

Newsletter



Legislative

House and Senate committees began laying out their priorities for the session and will slowly begin to dive into bills that are being introduced daily. Majority party priorities that we expect to see action on in 2023 include the perennial efforts to pass a statewide paid family and medical leave bill, universal child care, addressing the housing shortage, passing the cloud tax to increase broad based taxes, addressing the substance abuse and mental health issues exacerbated by Covid-19, sugar-sweetened beverage and candy taxes, and more.

Various committees will once again consider options to expand the housing stock in Vermont. However, the difficult decisions that need to be made may be punted for yet another year.

The Vermont Mayors Coalition laid out various solutions that the Legislature could consider surrounding the housing issue, among other concerns. And a coalition of House members have reported that they will be introducing legislation that would create a Rural Infrastructure Assistance Program to help communities access and manage grant funds for clean water, housing, broadband, and workforce development.

House Democrats outlined their proposal for a new Paid Family and Medical Leave program during their caucus in the second week of the session. While no bill has been introduced yet, the bill is expected to provide 12 weeks of paid leave, funded by a .58% payroll tax, split between the employer and employee. The tax is estimated to

generate \$100 million. Getting the program up and running will cost about \$20 million.

The Lets Grow Kids Universal Child Care Campaign has been a force throughout the summer and endorsed over 100 legislators prior to November's election, but hasn't released details on how the universal program would be funded. The eagerly anticipated RAND Child Care Report is expected to be made public before the end of January, which will serve as a guide on how much money the State would need to raise in order to establish and sustain universal child care in Vermont.

The American Heart Association has begun its advocacy efforts to impose a 2-cent per ounce tax on sugar sweetened beverages.

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Association News

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Happy New Year!

Happy new year to all of our members and supporters. We look forward to working with members throughout the legislative session to elevate the voice of the retail and grocery industries. And we hope to see you in person this year at one of our [networking events](#), all of which are open for registration.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to VRGA staff with questions, concerns, business news, and more.

Become a 2023 Sponsor

2023 Sponsorships and advertising are available through VRGA. A variety of opportunities are available to get your name and services in front of a diverse group of retailers, grocers, and industry professionals.

Sponsorship is essential to continuing our work and supporting our members. To learn more about specific options visit [our website here](#) or email info@vtrga.org.

2023 Scholarship Program

Application deadline is April 21st, 2023.

Supported solely by VRGA Members, our scholarship fund provides financial assistance to eligible students embarking on a path toward higher education.

Applications must be postmarked or emailed no later than April 21st, 2023 for consideration. All parts of the application including 2023 VRGA Scholarship Application, Photo Release, and Checklist must be submitted by this deadline. Partial applications will not be considered. [Start your application.](#)



LEGISLATIVE DAY

SPECIALTY FOOD & BEV TASTING

FEBRUARY 9, 2023 | MONTPELIER

Connect with lawmakers and government officials during the legislative session, network with fellow members, and taste some incredible specialty food and beverage products made right here in Vermont.



VRGA IS UPGRADING
HELP US SERVE YOU BETTER

UPDATE MY INFO

Available Funding

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Community Recovery and Revitalization Grants

Applications are still being accepted for the \$40 million Community Recovery and Revitalization Program (CRRP). CRRP grants are intended for projects that spur economic recovery and revitalization in communities across the state, and are available to for-profit, nonprofit, and municipal applicants for projects that:

- Assist industries most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic such as arts and entertainment, hospitality, agriculture, and educational services;
- Support childcare and affordable housing opportunities for low and moderate income households;
- Establish or improve municipal water and wastewater systems to build housing or create jobs through business creation and expansion; or
- Are located with a Qualified Census Tract (QCT).

The CRRP program is similar to the Capital Investment Program (CIP) which delivered \$10 million in grants over the last year to businesses across the state. To learn more about the Community Recovery and Revitalization Program, [click here](#).

SBA offers grants to community organizations

SBA offers [grants to community organizations](#) that promote entrepreneurship, including those that support veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses and Small Business Development Centers such as:

- **Boots to Business (B2B)** – This funding opportunity is addressed exclusively to Boots to Business (B2B) grantees. Through this program, the SBA supports your organization for a period of five years. [Learn more about B2B](#).
- **Service-Disabled Veteran Entrepreneurship Training Program** – This cooperative agreement aims to support organizations that currently deliver entrepreneurship training programs to service-disabled veteran entrepreneurs who aspire to be small business owners or currently own a small business. [Learn more about SDVETP](#).

A Hitch-Hiker's Guide to Navigating VT Grant Funding Opportunities

IN-PERSON WORKSHOP

January 25, 2023

9:00AM-12:30PM ET

Throwe Environmental, Hartford

[Learn more here.](#)

Throwe Environmental is hosting a workshop to cover the details of grant opportunities at the Cornerstone Community Center in Hartford, VT.

[Register here.](#)

This half-day workshop aims to bring together various federal, state, and philanthropic partners who will share important details about upcoming conservation grant announcements that will support project work in the Connecticut River Valley watershed in Vermont. You will hear directly from funders, learn important tips for creating a competitive proposal, find ways to connect with potential match, and have a chance to talk about specific project ideas with funders.

Limited-Time Discounts on Commercial Lighting

Update your business's lighting while our highest-ever discounts are around. Changes to the national and local lighting market means these point-of-sale discounts are expiring starting in July of 2023. Now is the time to upgrade your business's lighting for the best price [Learn more here](#).



Member Benefits

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Business Insurance Program

MMG Insurance offers a comprehensive and competitive insurance program designed for your business. Exclusive 5% discount for members.



Multi-state 401K Program

Provide great retirement plans to yourself and your staff, without the high cost, liability, and time drain of paperwork oversight. Member Chris Henry, President of The Medical Store, shares, "we ended up saving over \$12,000 annually" [Learn more.](#)



Dental Insurance

Access to a variety of affordable plan options with no minimum enrollments. Plans starting at \$38/mo.



Credit-Debit Card Processing

New programs where you pass the processing fees onto your customers are available. Members report a savings of 10–40%.



HR, Policy, and OSHA Guidance

Looking to reduce your workers comp rate or develop an employee handbook? The Richards Group can help with everything from planning and document preparation to OSHA certification for employees and owners. [Learn more.](#)



Vision Insurance

Low cost vision program with major benefits. Monthly premiums starting at \$5.95/mo.



Get the most out of your membership

The Vermont Retail and Grocers Association has partnered with these organizations after careful consideration and review. VRGA believes these organizations can offer superior customer service along with considerable savings to member businesses. In addition to these benefits, we offer a comprehensive package of services. [Learn more about our services here.](#)

[Discover benefits](#)

Payroll Services

A Vermont company offering easy and economical payroll services. Services include payroll checks, tax filings, reports, new hire reporting and more. Member discount & savings of up to \$150. [Learn more.](#)



For more information about various benefits please email info@vtrga.org.

Temporary Increase to WIC CVV/B for Fruits & Vegetables Extended to Sept. 30

The temporary increase in WIC cash-value voucher/benefit (CVV/B) for fruit and vegetable purchases has been extended once again with the passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, signed into law in December. The same increase in CVV/B amounts as described in [previous guidance](#) for FY2023, requiring the monthly value of the CVV/B will be maintained in the amounts of \$25 for child participants, \$44 for pregnant and postpartum participants, and \$49 for fully and partially breastfeeding participants. This temporary increase will run through the end of the fiscal year, September 30, 2023.

Soaring US egg prices put pressure on consumers, businesses

The Associated Press reports that, "the national average price for a dozen eggs hit \$3.59 in November, up from \$1.72 a year earlier, according to the latest government data." This increase is affecting budgets for consumers, restaurants, and other food producers.

What's driving the cost? A combination of factors including the bird flu outbreak, and rising feed, fuel and labor costs,

[Read more on how this commodity item is being affected and affecting our industry.](#)



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 Associated Grocers of New England is a full service Cooperative Grocery Wholesaler supplying Supermarkets and Convenience Stores from Maine to New York.

NGA Foundation Tapped to Advance SNAP Online Programs

The National Grocers Association Foundation (NGAF) shares that it, "has been awarded a \$5 million grant by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to establish a technical assistance center that will guide grocers through the process of implementing online Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) grocery purchasing." [More information about NGAF's assistance initiatives can be found here.](#)

Emergency Allotments for SNAP Benefits Ending By March

Beginning in March 2023, SNAP benefit amounts will be returning to normal for all Vermont SNAP households. These households will see their benefits dropping by, on average, \$82 per person per month. Under the [new guidance](#), states are not allowed to issue Emergency Allotment benefits for a phase-out month after the last benefit month February 2023. The pandemic-related enhanced benefit supplement has been in place since March 2020 as a result of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

9 retail trends to watch in 2023

"With the threat of a recession looming, the new year brings about a slew of challenges for retailers — but not all is gloomy," [according to Retail Dive's deep dive into 2023 retail trends to watch out for.](#)

Their top nine retail trends to pay attention are:

- Bankruptcies on the horizon
- The metaverse grows (and continues to confuse)
- A recession? Maybe. Uncertainty? Definitely.
- DTCs continue to struggle with profitability
- Environmentally conscious retail gears up
- Another tricky year for malls
- Marketing gets more complicated
- Is Amazon in crisis mode?
- Resale brings in revenue and risks overexposure

[Read the full article here.](#)

Inflation moderated in December, giving retailers some hope

According to a report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, December 2022 saw an ease in inflation and citing the decrease in gasoline prices as an impact.

[This Retail Dive article](#) says, "it was welcome news for retailers, which have watched consumers grow more careful about spending on discretionary items. The results reflect a 13.9% rise compared to 2020, however, according to GlobalData."

"The hope for 2023 is that inflation continues on its downward trajectory. However, this is likely to be a slow process which means consumer behaviors will remain choppy and changeable for the foreseeable future." [Read more here.](#)

What the December jobs report tells us about retail in 2023

After losing 30,000 positions in October 2022, the U.S. retail sector bounced back in December by adding 9,000 retail jobs as we wrapped up the holiday season.

[Modern Retail reports](#) that, "December's retail numbers, while an improvement, also provide insight into the evolution of the retail industry. Though some major retailers are slashing jobs, related sectors are opening up positions. In addition, while some more discretionary areas of retail have been hit hard, other segments are making progress."

Different factors are at play including some fast-growing segments like services & solutions and health care-related investments.

[Read more](#) about what is affecting the retail industry jobs and which types of stores are expected to do well in 2023.

Recreational marijuana dispensaries on the rise in Vermont

[Burlington Free Press via the Associated Press reports that](#), "In the first three months that Vermont has allowed the retail sale of marijuana for adult recreational use, the number of dispensaries around the state has grown from just three to about 25, with several more are expected to open soon.."

Looking for
something from a
previous newsletter?

[CLICK HERE](#)

Member News

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Congratulations to the 2023 Good Food Awards Finalists

Congratulations to the 15 Vermont food and beverage producers on becoming finalists in the 2023 Good Food Awards presented by the Good Food Foundation.

Congratulation to VSFA members Champlain Orchards, Spring Brook Farm Cheese, Mount Mansfield Maple Products, MOCO (My Organic Coco), Blake Hill Preserves, Runamok, The Tippy Pickle, Small Batch Organics, and SILO Distillery (American Crafted Spirits).

Selected from nearly 2,000 entries, 513 products topped the Blind Tasting and passed vetting for category-specific sustainability standards, with 25 Vermont products making the cut. [View all finalists here.](#)

WH Shaw Insurance Agency to join The Richards Group

Vermont Business Magazine shares the WH Shaw Insurance Agency of Manchester has been acquired by The Richards Group.

"The partnership with The Richards Group will benefit clients by ensuring that decisions and service remain local for years to come, while expanding client services and resources. Shaw Insurance's staff will remain at their current office, located at 135 Bonnet Street, Manchester, Vermont." [Read more about the acquisition here.](#)

Pomerleau Real Estate Q4 transactions

Pomerleau Real Estate facilitated a number of business transactions in 2022 and has just released their Q4 transactions.

These transactions include the sale of the award winning restaurant Kitchen Table Bistro in Richmond and The North Hero House in North Hero, VT.

[See the full list of transactions here.](#)

An Early Thaw Causes Maple Sap to Run — and Sugar Makers to Start Boiling

Maple sap is flowing early this year in Vermont due to the warm weather we've been having since late December. Seven Days speaks with Ruth Goodrich of Goodrich's Maple Farm in Cabot who has been making maple syrup since 1979.

"Whether the producers are ready to collect or not, the sap will flow when temperatures fluctuate from below freezing to above...For the Goodriches, that means boiling. The family has 150,000 taps on 6,000 leased acres, with facilities in Cabot and Eden. On Monday, Glenn Goodrich was boiling sap in Eden."

[Read the full article here.](#)

Do you have news to share about your business? media coverage, press releases, announcements, and more are all welcome. To be featured send to info@vtrga.org.

Health Care Fund Contributions – Employer Musts

In 2006, the Vermont legislature started requiring employers who do not offer insurance to all of their employees to pay a “Health Care Fund Contribution.” Employers must report the assessment to the Department of Taxes each quarter. When filing Form WHT-436, Quarterly Withholding Reconciliation, employers must include the Health Care Contribution Assessment for all employees not covered by health care coverage. [This fact sheet](#) provides information to help you determine which employees are considered to be covered and uncovered and how to report and pay the assessment. Find the [Declaration of Health Coverage here](#). Employers must have employees fill this out annually, or when a change in coverage has occurred.

DLL Alcohol and Tobacco Training

All sellers and servers of alcohol and tobacco must be trained before they start working and then must be re-trained every 2 years thereafter. DLL's available training options include in-person seminars as well as online seminars which can all be accessed by clicking on the Seminar link. In-House Training of employees is also allowed. DLL online, in-person or virtual seminars are acceptable forms of training for a business's licensing requirements. [Find upcoming in-person training session here](#), [online seminars here](#), and information about [in-house training here](#).

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An impactful way to support our members and the work we do.

To learn more about specific options visit our [website here](#) or email info@vtrga.org.



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Welcome

New Permit Navigator Tool Available

Do you have projects planned that will require permits? The Agency of Natural Resources has developed a [Permit Navigator](#) to assist in determining what permits may be needed for projects being planned. Use the site to learn about various Agency permits.

Association Staff is here to help!

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