

## Ash borer a deadly threat

C3

"Is it just supplies or could a teacher use it for a pizza party?" asked Boerem.

"It's mostly for classroom supplies, there would be procedures the teachers would have to sign off on," said Russ.

"Are there points on them, why not just a VISA gift card?" asked Dana Riccobani.

"We would get rebates," said Russ. "Also, when you purchase a VISA gift card, if you don't spend the entire amount the first time,

— See CARDS on page A5



# Economy summit returns, outlines big issues for region

## State pushes "missing middle housing" in new resource

By Lauren Harkawik

DOVER - In an effort to help spur housing development in Vermont, the state has created a toolkit complete with building designs for housing units. The toolkit, which is called, "Homes For All," was presented at a panel focused on rural redevelopment at the Southern Vermont Economy Summit on Tuesday.

Amy Tomasso, community planning and project manager for the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, said the state created the toolkit in order to encourage small-scale development that can incrementally address Vermont's housing challenges.

The focus of the development toolkit is "missing middle homes," which the toolkit defines as "house-scale residential building types featuring multiple units that are compatible in scale and form with detached single-household building types." These include duplexes, small-scale multi-household buildings, and smaller homes that are secondary to a primary home, such as a backyard cottage.

The state went as far as to include actual designs for homes that can fit in existing communities in the brochure.

"We did research into the existing missing middle housing stock and proposed four designs that we feel could fit really well in communities across the state and also based on the common lot sizes," said Tomasso. "It's not going out into the beautiful forestlands and building homes there but how can we puzzle piece homes into our existing communities and downtowns?"

Tomasso shared the development from the state as part of a panel discussion titled, "Add it Up: Unpacking the Potential of Rural Development." Presentations from other panelists highlighted how heavy a lift rural redevelopment can be.

John Dunbar, co-owner of Whitaker Properties, shared his experience of developing that missing middle housing in Bellows Falls. Dunbar co-owns the business with his brother. The company has redeveloped several properties that it owns at a loss. The company's math shows that one of the properties won't see a return on investment for at least 87 years.

"I won't live for another 87 years," Dunbar said. "If we set out to make money or retire on this, that isn't panning out, but that isn't why we got into this."

Dunbar, who clarified that he and his brother both have other full-time jobs and complete much of their redevelopment work in sweat equity, said the pair set out to make more housing in Bellows Falls. "We're hoping we can make a more friendly environment to create more housing in our town."

Chloe Learey, executive director of the Winston Prouty Center, gave an in-depth presentation about a project Winston Prouty has undertaken to create 300 housing units on its campus in Brattleboro, formerly the Austine Campus.

Learey said that as an organization, Winston Prouty decided to buy the campus and create housing on its land as a way to address the housing crisis in southern Vermont. In 2021, a study showed that Brattleboro was in need of at least 500 housing units to satisfy its then-current needs.

Figuring out how to do it, however, is a heavy lift.



From left, Jane May Jones, of I Love Art Space, Gig Zboray, town of Whitingham official, and Susan Coakly, of the Putney Planning Commission, share a discussion during Tuesday's Southern Vermont Economy Summit. The annual event was held at Mount Snow's Grand Summit Hotel.

Photo courtesy BDCC/Facebook

## With climate resilience, WRC director says finding common ground is the challenge

By Lauren Harkawik

DOVER - At a climate-focused panel at the Southern Vermont Economy Summit on Tuesday, Windham Regional Commission Executive Director Chris Campany asked panelists a question: How, in siloed New England, can we get groups to work together?

"My concern for not just Vermont, but New England, is, we're talking about interconnectedness and recognizing interdependence and avoiding or breaking down stovepipes, but since the 1600s, New England has been building massive stovepipes," said Campany. "We have 281 stovepipes who are effectively making decisions regarding climate resilience in Vermont. That's repeated throughout New England. Doing it at the watershed scale and community scale where it's needed is really challenging."

Campany noted that the absence of county-level government in Vermont makes it even more difficult to pool resources and dollars.

"It's almost impossible to do things between the municipal level and the state level, so a lot doesn't get done," he said. "I've been sitting through a lot of discussions about climate migration, and how do you accommodate the people who are here and make room for the people who are coming? To my mind, our biggest barriers to climate adaptation and resilience are structural ones.

Not being able to do the decision making to make the investments that are needed because we're still relying on tiny geographies to make decisions."

Campany's remarks came during a Q&A session following presentations from panelists about communities that have come together across town lines and sectors. In response, moderator Chris Estes, co-director of Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group, said he thought the best way to bridge gaps between groups is to come at the conversation not from a solely municipal standpoint.

"I think the intersection opportunity we have is to blend these conversations with people who might be more fixated on economic development," he said. "So much of New England's economic development growth and planning is thinking about outdoor recreation. Getting people who are thinking about long-term planning and the folks who are thinking about tourism is a way to bridge that conversation. It also lends itself to being bigger than governmental structures. Outdoor resources aren't bound by our government lines."

Moreover, Estes said, regional leaders have the opportunity to bridge conversations between communities.

"New England is almost like a hyper-

— See CLIMATE on page A6

### First Section

- News .....A2
- Opinion .....A4
- History .....A5
- Entertainment .....A7

### Second Section

- Community .....B1
- Classifieds .....B3
- Obituaries .....B6
- Sports .....B7
- Real Estate .....B8

### Third Section

- Real Estate .....C1



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— See HOUSING on page A6

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## Developer says bringing people together is key

*HOUSING continued from page A1*

Housing units are estimated to cost \$263,000 per unit to build, not including \$6 million in water and sewer upgrades that would be required. Though a path forward is uncertain, Learey said she is intent on finding a way.

"We needed this housing yesterday," said Learey. "We can't afford not to do this. How can we take this possibility and say we can't make it work? We can make it work."

Dan Riddlehoover, of M&S Development in Brattleboro, said that for a developer, it's integral to bring in as many community partners and funding sources as possible. "The whole is greater than the sum of the parts," he said.

To illustrate this, Riddlehoover showed a picture of a groundbreaking ceremony where shovels were being put into the ground. The picture showed about 10 people.

"Very few of the people in this picture are developers," he said, noting that the majority of the people in the picture were community partners who had contributed funding.

Riddlehoover said that finding ways to develop housing stock, either through new construction or through redevelopment of existing buildings, is integral to economic growth and the health of Vermont's communities. He said he often hears people frame housing and its relationship to jobs as a question akin to "what comes first, the chicken or the egg?" That is not the right question to be asking, he said.

"Have you heard stories of people being offered a job and they turn it down because they couldn't get a place to



Amy Tomasso, community planning and project manager for the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, presents at the Southern Vermont Economy Summit on Tuesday.  
 Lauren Harkawik

live?" Nearly the entire room of attendees at the presentation — which by the time it started was standing room only — raised their hands.

"Yeah, that's not the chicken or the egg," said Riddlehoover. "It's housing first."

## Panelists discuss how working closely is important

*CLIMATE continued from page A1*

democracy in the sense of its representation, smallness, and divisions," said Estes. "We all have ways it's easy to divide ourselves, but the commonality of what we have at stake is really important."

The discussion that preceded the exchange was a panel discussion that centered around climate disasters and how various communities had recovered from them. Though panelists hailed from dramatically different regions — tornado-torn Ohio and flood-threatened Cape Cod — their presentations had a thematic thread: the work being done to recover from and anticipate threats brought on by extreme weather and climate change is happening across sectors.

Elizabeth Baxter, manager of disaster recovery and economic development planning for the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, said that when a series of tornados hit her region in southwest Ohio in 2019, the impacts were far-reaching.

"In the days following that disaster, it became very clear to our impacted jurisdictions that they were going to need additional support with recovery services," said Baxter. "They found themselves unsure of how to navigate that process."

The regional planning commission's role in recovery was that it brought together voices from across town lines and across sectors and mobilized those groups in order to achieve their common goal of recovery.

"The first thing we did was we brought impacted communities together to understand what resources they needed and how they needed help in recovery," said Baxter. "Because everyone was competing for local resources there was a lot of miscommunication going on, and the communication that was happening was not great. As we began to evaluate and understand the needs within our communities we were very clear that this recovery effort was going to take a whole community approach."

The result was a network that worked closely with FEMA to figure out which agencies needed to work together and what shape that work would take.

"We used national disaster recovery framework and recovery support functions to really shape what this comprises and we are continuing this model throughout our resiliency planning and have shared this with neighboring communities," said Baxter.

Baxter said that currently, 97% of the region is con-



Samantha Kondracki, left, of Wilmington Works, and Bethaney LaClair, of the Southern Vermont Deerfield Valley Chamber of Commerce, at Tuesday's economy summit.  
 BDCC/Facebook

sidered fully recovered from the tornados. However, the framework they created during that disaster has not been disbanded, but rather, is planning for the future. So too on Cape Cod, where modeling shows that significant neighborhoods are under threat of flooding in the near future.

Chloe Schaefer, chief planner for the Cape Cod Commission, painted a picture of a multitown region that is working as one to determine how best to prioritize its projects for climate resiliency.

"The core of how we do this is through regional planning initiatives," said Schaefer. "We regularly update and produce regional policy plans, which provide a touchstone for other regional planning work and regulatory work."

Although planning is taking place on a regional level, Schaefer acknowledged that the actual work involved relies on municipalities working individually. For that reason, the commission has penned a climate action toolkit, which contains 15 action points for climate resiliency.

Stephanie Smith, state hazard mitigation officer for Vermont Emergency Management, said that at a state level, lessons learned during Tropical Storm Irene bolstered some regions to fare better in last July's flooding, which heavily impacted towns throughout the state. For example, in Bran-

don, major culvert work had been completed to keep the town from flooding the way it did during Irene.

The state received an infusion of funding after the July flood, Smith said, which it hopes to put toward major projects like the Brandon culvert project, which mitigated flooding effects in July. Smith said the state received \$34 million in funding after Irene. After the July flooding, it received \$90 million.

"We're working with communities to figure out the bigger projects like the Brandon culvert," she said. "That's the place we're in right now. Trying to focus on how we get funding out to our communities."

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