

## **Creative Economy's "Open Air Committee" Moves into Phase 2**

Over the past few months, a group of concerned citizens have joined together to form - via Rutland City's overall Creative Economy process - what is now called an Open Air Committee (OAC). Members have worked with local merchants and downtown building owners to define a common vision for a more pedestrian-friendly center that will promote social and economic development in the downtown area. Although initial conversation via the Creative Economy process began in response to ideas about making Center Street a pedestrian zone, OAC start-up work has explored an array of viable downtown options, which has formed the basis of discussion with local merchants, building owners and other key stakeholders.

From the onset, OAC members have defined its challenge as such:

*Many positive social and economic activities currently take place in the downtown Rutland area; however, a variety of basic, open air infrastructure does not exist to support a social and economic synergy of these events and spur further creative investment in the downtown area. By linking and promoting proven, successful businesses and events via a series of small to large scale "open air" infrastructure improvements, the OAC hopes to create a center point for downtown Rutland's cultural, community, and commercial life.*

Such a center point will allow merchants and community members alike to: (1) Expand successful events to attract more consumers downtown; (2) Create economies of scale by better linking key resources, pedestrian areas, businesses and consumers; (3) Attract tourists, consumers and new merchants downtown; (4) Promote sustainable, yet socially responsible engines of economic growth, which increase building capitalization and occupancy rates; and (5) Allow area-based families to fully enjoy and access downtown's outstanding architecture, wealth of businesses, and stunning mountain views.

To achieve these objectives and reach its goal of creating a *downtown center point for social and economic development*, the OAC has focused its efforts on a phased implementation schedule. Phase one has included creating a full social and economic inventory of downtown Rutland by soliciting and

documenting key input from local merchants, building owners, residents, and other current stakeholders. Based on this input, phase two has begun the process of creating a social and economic, open air infrastructure vision for downtown Rutland. This process will culminate in the presentation of a variety of easily digestible projects to the community. Phase 3 will begin the process of identifying all potential funding sources and will reassess the vision based on investment opportunities and timetables. Phase 4 is expected to secure funding for main projects and begin construction.

Currently, the OAC is in phase two of its plan - transitioning from the inventory phase to the project planning phase. In addition to forming and approving a formal, 10+ page action plan the OAC has recently completed three substantial surveys of merchants, downtown building owners and pedestrians. These were completed to document baseline numbers for funding proposals and determine potential support for key projects. Six sub-committees have been established to focus on: merchant and building owner relations, project management, community outreach, best practice research and more; and work has been initiated within each group. Exploratory meetings have been conducted with the Church Street Market Place in Burlington, Senator Leahy's office, the successful Bellows Falls Creative Economy leaders, and more. Based on initial and thorough research, upcoming efforts will begin to concretely define and present to downtown stakeholders proposed project specifics.

The OAC meets on the last Tuesday of every month at 5:15pm. For more information on meeting times, please contact co-chairs Mark Foley, Jr. or Chris Siliski via the Creative Economy address: [rutlandcreative@yahoo.com](mailto:rutlandcreative@yahoo.com).