

Memorandum

To: John Goodrich, Chair
Commission on the Future of Economic Development (CFED)

Cc: CFED Commissioners
State Representative Kathy Keenan, Chair, House Commerce
State Senator Vince Illuzzi, Chair, Senate Economic Development

From: Paul Cillo and Doug Hoffer, Public Assets Institute

Date: October 30, 2006

Re: Public process

As you and your colleagues consider how best to structure the public process, we offer the following thoughts and suggestions.

First, the statute provides useful guidance [10 VSA §1(f)(1)]

"In fulfilling its economic development planning responsibilities, the commission shall:

- (1) Conduct a planning process that is open and inclusive, with broad-based public engagement ensuring participation that is demographically and geographically representative of the state and includes input from a wide range of perspectives, expertise and interests, including the general assembly, state agencies and the administration, regional and local planning and development organizations, municipalities, the private sector, and business organizations, including owners, knowledgeable in the areas of economic interest such as agriculture, social and human services, energy, education, child care, environmental issues, science and technology, arts and culture, transportation, telecommunications, housing, workforce development, and tourism and recreation."

There are two distinct parts to the charge: 1) "broad-based public engagement" and 2) "input from a wide range of perspectives, expertise, and interests."

The first part (broad-based public engagement) will take time to plan and will require professional assistance (and perhaps a formal RFP process). Furthermore, in order to maximize the value of the public engagement process, the commission should present people with information about current conditions, challenges, opportunities, and alternative strategies. Therefore, the public engagement process should follow the commission's efforts to solicit input from experts in the various subject areas. The commission itself must first collect and organize the information necessary to create a manageable presentation for the public.

Therefore, the commission should begin now to consider the options, the budget, and the time frame for the public engagement process. But while that is under review, the commission could use its time to begin working on the second part of the charge.

With regard to the second part (input from those with expertise in various subject areas), we think the commission can arrange to have structured discussions without going through a lengthy RFP process to select a consultant. For example, the commission could:

- ⇒ Hire a part-time consultant to staff the commission, receive and distribute submissions from interested parties, and facilitate the focused discussions described below.
 - Presumably, this contract would be for less than \$10,000 so it could be done without a formal RFP. The commission could identify at least three qualified consultants and select one without a lengthy RFP process.
- ⇒ Assemble a list of the major private, non-profit, and governmental organizations active in each of the subject areas identified in the statute quoted above (e.g., Energy - DPS, GMP, CVPS, BED, WEC, VEIC-Efficiency VT, Renewable Energy VT, Regulatory Assistance Project, etc.).
- ⇒ Invite them to submit brief summaries (two pages or less) about how their area of interest contributes to the state's long-term economic prosperity, including their vision and long-term goals so the commissioners could read in advance and avoid lengthy testimony;
 - Entities invited to submit materials and join the discussion should be encouraged to focus on statewide goals and objectives rather than those specific to their own organizations;
 - Although the commission would start with the larger and/or better known entities in each subject area, efforts should be made to identify others with relevant expertise.
- ⇒ Schedule facilitated round table discussions on two subject areas for each commission meeting (1.5 to 2 hours each).
- ⇒ Contract with a major cable access channel to tape the round table discussions for broadcast on all of the state's community access channels. This will create a record of the proceedings AND provide an opportunity for thousands of Vermonters to be educated along with the commission.

This approach has several advantages. First, it gets the process moving right away and avoids the delays inherent in the RFP process. Second, it provides structure for the first 5 or 6 meetings. Third, by engaging the entities focused on the major subject areas early in the process, they are likely to inform their members / constituents about the work of the commission and encourage them to participate in the public process. Fourth, the taping and broadcast of the round table discussions is the best way to achieve the statutory goal of broad-based public engagement.

We support the commission's efforts to broaden the discussion about the state's economic future and hope the information provided in this memo is useful to you. Doug is our point person for this work, but if you have any questions about the ideas in this memo or if we can be helpful in some other way, please feel free to contact either of us. Our contact information is below.

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