

Rutland Herald

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Article published Mar 19, 2010

Community-building time

Lest anyone think all is doom and gloom in Rutland – and between the economy and the state of affairs at the south end of Wales Street, there are plenty of those stories in the city these days – along come the good folks at the Creative Economy to remind us of the positive energy in and around the community.

Having gotten a long way down the paths originally embarked upon almost five years ago, the group is going to have another series of community meetings to refresh and recharge. You may have seen the various committees' continuing op-eds in the Herald or caught representatives on PEG-TV.

The Creative Economy group has had a hand in a number of successes large and small, from Friday Night Live to the monthly Art Hops to the almost-ready-for-prime-time Rutland Creek Path, the downtown shopping bags and many more. Some, like the path, are works not yet completed. Others that are in progress include an online database for locals and visitors alike of recreation facilities, from swimming pools to biking and hiking trails in Rutland County; a fenced, off-leash dog park and the work on a revitalized downtown public space. Proposals for that include Center Street Alley and/or a permanent farmers' market along Evelyn Street.

One reason these projects have moved forward where others languish is that they are grassroots efforts, dreamed up by residents at open community meetings and moved forward not by government but almost exclusively by volunteers. There is some outside assistance: A grant paid for a one-person staff for a couple of years, the nonprofit Vermont Council on Rural Development facilitates the community meetings and the committees rely occasionally on local nonprofit groups for their expertise, but the movement is getting back to its volunteer roots at the end of the month, and looking to get a couple of new initiatives under way.

The next meeting, at the Paramount on March 31, is to once again get people together to discover what the majority feels is the best project or couple of projects for the community ... not just the city, but including surrounding towns as well.

The four areas of interest from the first consensus were arts, outdoor recreation, public space and sustainability. This year's goals may follow up on those or may move in different directions entirely. What will come out of the meeting is anyone's guess, but it's certainly not too early to have your thinking caps on about what one or two things would be the biggest improvements to our community that private citizens can create.

The first lesson Rutland has learned from the Creative Economy group is that when we work together, we can achieve a great deal. The second is that there are incredibly

motivated, energetic and talented people among us who want to improve where we live, not for personal gain but because it is good for the community as a whole.

The final lesson Rutland has learned is that while these projects are worthwhile, none of them come without a great deal of time and energy. But good things are worth working toward, and the journey is its own reward. The next step is in a couple of weeks and it's well worth taking, together.
