Town Takes on Climate Change”

Please Join Our Local Climate Economy Programs

Addison Independent Community Forum, Steve Maier, Chair, Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Initiative, February 1, 2018.

How can the greater Middlebury area become an even better place to visit, to live, to raise families, to grow businesses, and to grow old? What strategies can we deploy to make our region more affordable, resilient, inclusive, and vibrant, even in the face of climate changes and disruptions? At the core of the Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Initiative is the belief that the vitality of our communities and our response to climate change are intrinsically linked. As nations and communities around the globe marshal historic financial resources to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, those places that are pioneers in developing entrepreneurial approaches to this challenge are going to thrive. I invite you to join conversations underway in our community as we chart a path towards becoming one of those places of innovation and leadership.

A group in the Middlebury area has engaged with the Vermont Council on Rural Development to participate in the new Climate Economy Model Communities Program. Through September, October and November over 150 residents participated in the “Greater Middlebury Climate Economy Initiative” process with support and advice from a team of 36 visiting resource team members. After considering dozens of great ideas, the initiative is now focused on four priorities.

One team has gathered with utility and other expert partners to think about how to help residents and businesses save money and increase health and comfort through energy efficiency, fuel switching, and renewable energy opportunities. They are looking to begin with a pilot program aiming to radically increase participation in these activities in one or two neighborhoods.

Another group is developing strategies to make it easier to get around town and connect to other communities. While Addison County already has a high-quality rural transit provider in ACTR, members of this team are working to make it even easier to take the bus for in-town trips and to be sure we develop a great multi-modal transportation hub in our downtown. They also are considering how to improve walking and biking opportunities in town and how to facilitate more ridesharing.

Agriculture and food production is part of our region’s economic base and future vitality. A third task force wants to recognize and support those area farmers that are successfully employing practices that sequester carbon, reduce environmental impacts, and improve results.

Finally, a fourth task force is considering how we support and help coordinate all of this important work on an ongoing basis. Are there existing organizations we can partner with or is there a need to build something new that supports our communities and active citizens as we take on these and more action ideas?

Over 70 local citizens have stepped forward to serve on these Task Forces and each Task Force has a Chair or Co-Chair. We are in the process of developing a common vision for the initiative to unify efforts of the Task Forces moving forward. Engaging youth has also been identified as a critical component of this process and a concerted effort will be made to engage younger members of the community in all aspects of the Climate Economy Initiative as it moves ahead.

As our work continues, my invitation is to get involved. We have created a website (www.middclimateeconomy.org) that will provide regular updates on the work of the initiative with details on each of the Task Forces. Please be in touch with me (sbmaier55@gmail.com or 802-238-6699) if you want to join any of these conversations or have any suggestions or feedback to share. Our success is built upon local involvement and leadership. While we are off to a great start, our forward momentum will depend on our ability to attract a growing group of people to the table.