

November 1, 2004

The Future Depends on Citizen Participation

As we move closer to the November election each party is working as hard as possible to get out the vote for their candidate. The party with the greatest number of active participants will likely win the White House. For some people casting a vote every four years is their only act of civic engagement. Many choose not to vote, leaving it to others to choose their local, state and national representatives. In the 2000 election 69% of registered Vermont voters went to the polls. It's likely to be even higher this year. Nationally 55% of the voting age population voted in that election. There may be many reasons why there is a greater level of participation in this state. Part of the story may be that Vermont requires more of its citizens to get things done in its towns and villages than many other states. The size and scale of our communities is helpful in promoting accessibility to our government officials and the democratic process.

Vermont depends on active citizen volunteers to serve on boards and commissions; and to make important decisions regarding community life. Our non-profits are also well served by citizens who serve on boards and as volunteers to make things happen on the ground. Town meetings encourage people to take part in community life, and in most towns there are projects and issues that give residents an opportunity to voice their opinions. Informed participation can make the difference in the success or failure of a proposed municipal project, a bond issue, or a candidacy. Democracy, at the local, State or National level works best when there is a high level of participation.

When recently asked about the importance of public participation, a local official responded with the following "Public participation is the most reliable way to gather a mix of views on a subject. It's through the serious examination of that mix that credible and informed public decisions are made." The Valley Visioning process is a forum for doing just that; gathering a wide variety of views on topics that are relevant to living in this Valley such as: how much growth can be accommodated; how much density should be allowed at Irasville; what resources can be shared by the three towns; what is the future of the historic villages; how do we protect natural resources; and what can be done to encourage business development? There may be more common ground among Valley residents than some would think. The forum is an opportunity for everyone to share ideas and concerns in a neutral setting. It's also a chance for those who don't regularly attend meetings in their town to participate in something that's important but doesn't require a long term commitment. This November exercise your power by voting and attending the community visioning forum. All are encouraged to come to the celebratory dinner on Friday evening and to join with others on Saturday to share ideas and points of view on how to create a shared vision for the future. For a vision of the future to be shared – a good turnout is essential.

Mark your calendars for Friday November 5th and Saturday November 6th. On-line registration is possible at [**vision2020@madriver.com**](mailto:vision2020@madriver.com)