

# **Bennington County Regional Commission**

## **FY 2025 Annual Report**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) was created by the seventeen towns and villages it serves. BCRC works with and on behalf of those municipalities to build strong, resilient, and sustainable communities, to foster economic prosperity, and to promote a high quality of life for residents of the region. This mission is accomplished through direct planning and community development assistance to town and village governments, through preparation and implementation of regional plans and studies, and through synergistic working relationships with local and regional organizations. The BCRC works cooperatively with local governments to establish and advance regional cohesiveness, actively advocates for adherence to adopted state and regional policies, and facilitates effective communication between local, state, and federal levels of government.

The BCRC maintains an office in a historic building in Bennington's downtown. The commission is overseen by municipally appointed commissioners representing each of the member towns and villages as well as eight commissioners representing specific interests such as economic development, housing, transportation, and public health. An executive committee composed of seven commissioners meets with the executive director on a regular basis to guide organizational policy and work program. The BCRC currently employs ten full-time staff. Principal program areas with assigned staff responsibilities include municipal and regional planning, transportation, environmental/water quality planning, community and economic development, emergency management planning, energy planning, public health planning, and solid waste planning and management.

Each program manager at the BCRC is responsible for work plan and budget development. The executive director, financial manager, and BCRC program managers cooperate to ensure that all required tasks and reporting are completed and advance the commission's mission. The BCRC reported total expenditures of approximately \$1.688 million in FY 2024. The majority of revenues (\$1.976 million in FY24) are derived from grants that support specific work programs and special projects. Municipal appropriations and a portion of funds allocated to the BCRC from the state's municipal and regional planning fund provide critical support and matching funds to all of the diverse program areas operated through the commission. The FY25 financial audit will be completed in December 2025 or January 2026 to confirm the accuracy of the BCRC's financial records.

Regular meetings of the BCRC are held every other month with special meetings held during intervening months. Most meetings include presentations and information on specific topics that support commissioners' understanding and involvement in regional and local planning policy and implementation, the Regional Initiatives/CEDS Committee, the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance, the Bennington County Transportation Advisory Committee, the Southern Vermont Communications Union District, the Regional Emergency Management Committee, and a consortium of local energy committees. Commissioners serving on the executive committee may attend special trainings (e.g., financial management, regional economic development, housing, land use practices, energy planning, natural resource planning and environmental protection) to assist in the carrying out of their responsibilities to the organization. BCRC staff regularly attend training courses and participate in online webinars on topics specific to their program areas.

## ACT 181

Beginning in January 2025, the BCRC embarked on a region-wide effort to educate municipalities on the impacts of Act 181.

The initial stage of outreach was focused on the Future Land Use Mapping project and gathering community feedback on early drafts that will be unified in a regional Future Land Use (FLU) Map in BCRC's 2026 update to the regional plan. Planning staff met with the planning commissions in all seventeen municipalities between January and June 2025 to give background information about Act 181, share drafts of the FLU Map for each municipality, and field questions and suggestions for edits to those maps. Subsequent steps for the FLU mapping project will include minor adjustments to the map to create harmony across the region and follow-up meetings with municipalities that are interested in establishing Tier 1A/1B status.

The FLU map preparation feeds into the larger project of an Act 181-compliant regional plan update, which BCRC prepares to submit to the new Land Use Review Board (LURB) for initial review in spring 2026. As part of Act 181's requirements that regional planning commissions engage community members in meaningful participation during the planning process, BCRC staff developed a strategy to connect with community members throughout the region in the summer and fall of 2025. BCRC began the public engagement phase in late FY25, attending events in Stamford and Rupert in May and June respectively to share information about the regional plan. BCRC also launched a public survey in June and developed [a landing page on the website](#) for the regional plan update. Additional events and engagement opportunities will continue into FY26.

## BROWNFIELDS

The purpose of our Brownfield Redevelopment Program is to identify properties that are either vacant or underutilized because of known or perceived environmental contamination, to conduct environmental assessments, and to develop remediation and re-use plans that will lead to redevelopment meeting identified community objectives. Environmental Site Assessments (ESA) and Corrective Action Plans (CAP) allow properties to be environmentally remediated, sold, developed, or redeveloped in ways that benefit the local and state economy, create or protect jobs, and increase housing opportunities. Through direct contact with municipalities and individual property owners, the BCRC has identified sites that would benefit from assessments, provided information on brownfield redevelopment, and monitored redevelopment of sites that were assessed in the past. BCRC staff advise owners of potential brownfield sites in anticipation of future Phase I and Phase II ESAs. The BCRC maintains a Brownfields Committee that prioritizes sites for assessment and clean-up planning.

Over the past three years Vermont RPCs have been awarded over \$10 million through the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) Brownfields Program for this economic development initiative. All ACCD Brownfield Program funds allocated to BCRC have either been spent or fully committed. In July 2025 BCRC was awarded a \$500,000 US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Assessment Grant. Brownfield sites participating in ESAs, CAPs, or other follow-up work during the past year include:

- **Putnam Block Redevelopment – Phase II:** CAP is being implemented to pursue mixed use redevelopment of the historic downtown block. A project-specific \$500,000 Brownfield redevelopment grant was awarded for Phase II of this project. The CAPA/CAFI is complete and two public hearings have been held. An RFP for the remediation work was produced and a

contractor selected for clean-up work beginning in Spring 2023 (remediation completed in August).

- **Lauzon Machine and Engineering (The Bradford Mill), East Main Street, Bennington:** Completed Phase I ESA and Phase 2 ESA. The CAP was approved by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and is currently being implemented. Redevelopment plans include market value and workforce housing with potential commercial and retail services.
- **The former Bennington High School in Downtown Bennington:** A Phase 1 ESA, Phase 2 ESA, and CAP were approved by the Vermont DEC. The CAP is currently being implemented. Redevelopment plans include a mix of market rate and workforce housing, a senior center, a child day care facility, and indoor facilities for recreation and cultural arts programs.
- **Energizer Factory Complex, Gage Street, Bennington:** This recently closed manufacturing facility has become available for redevelopment. A qualified environmental professional has been retained to provide technical support in the review of past ESA's and ongoing corrective action planning.
- **The former Benmont Paper Mill, Benmont Avenue, Bennington:** A Phase 1 ESA has been approved, and the Phase 2 ESA is currently underway. If required, the CAP will be developed with the EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant.
- **Shaftsbury Medical Center:** A Phase 1 ESA and a hazardous building materials assessment have been approved by Vermont DEC. A Phase 2 scope of work has been approved and will be funded with the EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant. A large portion of the building will be redeveloped by the Town of Shaftsbury as their new Town Office.

## COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Cooperative and creative engagement with the region's municipalities, community organizations, and business sectors, as well as close working relationships with relevant state and federal agencies, is at the heart of BCRC's activities and professional expertise in community and economic development. BCRC has maintained a community development program since 2012 and expanded it to include economic development in 2016. Since then, BCRC has served as both the RPC and RDC for south-western Vermont, and approximately three staff members work in this program full or part-time.

Strong relationships within the region and across Southern Vermont, as well as an intentional pivot to project-based work to complement traditional grant-funded opportunities, has helped the BCRC to expand its engagements. The following are highlights for FY25 work, which reflect the variety of services provided:

- **Southern Vermont Communications Union District:** The BCRC has supported the formation and work of the Southern Vermont Communications Union District (SoVT CUD), providing fiscal management and staff support for efforts to expand access to broadband in rural areas throughout the region. After several years of intensive organizational support during the funding and buildout of a fiber optic network that now reaches 99.3 percent of previously unserved passings within the district, BCRC is now assisting the SoVT CUD with network oversight and sustainability planning for the organization's next ten years. In FY25 BCRC helped the CUD begin a federal single audit which was completed in early FY26.
- **Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone:** The BCRC worked closely with colleagues at the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) in FY25 to ensure continued collaboration and the submission of comprehensive materials to the US Economic Development

Administration regarding the proposed Southern Vermont Economic Development District (EDD). We expect a decision sometime in FY26. Additional efforts at this scale include the following:

- BCRC worked closely with colleagues at BDCC to complete the Southern Vermont CEDS by the end of Q2 and submitted the document to the Economic Development Administration at the beginning of Q3. The document was returned for suggested edits to comply with new Executive Orders issued after submission of the CEDS but prior to approval by the EDA. BDCC and BCRC revised and resubmitted but it was again returned for additional modifications. The document was accepted and approved in early July, just after fiscal year-end.
- The 8th Southern Vermont Economy Summit was held on May 20, 2025. More than 330 attendees at Mount Snow heard from keynote speaker Josh Wright of Lightcast who spoke of changing demographics and impacts on workforce, and participated in workshops on housing, workforce development, resiliency planning, creative financing for projects and the like. This event, held annually since 2017 (excepting pandemic year 2020) now boasts double the attendance of the approximately 150 attendees at the first Summit.
- **Business Visitations and Support:** BCRC staff conducted 53 business visits in FY25. Businesses included large manufacturers and healthcare providers, downtown retail, food service, real estate offices, and new business startups. Topics included workforce challenges, real estate development and rehabilitation, community support, housing challenges, the Vermont Employment Growth Incentive, Northern Border Regional Commission grants, and business relocation and energy efficiency incentives.
- **Building Communities Grants Program:** BCRC staff connected with several businesses to discuss the suite of grants under the Building Communities Grants umbrella. Staff worked with one applicant in FY25: a family-owned chocolatier securing equipment to expand offerings at retail locations in downtown Bennington and the village of East Arlington.
- **Putnam Block Redevelopment:** The completed Phase 1 of the Putnam Block Redevelopment continues to fill with tenants. All thirty-one residential units were committed as of the day the project construction was completed. Union South, a new 120-seat restaurant, opened on Labor Day weekend at the start of FY24. Planning for Phase 2 of the redevelopment is progressing. A preliminary letter of intent from Southwestern Vermont Health Care has been secured totaling approximately 12,000 SF of clinical use. The remainder of Phase 2 is likely to be some small retail spaces on the first floor and two or three floors of housing for up to sixty units. Phase 2 received a significant boost when it was announced in 2024 that Senator Peter Welch had secured a \$5,000,000 Congressionally Directed Spending appropriation to benefit the project. BCRC worked to finalize the grant agreement through HUD to secure this funding. Dialogue with Evernorth and Cornerstone Housing regarding an option agreement and planning for a third phase of the project to include up to thirty affordable housing units has also begun in earnest. Bennington County Industrial Corporation applied for a \$3,000,000 NBRC grant to help fund some of the over \$7,000,000 in infrastructure improvements (parking, drainage, curbing, streets, etc.) the project requires. BCIC received word that this application was successful in June 2025, and BCRC staff are coordinating with other project colleagues in its role as Local Development District for the project.
- **Bennington High School (Benn High) Redevelopment Project:** In addition to services and resources provided through its Brownfields program, BCRC staff have met multiple times with

representatives of the Town of Bennington and Hale Resources to provide support and guidance for a potential redevelopment project at the former Bennington High School on Main Street in Bennington. It is a complex project that, if successful, would lead to the relocation and expansion of the Bennington Senior Center and Meals on Wheels program, new and improved gymnasium and other recreational space for the Bennington Branch of the Northern Berkshire YMCA and thirty-nine (39) new affordable and market rate housing units in the historic structure. The BCRC Executive Director has been meeting regularly with Hale Resources to discuss funding opportunities and structure, calling upon the success of the Putnam Block Redevelopment project as a model. The BCRC has authored letters of support for funding applications sought from the Vermont Community Development Program, Northern Borders Regional Commission and the Community Recovery and Revitalization Program. The BCRC will be serving as the LDD for a \$1,000,000 NBRC grant just awarded to the project. BCRC received word in July 2025 that the project had reached its financial closing, and construction and renovation efforts are now fully underway.

- **Southern Vermont College Redevelopment:** As a result of an RFP produced by BCRC to showcase the former college campus as an investment opportunity, Southwestern Vermont Health Care Realty (SVHCR) entered into a purchase and sale agreement with Alfred Weissman Real Estate (AWRE) in 2023. AWRE plans to create a four-to-five-star luxury resort at the former campus. Since then, BCRC staff have met multiple times with representatives of SVHCR and AWRE and have connected AWRE with numerous technical and financial resources to benefit the proposed redevelopment. BCRC's Executive Director met several times in Q3 with SVHCR and AWRE to discuss the project timing, permitting, and other items related to the development. In Q4, BCRC met with AWRE, SVHC, the Town of Bennington and representatives from VT DED, ANR, VTrans and Agriculture & Market to discuss permitting and how to ensure a timely state response to permit filings.
- **Energizer Facility Redevelopment:** The BCRC has been actively engaged in multiple ways in efforts to redevelop the 300,000SF former Energizer manufacturing facility in downtown Bennington. BCRC has facilitated discussions with potential purchasers and provided guidance on the state's business attraction offerings. At FY end the building is subject to a purchase and sale agreement and Energizer has commenced additional remediation at the site.
- **SVHC USDA CDS TA:** BCRC staff continue to assist SVMC personnel with the administrative activities necessary for procuring the Congressionally Directed Spending award from the offices of former Senator Patrick Leahy. Q3 highlights include a site visit with the project architect to advance and coordinate understanding of the project design and scope. The project will renovate the Learning Tree childcare facility, adding more than a dozen slots.
- **Workforce Development:** The BCRC Workforce and Education Committee continued its monthly meetings in a virtual format throughout the fiscal year. Areas of work included planning and support in conjunction with regional partners for a September career fair and April career month activities. The BCRC worked on planning for a Bennington Career Expo in conjunction with the Vermont Department of Labor, Creative Workforce Solutions, and the Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce. The event was a big success on September 19, 2024, with over 125 job seekers and 42 employers participating. Twelve Career Month events took place throughout the county in the Spring of 2025, including Sophomore Summit, the Financial Reality Fair, and a "New Faces, New Opportunities" Panel taped by CAT TV. A second Career Fair was also held in May

2025 with 33 employers and 87 job seekers attending. The BCRC continues to maintain a page on its website specific to the Workforce and Education Committee. This page holds all the events planned for April Career Month and shares news throughout the year dedicated to workforce development.

## **CLEAN WATER & INFRASTRUCTURE**

RPCs work with the Agency of Natural Resources to help complete the EPA required Tactical Basin Plans. RPCs also work with municipalities to implement river corridor assessments in local planning and regulations which result in better and safer growth management decisions. During FY25, the BCRC undertook the following clean water program work:

- Assisted the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) by integrating recommendations from the Basin 1 and Basin 11 Tactical Basin Plans into local hazard mitigation plans, projects, and land use plans and regulations.
- River Basin Planning/Assessment Project Compilation for migration into DEC's Watershed Project Database. BCRC will support the Vermont DEC and its tactical basin planning partners including The Bennington County Conservation District, The Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, The Hoosic River Watershed Association and Trout Unlimited to design and implement projects that will restore and protect Vermont's rivers, streams, lakes, ponds and wetlands from precipitation driven nutrients and pollution. BCRC will also support the completion of "construction ready" clean water improvement projects identified in the DEC Watershed Projects Database. This database is a key component of the DEC's Tactical Basin Plans that address water quality issues throughout Vermont. The Tactical Basin Plans prioritize water quality problems, consider alternatives, and recommend solutions and funding sources.
- Identified actions related to water quality protection outlined in adopted Hazard Mitigation Plans and Stormwater Master Plans and integrated that information into ANR's Clean Water Projects database for future funding allocation.
- Prepared tables characterizing flood and fluvial erosion hazard mitigation projects and drafted language for use of the tables in resiliency elements of municipal plans.
- Created and updated town river corridor maps for the Batten Kill, Walloomsac, Hoosic, and Mettawee watersheds and assisted with the development and adoption of municipal river corridor regulations.
- BCRC staff attends meetings of the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, Trout Unlimited and the Bennington County Conservation District and assisted with their municipal education, public outreach, and water quality improvement projects. BCRC supported work on projects to assess and remediate obstacles to passages for aquatic organisms in North Bennington, Sandgate and Shaftsbury.
- BCRC staff worked with the Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, Bennington County Conservation District, and Trout Unlimited to identify and treat invasive species in selected areas of the Batten Kill watershed and to identify areas in need of revegetation. Riparian buffer plantings of native trees and shrubs were completed along the Batten Kill, Green River, Utley Brook and the Walloomsac River, with additional sites identified and approved for future plantings.
- The BCRC worked directly with fourteen towns and villages in the region to identify, implement, and verify completion of "Grants-in-Aid" water quality improvement projects on hydrologically connected segments of municipal highways. The Municipal Road General Permit and the Vermont Culverts data portals were updated to reflect the completion of these projects.

- Assisted the Towns of Arlington, Bennington, Rupert, Sandgate and Shaftsbury with successful Better Road Program grants to address erosion, sedimentation and other stormwater related issues.
- Coordinated the implementation of stormwater master plans in Arlington, Bennington, Manchester, Manchester Village, North Bennington, Pownal, Rupert, Sandgate, Shaftsbury and Sunderland.
- Coordinated the removal of several downed trees in the Batten Kill which posed a serious threat to public safety. Coordinated meetings of watershed partners, state agencies, USFS, municipalities and private property owners to establish a protocol for future woody debris issues, addressing public safety while preserving and enhancing wildlife habitat and bank stabilization.

## ENERGY PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

A renewed focus on clean, renewable, sustainable, and affordable energy presents Vermont with great opportunities and significant challenges. RPCs integrate energy planning with land use, transportation, and natural resources efforts, and they work with municipalities to assist with project implementation. RPCs participate in Section 248 proceedings and support comprehensive planning at the local and regional level to inform the permitting process.

- The BCRC continued efforts to support local energy committees, assisting with weatherization events, including “Button-Up” and “Window Dressers” programs, and coordination with Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network (VECAN), Efficiency VT, and other partners.
- The BCRC engaged in ongoing coordination with the Department of Buildings and General Services on the implementation of the Municipal Energy Resilience Program (MERP). In FY25 the BCRC has helped thirteen municipalities apply for MERP implementation grants, of which eight were awarded for a total of \$1.3 million.
- The BCRC has helped a majority of the municipalities in the region develop and update enhanced energy plans, including Manchester and Bennington in FY25. Manchester’s enhanced energy plan was adopted as part of the municipal plan in May 2025 and Bennington’s municipal plan will undergo the adoption process in FY26. These plans are used to guide local energy efficiency efforts and to represent municipalities’ positions on applications for new generation projects before the Public Utility Commission.
- The BCRC also continues to provide new energy-related information to towns and villages as it is developed. BCRC develops annual town energy fact sheets with data on local energy usage and energy efficiency projects provided by Efficiency VT.
- The BCRC continues to attend regular monthly meetings of RPC energy and climate planners.
- In FY25, the BCRC reviewed one proposal for a 2MW solar project in Bennington and continues to monitor Section 248 proceedings for several proposed projects.
- The BCRC’s energy and development review committees met with developers and invited local officials to participate in discussions of possible new projects.
- Support was provided to towns and villages seeking to establish and maintain designated village centers, downtowns, and neighborhood development areas, to develop or expand needed infrastructure to enable energy-efficient walkable communities, and to revise land use regulations in keeping with new statewide initiatives for regulatory reform that encourage more diverse and higher density housing.



## EMERGENCY PLANNING & DISASTER RECOVERY

The BCRC continues to play a key role in the mitigation and preparedness phases of emergency management in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), the Vermont Homeland Security Unit, VTrans and the Agency of Natural Resources. The BCRC provides direct staff support to the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), administrative support to the Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC), and coordination among responders and planners. The BCRC also helps update municipal floodplain bylaws and FEMA-required hazard mitigation plans, coordinate updates to municipal emergency management plans, and assists as needed in special circumstances and declared disasters as local liaisons between the municipalities and the SEOC.

- The BCRC assisted in onboarding new Emergency Management Directors to their roles and provided outreach and training on an as needed basis.
- BCRC worked with the Town of Bennington and its local partners to Create a Hot Weather Annex to attach to the Town's Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP).
- The BCRC participated in the Local Liaison exercise in June 2025 spearheaded by VEM. BCRC staff reviewed the exercise plan with VEM staff and then participated in the exercise by contacting all the EMDs in the region and reporting back to VEM via WebEOC. BCRC also participated in the review process at the end of the exercise.
- The BCRC provided support for development and updates to four local hazard mitigation plans (HMPs). The BCRC completed one local hazard mitigation plan for the Town of Sandgate and began work on three other plans for Arlington, Bennington, and Manchester. Flood resiliency and stormwater actions, assessments of threats from forest insect pests, and economic development planning relevant to hazard mitigation are considered as part of the HMP planning process.
- BCRC staff provided ongoing administrative support for the Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC) including meeting scheduling, minute taking, and complying with Vermont's Open Meeting Law. BCRC staff coordinated with representatives from VDART, the Enhanced 911 Board, Team Rubicon, and the Chairperson of the LEPC.
- BCRC staff served on the local Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Committee and attended meetings regularly. The MRC is comprised of community-based groups of volunteers who supplement local emergency and public health resources with their existing skills.
- The BCRC was activated as local liaison one time in July 2024 and assisted Vermont Emergency Management with information regarding impacts from hazardous weather.
- The BCRC participated in FEMA map updates for Landgrove, Peru, Glastenbury, and Sunderland. BCRC reviewed the maps for any changes to flood zones that may impact the towns.
- BCRC staff attended the 2024 Vermont Emergency Preparedness Conference held at Lake Morey September 10-11, 2024. Topics such as the Vermont CARES and Supplemental ALI programs, Equity Considerations in Emergency Preparedness and Response, Dam Emergency Action Plans, and Media Training for Emergency Management were attended.
- BCRC staff worked with two municipalities to develop floodplain restoration projects that were submitted to FEMA. One of these projects, the Bourn Brook Floodplain Restoration Project, was chosen as a top priority project by the State and one, the Woodford Packers Floodplain Restoration Project, was submitted as an alternative project for HMGP DR-4720 funding. BCRC continues to develop these projects as directed by the State and FEMA.
- In June 2025, BCRC received a Clean Water Initiative Program Grant for approximately \$23,000 to draft final design plans for the Woodford Packers Floodplain Restoration Project after changes in permitting requirements required the 2023 designs to no longer be permittable.



- BCRC staff were involved with the development, training, and roll-out of the new Municipal Vulnerability Indicator Tool developed by the Agency of Natural Resources and Eastern Research Group in response to Vermont's 2020 Global Warming Solutions Act. BCRC conducted training for the use of this tool to Commissioners and to Emergency Management Directors in October and November 2024.
- Other focus areas during the past year included: distributing emergency management training information, scheduling emergency management related trainings, coordinating and supporting Emergency Management Directors and municipal officials with assistance and guidance.

### *Flood Response*

BCRC staff were activated as local liaisons between the state and the municipalities in the region in July of 2024. BCRC staff kept in contact with the local emergency management directors throughout the region immediately after the initial flooding and then throughout the subsequent storm events that hit the state. To provide the state with on-the-ground situational awareness, the local liaisons gathered information regarding damages within the Bennington region and then relayed the information to the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) via the WebEOC system. BCRC staff also participated in the regular statewide situational briefings and acted as a Documentation Unit Leader for the SEOC. The Bennington region was largely spared in the summer flood events that devastated other areas in the state.

## **EQUITY, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, & HEALTHY COMMUNITIES**

- Participation in the Bennington County Regional Prevention Partnerships For Success (PFS) to reduce substance misuse in youth and young adults. Contributions of BCRC staff have focused on interpretation of emergent commercial cannabis policies.
- The BCRC serves on the Bennington Unaccompanied Youth Task Force, which is a committee of the Bennington Continuum of Care. This committee is working to implement solutions outlined in a 2023 Unaccompanied Youth report written by Proscenium Solutions and the BCRC. In 2024 the task force developed a tutoring and mentorship that operates through The Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union which is currently being supported by a three-year grant from Vermont AOE. BCRC also makes annual updates to a resource and service directory that local service agencies distribute to the homeless youth population.
- After the completion of the RPC Health Equity Planning Toolkit in FY24, BCRC received additional funding from the grant to incorporate health equity language and principles into municipal planning documents.

## **GRANT WRITING & ADMINISTRATION**

- **Bennington Town Plan:** The BCRC assisted the Town of Bennington to implement Phase 2 of an effort to develop a new town plan, supported by funding from a municipal planning grant proposal with a budget of \$31,000. The BCRC spearheaded the Phase 1 effort engaging over 1000 people through various activities. Phase 2 of the effort involves writing the new town plan and garnering public response and input before adoption in FY26.
- **Ninja Path Construction Grants:** The BCRC prepared a successful application to a combination of VTrans grant programs for the Ninja Path Project's most challenging phase to connect the interim path north of Furnace Brook with Morse Road. It consists of a paved 1,065' shared use path, an 85' steel bridge over Furnace Brook, and 75' of boardwalk across the adjacent wetland. It will establish a safe route for walking and biking between Bennington's urban core and the Village

of North Bennington, including key destinations like Bennington College and the Northside Drive/VT67A commercial corridor, a significant regional hub for economic activity.

- **Better Roads Grants:** The BCRC assisted the Towns of Arlington, Bennington, Rupert, Sandgate and Shaftsbury on successful Vermont Better Roads Grants. These grants will be used to bring hydrologically connected road segments into conformance with the Municipal Roads General Permit.
- **Emergency Management Grants:** The BCRC applied for and received the Emergency Management Planning Grant (EMPG). This \$42,491 grant was used to increase and sustain municipalities' emergency management capabilities by providing on-boarding for new emergency management directors (EMDs), working in coordination with the local EMDs to provide up-to-date information to the state during times of crisis, supporting the Regional Emergency Management Committee, and coordinating with Vermont Emergency Management to provide trainings to the EMDs regarding best practices within emergency management.
- **Water Quality Enhancement Development, Design, and Implementation Block Grant (EDDIBG):** In June 2025, the BCRC applied for and received this \$20,030 grant that was used to create a new design for the Woodford Packers Floodplain Restoration Project in order to meet permitting requirements for this project in anticipation of a grant application for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding to complete the floodplain restoration.
- **Building Communities Grants:** BCRC staff connected with several businesses to discuss the suite of grants under the Building Communities Grants umbrella. Staff worked with one applicant in FY25: a family-owned chocolatier securing equipment to expand offerings at retail locations in downtown Bennington and the village of East Arlington. More details on this program can be found in the Economic & Community Development section above.
- **Manchester Village Bylaw Modernization Grant:** The BCRC submitted an application on behalf of Manchester Village and secured \$15,000 in FY24 Bylaw Modernization Grant to conduct comprehensive revisions to its land use and development regulations. More details on this project can be found in the **Planning & Zoning** section.
- **Municipal Planning Grants:** The BCRC submitted applications on behalf of the Village of Old Bennington and the Town of Sunderland and secured \$53,347 in FY25 Municipal Planning Grants to support municipal plan updates for both municipalities.
- **Municipal Energy Resilience Program Implementation Grants:** The BCRC helped thirteen municipalities apply for implementation grants, of which eight were awarded. BCRC continues to assist the eight awardees with project implementation and grant management.

## HOUSING

- BCRC staff were engaged in legislative discussions that led to the passage of Act 181, an Act 250 reform that restructures the board that administers the state land use law and changes jurisdictional thresholds. The law offers extension of temporary exemptions for housing projects until the new jurisdictional rubric is in place. In many cases, under the new rules, housing projects in downtowns and villages would not require Act 250 permits.
- BCRC staff prepared and provided a user-friendly summary of the broad-reaching Act 181 and distributed it to municipal officials throughout the region. The BCRC has otherwise served as a resource to planning commissioners, development review boards, and zoning administrators as they work to understand the implications of Act 181 and the previous year's HOME Act for local

planning and regulatory requirements as well as the area designations that will be the basis for Act 250 permit jurisdiction.

- In the final stages of review and adoption proceedings in summer 2025, the Manchester Village BMG project is working to bring the village's zoning into compliance with the HOME Act and make other adjustments to lower barriers to housing development in the village's mixed-use center.
- BCRC staff refined housing target methodologies such that when the 2026 Regional Plan is completed town housing targets will be quantitatively integrated with the plan's Future Land Use maps.

## PLANNING & ZONING

The BCRC coordinates planning at the regional level through the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive regional plan and related plans and studies. These plans and studies guide local planning and investment decisions of the public and private sectors, and plan policies inform Act 250 land development and Section 248 utility development proceedings. The regional plan is a resource document for regional and local officials, organizations, businesses, and residents of the region.

In November 2024, BCRC adopted a new regional plan to incorporate updated data, including initial housing targets, as required by the HOME Act (2024). A further update is planned to occur by the end of 2026 after a comprehensive public engagement effort to inform additional new policy and compliance with Act 181. (See **Act 181** for more information.)

Meetings of the BCRC's Energy Committee and Development Review Committee are called as needed to inform reviews of Section 248 and Act 250 applications. No Act 250 reviews were conducted by the BCRC in the 2024 fiscal year. In November 2024, the BCRC Energy Committee reviewed the 45-day notice pre-application for the 2MW Apple Hill Solar Project in Bennington. A formal application was subsequently filed, but BCRC has not provided official comments on the project. In addition to this formal Section 248 filing, the BCRC provided guidance to local village and town officials on the PUC review process for a proposed cell tower in Manchester.

The BCRC's work with member municipalities emphasizes improving municipal plans and local permitting through education and regular consultations, bylaw modernization, support for policies that focus development on downtowns and village centers, and assessment for compliance with new requirements for economic development, housing development, forest and habitat fragmentation prevention, and flood resiliency policy. The BCRC's work in municipal planning is supported through municipal and regional planning funds, payments from member towns and villages, and other grants. Technical and planning assistance provided this year is shown on the At Work map (attached); highlights include:

- **Municipal Officials Training:** The BCRC updated its annual Land Use & Planning Essentials training for municipal officials and presented it on April 15, 2025, to participants representing ten of our seventeen member municipalities plus one Windham region town. Ten participants provided evaluations of the training and generally rated it as effective, relevant, and useful to their municipal work. In addition, the BCRC now offers a roving brown bag series addressing land use and planning topics every three months to supplement the annual training. BCRC staff also responded to regular requests for assistance with various planning and zoning issues in all 17 of its member municipalities during the 2024 fiscal year.
- **Municipal Plan Updates:** The BCRC reviews newly adopted or amended municipal plans for conformance with statutory requirements. In FY25 the BCRC reviewed new plans for the Town of

Manchester (May 2025) and the Village of North Bennington (June 2025), which were approved in July 2025.

- **Municipal Consultations:** In FY25 the BCRC met with the planning commissions of Sunderland, Old Bennington, Bennington, Landgrove, Peru, Shaftsbury, Stamford, North Bennington, Manchester Village to assess plan implementation and training needs. Consultation reports for each were provided to document the assessments.
- **Designation Program:** The BCRC assisted Arlington and Bennington in exploring the possibilities of applying for Neighborhood Development Areas in their respective towns. The BCRC also worked with the Town of Manchester to investigate opportunities to expand the town's existing NDA to acknowledge recent investments and improvements to utilities and infrastructure pedestrian infrastructure.
- **MTAP:** The BCRC secured Municipal Technical Assistance funding (\$130,000) for four projects in the towns of Landgrove, Rupert, Sandgate, and Sunderland. The program aims to provide expanded assistance to high-needs municipalities to access state and federal funding for eligible projects including water and wastewater infrastructure, housing, community recovery, and other identified activities. Landgrove, in coordination with Trout Unlimited, removed a road sand and salt pile from a wetland and flood hazard area to a new upland site. The town acquired a parcel, engaged an engineering firm to draw up a site plan and was recently awarded a grant to build the new sand and salt shed. Rupert is working on a landscape plan for its 12-acre town green. Sandgate is addressing water and wastewater needs to allow its town office building, town garage and the Sandgate church to serve as a temporary emergency shelter. Sunderland has contracted with a development firm to conduct an engineering and architectural assessment of the Sunderland Union Church and with an attorney to research ownership questions concerning the church. The effort is working in conjunction with the Northshire Community Land Trust, which has expressed interest in taking over the property and is funding an adaptive reuse study for the church property. In addition to securing the MTAP funding, BCRC staff is coordinating the work efforts on each of these projects.
- **Manchester Village Bylaw Modernization Grant:** The BCRC secured \$15,000 in FY25 BMG funding for Manchester Village to conduct comprehensive revisions to its land use and development regulations. The project kick-off and visioning meetings were held in March and June 2024. The BCRC plans to present a revised zoning map and ordinance to the village on September 30, 2024, and continued to work with the Planning Commission on revisions to the proposed bylaws through January 2025. As of June 2025, the Manchester Village Planning Commission was preparing to adopt their updated bylaws by the end of 2025.
- **Bennington Town Plan Update:** The BCRC secured a FY23 municipal planning grant to undertake a public engagement effort to serve the development of a new town plan with an emphasis on reaching formerly underrepresented and disadvantaged populations within the town. The BCRC worked with Abundant Sun to devise and carry out an engagement plan. Three options for a thematic outline for the new town plan were presented to the planning commission on May 23, 2024. On behalf of the town, the BCRC secured a \$31,000 municipal planning grant to draft the new town plan based on the engagement results. The BCRC worked with the Bennington Planning Commission to prepare a full draft of the plan in the summer of 2025. As of June 2025, the final phase of review is in progress and the plan should be adopted in fall 2025.
- **Pownal Center Village/Center Street Park Improvement Study:** With funding from a \$20,500 FY23 Municipal Planning Grant, the BCRC began work on a village center study with the Town of Pownal. With a robust public engagement component, the project identified and prioritized

physical improvements to enhance the village center, foster a sense of community, and facilitate development in the area. This project was completed in early 2025.

- **South Shaftsbury Commercial Sites Assessments:** Shaftsbury contracted with the BCRC to conduct a commercial sites inventory and assessment for the South Shaftsbury village center with \$12,000 from a FY24 municipal Planning Grant and local match funds. Work was completed in January 2025.
- **Manchester Town Plan Update:** The BCRC worked with the Town of Manchester to update their municipal plan, which was adopted in May 2025. This project was primarily intended to refresh data, incorporate recent planning studies, and bring the plan into compliance with the HOME Act and Act 181.

## MAPPING

The BCRC uses its geographic information systems (GIS) capabilities to produce maps and conduct analyses in support of virtually all of its programs. RPCs also provide municipalities, state agencies, and regional groups with mapping and data analysis in support of their projects. Particularly valuable GIS projects completed during the past year included:

- The BCRC participated with VAPDA partners to finalize proposed future land use mapping methodologies and draft a Future Land Use Map for the Bennington region for review by all municipalities in the region.
- The BCRC assisted in devising revised zoning maps for North Bennington and Manchester Village.
- As part of Pownal's work developing a new Town Forest, the BCRC has been working with their Parks and Recreation Commission to create an interactive mapping tool that will live on the town's website. This web-based mapping tool will allow residents and visitors to see information about the forest and its trails, as well as other points of interest throughout Pownal.
- The BCRC developed maps to support the development and improvement of bike-ped facilities/systems throughout the region as part of the TPI Task 7 Bike and Pedestrian Planning Initiative.
- The BCRC performed mapping of municipal bridges, culverts, and road segments related to stormwater management and municipal road general permits.
- The BCRC conducted GIS assessments of demographic and business trends to support Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone programs. Economic and community development staff use ArcGIS Business Analyst and ArcGIS Insights software to analyze commerce and commuter trends.
- The BCRC updated maps for hazard mitigation plans in Manchester, Bennington, and Arlington.
- The BCRC produced maps for the Peru and Landgrove town plan updates
- The BCRC worked to produce GIS layers of municipal water and sewer service lines in Dorset, Pownal, Bennington, Manchester, Shaftsbury, and North Bennington. These were used to inform Future Land Use Mapping throughout the region.

## TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Through a contract with VTrans, RPCs coordinate the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI). This effort has provided a statewide framework for public involvement in planning improvements to Vermont's transportation system, with local communities represented through regional Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs). Each regional TAC prioritizes projects, identifies local and regional transportation needs, and provides the platform for public involvement in the planning and development of the state's

transportation system. RPCs serve as the point of delivery for the statewide transportation planning process to support local, regional, state, and federal transportation network advancement. The past year's accomplishments as they relate to the BCRC's TPI work program include:

**Objective #1: Enhance Cooperation and Coordination between VTrans, RPC Regions and Municipalities**

- The BCRC's Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) met regularly during the past year. The TAC consists of 17 members. Principal functions of the TAC are to provide input on specific projects and to prioritize projects in several program areas.
- Provided direct outreach to each member town and village regarding codes and standards, complete streets standards, hazard mitigation planning, erosion control and stormwater management, and related funding and financial considerations.
- Participated in development of projects involving bicycle and pedestrian system connectivity and streetscape improvements in Arlington, Bennington, Manchester, Manchester Village, Pownal, Rupert, Shaftsbury, and North Bennington.
- Led an effort to identify impediments to timely development of bike-ped projects and to identify solutions. Working with VTrans and Local Motion to reform the Section 106 review process for bike/ped projects.
- The BCRC continues to chair the Regional Mobility Committee, in partnership with the local transit provider, the Green Mountain Community Network, and VTrans.
- BCRC staff continues to participate in planning for intersection safety improvements, with a special focus on the VT 67A corridor near Bennington College and the Kocher Drive/Route 7 intersection in Bennington, the Route 313 and Warm Brook Road intersection in Arlington, the Route 30 and East Manchester Road intersection in Manchester, and VT 7A in Manchester Village.
- The BCRC is participating in implementation of the Transportation Resilience Planning Tool by applying those techniques to the Batten Kill watershed.
- The BCRC managed a scoping study for an improved bicycle connection between Manchester Village and Manchester Center.

**Objective #2: Better Connect Federal, Regional and Statewide Transportation Planning**

- The BCRC is serving as Municipal Project Manager for the construction of Stage 1 of the Ninja Path Project, which includes an 80-foot-long bridge over the Furnace Brook. The project involves coordination between VTrans, FHWA, and the Town of Bennington.
- The BCRC continued to work with Green Mountain Community Network and several Northshire towns regarding service needs and opportunities in rural communities.
- The BCRC worked to integrate energy plans with TPI program objectives and is coordinating a statewide effort to support implementation of local and regional energy plans. In addition, the BCRC organized events focusing on electric vehicles (cars and bikes).
- The BCRC is a founding member of the Bennington Bike Hub, a non-profit dedicated to promoting cycling for transportation. In the past year, the Bike Hub has given away nearly 100 bicycles to people in need of basic transportation. In addition, the Bike Hub runs education and outreach programs to promote cycling for transportation. BCRC staff serve on the Board of Directors.
- The BCRC wrote an application for the Safe Streets and Roads for All grant, run by the U.S. Department of Transportation. BCRC applied for funding to develop a comprehensive safety action plan for the Bennington region, which would work toward preventing roadway fatalities and serious injuries in a systematic, network-wide approach.

- BCRC worked to create an inventory of existing shared use paths, as well as planned and conceptual bicycle and pedestrian projects regionwide noting more than 150 potential projects.

### **Objective #3: Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities**

- Created a Traffic Calming Guide with technical information to help towns and villages address concerns about speeding vehicles.
- Arlington: Managing the design and construction phase of a safe walking route to link the Arlington Recreation Park to the Village Center and the Arlington Public Schools.
- Bennington: Ongoing project management for the “Ninja Trail” design-build project, and the Benmont Streetscape improvements project in Bennington, and a shared-use path and safe-routes to school improvements to Orchard Road. Assisting the town to devise a traffic calming policy and project ranking system. This could serve as a prototype for other towns and villages.
- Manchester: The BCRC is working with the Town of Manchester and Manchester Village to plan a safe bicycle connection between the town and village centers.
- Shaftsbury: The BCRC completed a scoping study to add sidewalks and traffic calming measures in a village area. Staff began pre-scoping meetings regarding a path to connect South Shaftsbury to North Bennington.
- BCRC secured Better Road Grants for the towns of Arlington, Bennington, Rupert, Sandgate and Shaftsbury.
- BCRC staff continues to contribute to a local advocacy group, which has renamed itself the Bennington-Pownal-Williamstown Path Advisory Group. Their aim is to create a multi-use path along connecting Bennington to Williamstown, MA. BCRC supported this group’s efforts at a Bennington Select Board meeting in spring 2025 to request the creation of a connector path from downtown Bennington to a nearby park system. The group is also working to advance the Western New England Greenway project throughout the region.
- The BCRC completed traffic studies to aid local planning in Bennington, Dorset, Manchester, Manchester Village, North Bennington, Peru, and Pownal.
- The BCRC organized and hosted Municipal Road Crew workshops on a variety of topics including The Municipal Road General Permit, The Grant In Aid Program, stream alteration permitting, wetland permitting and stream crossing design and construction.
- The BCRC provided support for municipal road stormwater management and flood resilience planning and implementation in most municipalities.
- The BCRC updated culvert inventories in Arlington, Bennington, Landgrove, Manchester, Sandgate, and Shaftsbury.



## UNMET NEEDS & OTHER

### SOLID WASTE

The BCRC has developed programs in solid waste management and planning and healthy community design that have led to numerous special projects and ongoing actions. The BCRC provides staffing for the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance (BCSWA) and developed an updated Solid Waste Management Implementation Plan for that thirteen-town organization. BCRC staff manages the implementation of the plan and assures compliance with state rules related to solid waste. Some of the Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance's ongoing activities include:

- **Hazardous Waste:** Overseeing management and operations of a permanent household hazardous waste collection facility open to members of the 13 towns in the Alliance. The facility is located in Bennington and funded by the member towns of the alliance with disposal subsidies from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture. The facility is open to the public one day per week for a minimum of 18 weeks each year.
- **Battery Recycling:** Providing continued collection opportunities for batteries under the Call2Recycle Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program.
- **Education:** Providing education and outreach to schools, municipalities, solid waste service providers, and the general public to increase recycling and organics management/composting and reduce levels of trash sent to landfills. The BCRC hosted an information booth at four public events.
- **Business Outreach:** Performing outreach to 80 businesses and technical assistance to 41 businesses, including housing management companies, restaurants, retail businesses and others.
- **School Outreach:** Performed outreach to 26 schools, performed assessments on solid waste management for schools within the Alliance, and provided recommendations for improving recycling and food waste management. Led educational programs for students related to solid waste.
- **Residential Composting:** Organizing residential composting workshops and providing composting related items at wholesale prices to help residents comply with state food scrap diversion legislation.
- **Newsletter:** Producing and distributing a regular newsletter on solid waste issues and maintaining a social media presence to educate the public on waste reduction, food scrap diversion, and household hazardous waste events.
- **Legislative Input:** Supporting legislation to create extended producer responsibility programs to require manufacturers to pay for the costs of recycling packaging and for the collection and disposal of household hazardous waste.
- **Financial Management Support:** Overseeing a cost sharing program for five towns that collectively share two waste transfer stations.

### 'AT WORK' MAP

The BCRC has updated its At Work Map depicting the range of services provided to member municipalities in FY25. The map is available on the next page, and online at: <https://vapda-report-vapda.hub.arcgis.com/>

# BCRC At Work-FY2025

