

Memorandum

To: Community Access Channel Directors
From: Paul Cillo and Doug Hoffer, Public Assets Institute
Date: 24 January 2007
Re: Broadcast of the Commission on the Future of Economic Development

You will shortly receive a DVD from ORCA Media in Montpelier that contains a video recording of the January 8 meeting of the Vermont Commission on the Future of Economic Development. With funding from the Vermont Community Foundation, the Public Assets Institute paid ORCA to record the meeting. We hope you will consider broadcasting this program and others to follow.

Background: The Legislature created the Commission to develop a five-year plan. This had previously been the responsibility of the Vermont Economic Progress Council (VEPC). Unlike VEPC, however, the new Commission has a broader membership including legislators and representatives of organized labor and non-profits. The Commission must submit a report to the legislature in September.

The statute creating the commission is very explicit about the legislature's intention that the process be "open and inclusive, with broad-based public engagement" (Act 184 2006, Sec. 17). Commission members were appointed in July but did not hold their first meeting until October. Although the Commission has discussed the need for public outreach, it has not yet done anything to inform Vermonters about its work or seek input from interested parties.

The Public Assets Institute (PAI) has partnered with a diverse group of organizations to monitor the commission and ensure that the process is open and inclusive. In October, the PAI proposed that the meetings be videotaped and distributed to community access channels. While awaiting a decision, we arranged to have the January meeting recorded and asked that the Commission share the costs of future recordings. The Commission agreed to a trial while other options were considered (this discussion is on the DVD).

To date, the vast majority of testimony has been by representatives of various state departments and programs. But the Commission is expected to begin hearing from non-governmental "experts" in some of the subject areas listed in the statute. This testimony will help citizens become better informed about the issues as opportunities arise for direct participation (e.g., web based surveys, local meetings sponsored by the Commission, etc.).

In the past, such long-range economic development planning efforts were not especially open or inclusive. This is a rare opportunity for Vermonters to be heard on this subject.

We hope you will find time in your schedule to broadcast the DVD. The January meeting was unusually long (6 hours) but most meetings run 4 hours. ORCA has provided captions to help the viewer identify speakers, as well as run times for major agenda items.

We would be grateful if you would let us know when you plan to broadcast the program so we can alert viewers in your area. Thank you in advance.

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Commission web site
<http://www.dca.state.vt.us/commissions/cfed/index.html>

Public Assets Institute
<http://www.publicassets.org/>