

The Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) and Smart Growth Vermont (SGV) announced a strategic merger to more efficiently and effectively promote land use and community development policies that best serve the state's ecological, economic and social needs.

Effective July 1, 2011, SGV's key programs will be consolidated with VNRC's Sustainable Communities program. It is anticipated that some SGV board members will join VNRC's board, and that John Ewing – SGV's founder and former Board Chair – will serve on VNRC's advisory committee.

SGV (formerly the Vermont Forum on Sprawl) was founded in 1998 to support development patterns that reinforce downtowns and compact neighborhoods. Over that time, SGV has worked with other organizations, including Preservation Trust of Vermont, Housing Vermont, and VNRC on a variety of initiatives, including strengthening the state's Downtown Program, enacting Growth Centers legislation, and providing assistance to communities engaged in smart growth planning.

Ewing explained that “the merger is a logical integration of two organizations that have been working side by side for years and one that will create a unified voice for smart growth and expanded leverage and greater efficiencies at a time when nonprofits are struggling to sustain themselves.”

VNRC was founded in 1963 to support good stewardship of Vermont's natural resources and working landscape. According to VNRC Executive Director Elizabeth Courtney, the two organizations' decision to join forces will strengthen VNRC's focus on community development and smart growth issues.

“SGV has been a leader in bringing people to the table in an attempt to solve Vermont's thorniest land use and development challenges” Courtney explained. “The programs that they have developed, such as the on-line community planning toolbox, will enhance the work we are doing with communities, state officials, and the development community.”

The merger is the result of a five month process that began soon after former Executive Director Noelle MacKay left the organization to become Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Housing, Economic Development & Community Affairs in January. “We decided to explore all options for the future. After interviewing stakeholders and meeting with funders and donors, the decision was made that SGV's mission would be best served by joining forces with VNRC,” Ewing explained.

According to Ewing, a key to the success of the merger has been the leadership provided by VNRC's Deputy Director Brian Shupe, who served as Program Director for SGV before joining VNRC in 2008. “Brian was heavily involved in SGV's work. His passion for Vermont, commitment to smart growth and willingness to work with people with vastly different perspectives to find common ground is an important part of SGV's legacy that will be well served at VNRC.”