

Northeastern Vermont Development Association

FY 2025 Annual Report

Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) serves the three counties (Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans) that make up the beautiful Northeast Kingdom region of Vermont. The NEK is home to roughly one-tenth of the state's population, which is spread over one-fifth of the state's land mass. This vast and mostly rural region has a complexity of needs, with towns falling into one of six labor market areas and seven basin planning areas. The NEK contains a USDA-designated economic planning area and is part of the six-county Northern Economic Development District, which maintains a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. NVDA is one of only two regional entities that serves as both the regional planning commission and the economic development corporation. Our staff of 14 serves 50 municipalities, representing about 62,500 people over 2,000 square miles.

NVDA is governed by a Board of Directors who meet quarterly. Each municipality may appoint two local representatives. Our board also includes at-large members and legislators.

In FY2025, NVDA invested more than \$3,000,000 in regional planning, transportation planning, and economic development, utilizing a variety of federal and state funding sources. We also received an annual appropriation from each of our municipalities to help ensure a high level of professional service. NVDA operates two revolving loan funds capitalized by loan repayments from Vermont Community Development Block Grants. We also have also established a Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund capitalized by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. NVDA's financial audit will be available in December 2025.

ACT 181

Regional Planning Commissions coordinate planning in their respective regions through the adoption and implementation of comprehensive regional plans and related studies. While NVDA's plan was updated and readopted in 2023 so we could maintain substantial deference in Section 248 proceedings, we now must prepare a new plan that will receive approval from the Land Use Review Board by the end of calendar 2026. There are multiple facets to the landmark legislation, and NVDA staff has dedicated a significant amount of time and resources to keeping abreast of implementation and rulemaking.

NVDA's new regional plan will be reorganized into a new format that is more accessible to a general audience. The new plan also addresses the new statutory planning goal of equitably distributing environmental benefits and burdens. As guidance on this goal continues to unfold, we've developed a broadly inclusive public outreach process that will continue into FY2026. We are working hard to ensure that our efforts include a diversity of voices when developing regional policies and strategies.

- **Future Land Use Mapping:** NVDA staff has prioritized public outreach on this key element of Act 181, and we have committed to conducting at least one in-person meeting with every one of our 50 municipalities to review Future Land Use maps. This is a tall order for our regional planning staff, who meet weekly to review map data and strategize outreach. In FY2025, NVDA staff personally attended meetings with local officials in Albany, Burke, Coventry, Craftsbury, Danville, Groton, Guildhall, Hardwick, Kirby, Lyndon, Morgan, Newark, Newport City, Peacham, Ryegate, St. Johnsbury, Sutton, Walden, Westmore, and Wheelock. Some of these towns required follow-up meetings, and many meetings generated questions from local officials regarding methodologies and identification of land classification boundaries. Interestingly, some of our municipalities working on plan updates have begun to adapt and incorporate our future land use

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map data into their plan maps. Our work will continue through this fall and will conclude with a regional webinar of key findings.

- **Tiers and Housing Targets:** Although our region's housing targets will depend largely on the final results of the Future Land Use Mapping, assignment of housing targets will align with statute, with higher targets assigned to the region's most populated centers: St. Johnsbury, Newport City, Hardwick, Lyndon, Derby, and Barton, all of which can be expected to be eligible for at least partial exemption of Act 250 jurisdiction. To that end, NVDA is engaging with municipalities (and potential housing developers) in discussions about Tier 1 eligibility and benefits.
- **Act 181 Training:** In FY2025, NVDA staff focused its training programs on the complexities of the landmark legislation. In February, staff hosted a widely attended webinar providing an overview of Act 181 in relation to future land use mapping and housing targets. This was a live event held on Zoom, and 23 individuals representing 17 of our member communities attended: Burke, Canaan, Concord, Craftsbury, Greensboro, Groton, Hardwick, Jay, Lowell, Maidstone, Sheffield, St. Johnsbury, Sutton, Unified Towns and Gores, and Westfield. A recording of the webinar is available from our web site.
- **Designation Training:** Streamlined center and neighborhood designations, another key component of Act 181 legislation, greatly extends designation benefit to our member communities. Our proposed Future Land Use Map creates village centers designations for 17 communities that previously lacked any such designation. If approved by the Land Use Review Board, 90% of our member communities will be able access designation benefits. In May, NVDA staff hosted a second training on explaining the new designation process and how communities can benefit. Held on Zoom, the webinar drew 16 attendees from 12 member communities: Brighton, Concord, Greensboro, Hardwick, Holland, Jay, Lyndon, Peacham, Sheffield, St. Johnsbury, Sutton, and the Unified Towns & Gores. A recording of this webinar is also available from our web site.
- **Planning Manual Updates:** The Vermont Planning Manual is comprised of three modules: [the Municipal Plan](#), [State Designation Programs](#), and [Enabling Better Places: A Zoning Guide](#). All three modules needed extensive updates to reflect important statutory changes. NVDA worked with the Department of Housing and Community Development to hire DuBois & King to update content to reflect the Home Act and Act 181, and migrate all three modules to a consistent format that meets State of Vermont's accessibility guidelines. NVDA staff regularly met with consultants and spent many hours reviewing progress drafts. The updated planning module series will be available from the DHCD late in 2025.

BROWNFIELDS

In 2025 NVDA was awarded another EPA Brownfields Coalition Assessment Grant of \$1,200,000, augmenting an active \$1,000,000 Revolving Loan Fund Grant capitalized in 2023. The previous 2023 assessment grant and newly awarded 2025 grant have funded assessment activities at over 40 sites across the Northeast Kingdom, prioritizing projects that involve housing and the redevelopment of key sites in our region's downtowns. These funds have also supported NVDA staff attendance at the most recent New England Brownfields Summit in Portland and National Brownfields Conference in Chicago.

- **Rural Edge:** In FY2025, NVDA assisted the region's affordable housing developer with an assessment of the Greensboro Town Hall, which was under consideration for redevelopment to create 16 to 20 rental units while retaining the Town offices. NVDA also assisted Rural Edge with a

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property in Newport Center (26 units in two buildings), and with the redevelopment of the former Sacred Heart Convent in Newport City. Rural Edge has been working on acquiring and redeveloping the latter project for several years. Last December, Rural Edge broke ground on Newport Crossing, a multifaceted community facility that will feature a senior meal site, a community center, as well as 26 units of affordable housing. In St. Johnsbury, NVDA assisted Rural Edge with an EPA assessment for two projects: the Packard Court site on Main Street, which will create 26 units of housing, as well as a 5-building, 10-unit scattered site project called Caledonia Crossing.

- **Private Development:** In FY 2025, NVDA facilitated an EPA assessment for the former Bayview Motel in Newport City, which is proposed for re-development to create eight market-rate housing units.
- **Flood Resilience:** NVDA has been working with the Town of Lyndon to complete project scoping for floodplain restoration of the former Town Garage site, just north of the village. The project is under consideration for FEMA Hazard Mitigation funds. If awarded, the site will likely need remediation. NVDA staff and its brownfield consultants have provided technical assistance on this project to ensure a smooth mobilization if it receives the green light.

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

As the regional planning commission and the region's economic development corporation, NVDA is in a unique position to leverage multiple resources and refine innovative development practices. Many of our endeavors involve ongoing partnerships with state and regional organizations, ensuring that local businesses access the support and assistance they need to grow and remain competitive.

- **Yellow Barn Business Accelerator:** After years of planning and project management, this project reached substantial completion with a well-attended ribbon cutting in September 2024. The project consists of an adaptive reuse of the historic gambrel-roofed barn at the gateway to downtown Hardwick, as well as the construction of a new 25,000 square foot facility alongside it. The project is fully occupied and operational. Cabot Creamery operates the historic barn as a cheese retail destination (conveniently located along the LVRT) that also features a variety of other Vermont-based offerings in addition to its own product. Even though the store opened in mid-September, Cabot had already reported 16,000 visitors by the end of the calendar year. The new accelerator building is occupied by Jasper Hill and the Center for an Agricultural Economy. The latter occupies slightly more than half the space in the new facility to support its farm-to-supply chain services, [Farm Connex](#), which serves 80 agricultural producers and moves about \$12.7MM worth of product annually.
- **Business Development:** In FY25, NVDA hosted a business pitch competition in St. Johnsbury. The event showcased 12 startups from the Northeast Kingdom and the Upper Valley, highlighting the region's growing entrepreneurial ecosystem. A total of \$20,000 in prizes was awarded across several categories, including Best Pitch, Potential to Scale Community Impact, and Crowd Choice. Throughout FY25, NVDA partnered with Do North Coworking to continue developing and delivering entrepreneurship resources and programming. This included several pitch development workshops and the launch of a new series of informal *Pitch Kitchen* events that are designed to provide a welcoming space where entrepreneurs, existing businesses, and individuals with new ideas can share their concepts and receive feedback and coaching from a network of service providers and mentors. This programming will continue to expand in FY26. As

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part of that effort, NVDA plans to relaunch *KickStartNEK*, a 10-week business incubator program that helps guide emerging ideas and small businesses through a structured process to build sustainable and profitable ventures. NVDA's ongoing work to support entrepreneurship and innovation is funded through a U.S. Economic Development Administration Build to Scale Venture Challenge grant.

- **Technical Assistance and Grants:** In FY25, NVDA provided technical assistance funding to 26 small businesses across Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans counties through its *Business Professional Assistance Cost-Sharing Program*. Funded by a FY24 USDA *Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG)*, the program supported 28 unique projects with over \$190,000 in technical assistance funds. Projects included website development, architectural design, marketing strategy development, accounting services, and more—helping small businesses strengthen their operations and grow. NVDA also continued to draw down funds from its FY24 *USDA Community Facilities Technical Assistance and Training (CF TAT) Grant*, which totaled \$150,000. These funds are currently supporting predevelopment work for the *Kingdom Trails NEK Outdoor Recreation Community Hub*, a key infrastructure project for regional outdoor recreation. Additionally, in FY25, NVDA assisted the *Craftsbury General Store* in successfully applying for a *Regional Economic Development Grant*, administered by the Vermont Department of Buildings and General Services. This competitive program supports municipalities and nonprofit organizations with capital costs for maintenance, renovation, and equipment purchases tied to facility development expected to create or retain job opportunities.
- **Lyndon Small Business Fund:** In FY25, NVDA continued to manage the *Lyndon Small Business Fund (LSBF)*, which supports businesses with the potential to scale, positively impact the community, and leverage this one-time investment for sustainable growth. Established in early 2024, the LSBF was created to assist both the launch of new businesses and the expansion of existing small businesses in Lyndon. The fund has, to date, obligated \$126,900 to seven Lyndon-based businesses and in FY25 alone, the fund awarded \$26,900 to two businesses for the following projects: 1) Startup costs for a new real estate office in downtown Lyndon; and, 2) Development of a new 27-hole disc golf course at the Wildflower Inn.
- **Assistance to Flood-Impacted Business:** In response to the two major flooding events that struck the Northeast Kingdom in July 2024, NVDA provided critical support to businesses across the region to aid in their recovery. Efforts included developing property acquisition projects in partnership with Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), and offering one-on-one advising to assist businesses in applying for the State's *Business Emergency Gap Assistance Program (BEGAP)* and the *Main Street Recovery Fund*. Additionally, NVDA collaborated with the Lyndon Selectboard to pivot a portion of the Lyndon Small Business Fund toward emergency relief. This initiative resulted in the creation of the *Lyndon Business Flood Recovery Fund (LBFRF)* — a targeted grant program supporting independently owned small businesses impacted by the disaster. The LBFRF provided grants of up to \$3,500 per business to help cover urgent needs such as equipment replacement, operating expenses, supplies, and cleanup. In total, \$73,100 was awarded to 22 Lyndon businesses.
- **Regional Priority Projects:** In FY25 NVDA compiled and updated Regional Project Prioritization (RPP) lists for Caledonia, Essex, and Orleans counties. These lists are developed by Regional Development Corporations across the State to identify community and economic development

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projects of regional importance that may need grant funding to advance. The lists will be used by federal, state, regional and local organizations to understand the funding needs of the region and allow regional economic and community development staff to match federal and state funding announcements to projects. The regional lists express the highest priority projects for each region and the top ten projects from each county will be included in a consolidated statewide list submitted to the Agency of Commerce, who will share it with other funders, to be used by state and federal funders when making funding decisions.

CLEAN WATER & INFRASTRUCTURE

Nonpoint source pollution, such as phosphorous loading, remains a key concern throughout the state. NVDA's watershed planner engages in partnerships with state agencies, municipalities, and various public and private organizations to achieve holistic solutions. It's all tall order because our region encompasses seven basin planning areas. Two of these basins -- the Passumpsic and the Memphremagog -- are completely contained in our region, so we do not share planning responsibilities with other regional planning commissions.

NVDA's Water Quality Planner is responsible for reviewing Tactical Basin Plans for conformance with NVDA's Regional Plan. These plans are important because they identify impaired areas, as well as corrective measures to restore water quality. The plans are also useful to local planning commissions as they provide insight into water quality.

Cognizant of the strong nexus between flooding and water quality, NVDA's Water Quality Planner is also assisting in the review of local flood regulations, not only to identify revisions necessary to comply with FEMA minimum standards of CFR44 60.3, but to identify opportunities to make local regulations more flood resilient.

- **Wakeboats:** In FY2025, NVDA participated in a stakeholder process to discuss the regulation and decontamination of wakeboats. NVDA also provided comments and recommendations to the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation regarding the updated wakeboat regulations, particularly in relation to the potential for wakeboats to spread animal invasive species, such as zebra mussels, which are found in Lake Memphremagog, strongly opposing the plan to eliminate the Home Lake Rule.

ENERGY PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION

NVDA's energy planning staff strive to build capacity and support for local energy committees. Our annual work plan supports local initiatives that align with state, regional, and local goals, including:

- thermal efficiency through weatherization, energy-efficient construction, as well as fuel switching (such as heat pumps and wood heat);
- transportation efficiency through increased use of electric vehicles (cars, bikes, med-heavy duty), expansion of bike-ped and transit use, and land use strategies related to compact walkable communities; and
- electrical efficiency and appropriate development of local renewable energy resources.

Highlights of our annual accomplishments include:

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- **Quarterly meetings:** NVDA organized quarterly online convenings for the NEK Energy Network, representing energy committees and partners from around the region committed to reducing energy burden and climate pollution. Collectively, this year's meetings drew regular attendance from 13 member communities: Brownington, Craftsbury, Danville, Glover, Greensboro, Morgan, Newport, Peacham, Ryegate, Sheffield, St. Johnsbury, Westmore, and Wheelock. The convenings also received robust participation from regional and state partners, including Efficiency Vermont, Heat Squad, the Public Service Department, Rural Edge, Northeast Kingdom Community Action, Northeast Employment Training Organization, USDA Rural Development, Vermont Department of Agriculture, Farm & Markets, Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network, as well as Vermont Electric Coop, and Washington Electric Coop.
- **Enhanced Energy Plan Analysis and Support:** Act 174's requirements for "enhanced" energy plans allows our communities to adopt local plans that receive substantial deference in Section 248 hearings. In FY2025, NVDA staff provided comprehensive analysis on energy use, energy generation, targets for weatherization and fuel switching, and pathways to achieving state energy goals for the following communities: Irasburg, Morgan, Albany, Barton, Coventry, Westmore, Burke, Newark, Maidstone, Holland, Walden, Sutton, Ryegate, St. Johnsbury, Sheffield, Greensboro, Craftsbury, Canaan, Charleston, Brighton, and Hardwick.
- **Energy newsletter:** NVDA produces a monthly Energy Newsletter, detailing relevant programs and events, funding and learning opportunities, energy incentives/rebates, and more. The e-newsletter is distributed to more than 400 contacts, has a 50% open rate, and is often recirculated by the media.
- **Municipal Energy Resilience (MERP) Administration:** In FY25, NEK communities were awarded over \$11.4 million for MERP energy efficiency and resiliency measures across 85 municipally-owned buildings. The NVDA team provided post-energy assessment analysis and MERP Implementation Grant application support.
- **Statewide Initiatives:** NVDA staff collaborated with non-profit energy groups such as Vermont Energy & Climate Action Network, Vermont Natural Resources Council, and Energy Action Network. We also provided feedback to Efficient Vermont/Vermont Energy Investment Corporation on their programming, energy burden report, and supporting initiatives and policies. NVDA also helped to organize and host a public event in Hardwick to provide comment on the 2025 update of the Climate Action Office Consolidated Action Plan.

EMERGENCY PLANNING & DISASTER RECOVERY

The regional planning commission plays a key role in emergency management through its work with Vermont Emergency Management, Vermont Homeland Security, Vermont Agency of Transportation, and the Agency of Natural Resources. We focus primarily on mitigation and preparedness, so we work with each community to identify vulnerabilities and actions to eliminate or lessen the risk. NVDA staff work with member communities to write and update flood hazard regulations, prepare FEMA-approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plans, and coordinate updates to local plans. We also assist during response and recovery in larger scale-events, such as federally declared disasters.

- **RIVER:** The Resilience Initiative for Vermont Empowerment and Recovery (RIVER) program provided assistance to towns in NVDA's region that were damaged from the July 2023 storms. NVDA staff worked local officials from Barton Town, Barton Village, Orleans Village, Glover, and Hardwick. STANTEC Engineering firm was awarded a grant to work with each town to provide free engineering services in preparation for Hazard Mitigation Grants

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- **Emergency Preparedness:** NVDA staff regularly attend the Vermont Emergency Preparedness Conference and provide local support. In FY2025 NVDA made an emergency preparedness presentation to citizens and local officials in Ryegate and participated in two tabletop exercises. The first was for the Orleans-Essex Regional Emergency Management Committee, and the exercise involved an active shooter at the North Country Hospital in Newport. The second exercise was with first responders in the St. Johnsbury and Waterford in which they simulated a truck with hazardous materials crash on Route 18 in Waterford by the reservoir, which compromised the drinking water for the area.
- **Local Hazard Mitigation Planning:** These five-year plans identify predominant risks to a community and identify ways to lessen their impacts. They are required for any community seeking FEMA hazard mitigation funds. In many instances they are the last required resilience measure that needs to be in place in order to receive level funding under the Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund. In FY2025, NVDA completed a FEMA-approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plan for Westfield.
- **FEMA Map Updates:** The long-anticipated rollout of draft updates to local Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMS) continued. These FEMA-produced maps are critical to towns that administer flood hazard development regulations so that they may participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. In April of this year, work maps for 19 communities in Orleans County were released. NVDA staff assisted with download and interpretation of data.

EQUITY & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

NVDA serves the most rural region of a rural state, with some of the lowest household incomes statewide. Our programming therefore is often focused on centering equity and environmental justice.

- **Solar Installation and Design Training:** Twenty NEK residents received free introductory training in [Solar Installation & Design](#), thanks to a partnership between NVDA and the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD). This opportunity aimed to boost renewable energy education and workforce development in the region, and it was made possible by the [VCRD Climate Catalyst Innovation Fund](#). Participants in the online course included residents and students from Barnet, Canaan, Coventry, Craftsbury, Danville, Jay, Lyndonville, St. Johnsbury, as well as additional in-person learning at Canaan Technical Center, North Country Career Center, North Country Union Highschool, and NETO Weatherization. The online trainings were self-paced and designed for beginners, providing an entry-level introduction to solar installation and design.
- **Solar Access:** NVDA and Vermont Electric Co-op (VEC) partnered to provide [free community solar memberships](#) in Orleans County, thanks to NVDA securing a \$75,940 grant from the Department of Energy's (DOE) Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) Program. The grant will cover the cost-in-full for 20 income-qualified households in Orleans County to sponsor panels in [VEC's Community Solar Program](#), leading to nearly \$45 in monthly savings on their electricity bills. Over the 10-year program term, each household will save over \$5,200, making a difference in their annual energy burden.
- **EV Charging:** NVDA promoted Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment grant available to local governments, businesses, and public attractions, such as Groton multi-family properties.
- **Municipal Vulnerability Index (MVI):** Regional Planning Commissions, with support from the Climate Action Office, developed municipal profiles for communities around the state. These

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profiles demonstrate how the MVI can enhance a community's understanding of its potential vulnerability to climate change impacts and identify specific actions to mitigate that vulnerability. In FY2025, NVDA staff participated in the MVI rollout and documentation and produced profiles for Barnet, St. Johnsbury, and Canaan.

GRANT WRITING & ADMINISTRATION

Few of our communities have staff to write and administer grants, so they rely heavily on NVDA staff for support.

- **Building Resilient Community Infrastructure:** The Town of Coventry was one of the last communities to benefit from this program that has now been eliminated by the federal government. NVDA staff is administering this grant, which has hired a consultant to develop a plan of action to reduce ice jam flooding of the Black River in Coventry. The consultant is scoping flood mitigation options, developing final plans for the preferred methods, and will complete a Benefit Cost Analysis in support of a complete application for funding for implementation.
- **Bike-Pedestrian Planning:** NVDA is administering a grant to have the firm Dubois & King conduct a feasibility study of improved bicycle and pedestrian connections between where the Newport bike path meets Landing St and the southern end of the Beebe Spur Rail Trail. A network of off-road trails already exists and includes the former Scott Bluff Farm Trails and a path owned by the Pomerleau family behind the Vista Shopping Center. The feasibility study will also assess, identify, and prioritize locations for new and upgraded connections, amenities and enhancements to these facilities that will provide for the user a seamless experience.
- **Municipal Planning Grants (MPG):** This program remains the lifeblood for our communities' planning and revitalization efforts. In FY2025, NVDA wrote and administered successful Municipal Planning Grants for Guildhall, Brighton, Groton, and Lunenburg. NVDA staff is assisting the towns of Brighton and Groton with their town plan updates, and is also assisting the Town of Guildhall to update their zoning regulations. The MPG grant for Lunenburg is funding pre-construction (architectural and engineering) to make the Town Clerk's office ADA accessible.
- **Vermont Community Development Program:** In FY2025, NVDA completed the administration of a \$40,000 Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) planning grant for the Town of Lyndon and the Village Improvement Society (VIS) for a development plan regarding Powers Park. The designs of the new playground, accessibility, and pavilions will not only offer locals a stronger place to meet and recreate as well as opportunities to spur local economies, but a regional asset for numerous NEK residents and seasonal visitors. Also in FY2024, NVDA closed out a \$1,000,000 VCDP grant to fund improvements to the non-profit Craftsbury Community Care Center. Work funded by the grant significantly improved heating, cooling and ventilation.
- **Flood Resilient Communities Fund (BRCF):** Lyndon is in a flat valley flood adjacent to the Passumpsic River. Downstream of three tributaries that empty into the main stem, the community is highly vulnerable to flooding. NVDA helped the town acquire a BRCF to review years of studies and recommendations and scope preferred strategies. The Town hired SLR International, who partnered with Whiteout Solutions to obtain highly accurate data for flood

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modelling. SLR then ran multiple scenarios to help the Town identify two projects: restoring floodplain function at the former town garage site and replacing a dry culvert on Route 5 with a dry bridge. These efforts aim to lower flood levels and prevent debris from blocking downstream infrastructure. SLR provided data to support highly-ranked Hazard Mitigation grant applications.

HOUSING

Housing is at the core our policy and planning. It directly shapes the Northeast Kingdom's communities—impacting where and how people live, the availability and affordability of homes, and access to jobs, schools, healthcare, and other essential services. Our region will need about 400–650 new homes every year between now and 2029—just to ensure we can keep up with future demand. NVDA is committed to helping the region meet its housing needs, ensuring that homes are safe, climate-resilient, energy-efficient, and affordable.

- **Headwaters Community Land Trust:** A community land trust is a proven vehicle for creating affordable housing that is permanently sheltered from the speculative housing market. Purchasers of trust-owned homes sign a long-term, low-cost lease on the underlying land, which remains the property of the trust. In FY2025, NVDA continued to facilitate technical support to an emerging land trust, now called the [Headwaters Community Land Trust](#). The mission of the trust is to create homeownership opportunities and access to land and housing for low- and middle-income community members through community-based ownership, development, rehabilitation, and stewardship. Headwaters CLT serves the northeastern Vermont towns of Albany, Craftsbury, Glover, and Greensboro, as well as adjoining communities, and their service area encompasses the headwaters region of the Black, Barton, and Lamoille Rivers.
- **Feasibility Study:** In St. Johnsbury, NVDA assisted for-profit housing developers with a feasibility study. The property – the site of former motel – is in St. Johnsbury's downtown and could support anywhere from 30 to 60 new units of housing.

PLANNING AND ZONING

Only a handful of our member communities have full-time planning staff, so NVDA is often the first organization called for assistance when it comes to municipal plan development, zoning bylaw development, and plan implementation projects. Here are some of our service highlights for FY2025:

- **Town Plan Approvals:** Town Plan approval is critical receiving confirmation under 25 V.S.A. 4340, which enables communities to receive additional benefits, such as eligibility for Municipal Planning Grants. In FY2025, NVDA staff reviewed and approved plans from the following communities: Danville, Guildhall, Granby, Newark, Walden, Canaan, Holland, Sheffield. All plans received technical support from NVDA. The Town of Walden was a first-ever plan for the community.
- **Town Plan Development:** NVDA staff also assisted the following communities with the development of Town Plans in FY2025: Waterford, Barton, Maidstone, Craftsbury, Groton, Albany, Brighton, St. Johnsbury, and Sheffield. Sheffield and St. Johnsbury have already updated and adopted their plans, and regional approval is expected shortly. Craftsbury's plan

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is a substantive update from its previous plan, and is now scheduled for its second adoption hearing. Maidstone will hold its first adoption hearing shortly.

- **Zoning:** NVDA began working with the Town of Guildhall to update its zoning. The existing bylaws currently have not site plan review or subdivision regulations, nor do they site provisions for the approval of non-frontage lots. The community has many deep lots that traverse multiple zoning districts, creating some significant legal challenges for the community.

MAPPING

GIS mapping is an integral component of NVDA technical service offerings in planning and economic development. Our mapping supports planners and community development initiatives by providing geographical and spatial analysis.

- **Planning and Zoning:** This year, NVDA staff assisted the following communities with Town Plan map updates: Maidstone, Craftsbury, Burke, St. Johnsbury, Holland, Burke, Canaan, Ryegate, Hardwick Guildhall, Concord, and Sheffield. We also updated base data for zoning maps for Sutton and Brighton, and provided assistance to the Town Westfield that recently adopted a major revision to its zoning, which included a new zoning district for high elevation areas.
- **Community Values Mapping (CVM):** CVM is a participatory activity that asks residents to identify places they care about for a whole range of values; from special community places to recreation, hunting and fishing to scenic, working landscapes, and more. In the previous fiscal year, we provided this service for Craftsbury, which helped to inform a substantive update to their municipal plan. This year, we facilitated a similar session for the Town of Burk. The session was well attended and will provide an informed basis for important conservation issues in the community around wildlife habitat and flood resilience.
- **Energy Mapping:** In FY2025, NVDA continued to provide energy mapping for our communities, helping individuals and communities to make a difference in climate impact. This is a perfect example of the old truism, "Think globally and act locally." Brighton, Burke, Sutton, and Lowell all received energy planning maps that met the requirements of Act 174 for "enhanced" energy plans.
- **Draft FEMA Map interpretation:** The long-awaited release of draft updates to the region's FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) began in FY2025. The release of the maps has to be handled sensitively, since draft maps are to be shared exclusively with local officials, who must then assess the effectiveness of their existing flood hazard regulations. However, draft map updates are generally provided in .pdf, which can be difficult to interpret. NVDA GIS staff was able to download shape files for communities that had questions about flood hazard boundaries.

TRANSPORTATION

The regional planning commissions serve as the point of delivery for the statewide transportation planning process to support local, regional, state, and federal transportation network advancement.

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- **Road Erosion Inventories:** In FY2025, NVDA completed full or partial road erosion inventories (REIs) for Groton, North Troy, Newport Town, Wheelock, Jay, Holland, Lyndon, Walden, Newark, Craftsbury, Greensboro, Guildhall, Hardwick, Westmore and St. Johnsbury. These inventories fulfill one of each town's statutory Municipal Roads General Permit requirements (to have an REI done every 5 years). Towns may use these inventories to prioritize road segments for repair or upgrade. Additionally, these REIs allow towns to qualify for Better Roads and Grants in Aid grants from the state.
- **Walkability Audit:** Speeding is a growing concern in our communities. In June of this year, NVDA staff joined the Town of Danville in an AARP-sponsored walk audit. We will gather at the Village Green to discuss issues impacting walking and then head out to survey three popular walking routes along Brainerd Street, the Peacham Road, and Hill Street. Residents learned how to assess walkability conditions and inspire needed change.
- **Traffic Counts:** AADT, also known as a "Traffic Count," is a useful and simple measurement of the total volume of vehicle traffic in both directions of a highway or road for a year divided by 365 days. NVDA provides these reports for all municipalities in the Northeast Kingdom. In FY2025, NVDA provided traffic counts for the following communities: Albany, Barnet, Ryegate, Bloomfield, Brighton, Burke, Concord, Charleston, Craftsbury, Danville, Lowell, Jay, Irasburg, Peacham, and Groton.
- **Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Coordination:** NVDA staff continue to participate in a broader planning effort with regional planning partners in Lamoille and Franklin Counties to coordinate planning and development resources to our LVRT host communities. NVDA staff continue to facilitate the NEK+ Regional LVRT Council which includes representatives from each of our LVRT towns as well as at-large members from trail user groups.

Regional Planning Commissions coordinate the Transportation Planning Initiative (TPI) through a contract with VTrans. This effort has provided a statewide framework for public involvement in planning improvements to Vermont's transportation system, with 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. Here are our accomplishments this year, as they relate to the Transportation Planning Initiative:

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

- 2 TAC meetings held
- 2 non-municipal TAC members actively engaged in transportation planning
- 45 municipalities actively engaged in transportation planning
- 10 RPC coordination activities with municipalities and VTrans

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

- Regional transportation plan that is current (within 8 years) – note our plan was updated and readopted this year. A new plan is in development.
- 1 Act 250 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation
- 0 Section 248 applications with RPC comments relating to transportation
- 3 coordination activities in support of regional public transit providers
- 1 VTrans committees that involves RPC staff participation
- Region participates in Project Prioritization

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Objective 3: Provide Technical Assistance to Municipalities

- 35 municipalities participating in road foreman meetings annually
- 10 municipalities assisted with transportation related grants
- 3 grant programs assisted municipalities with for transportation related grants
- 50% of budget spent on municipal technical assistance
- 3 municipal transportation inventories conducted
- 0 municipal transportation related feasibility/project definition studies completed or undertaken
- 7 municipalities assisted with transportation element of municipal/town plan
- 10 road erosion inventories in support of the MRGP completed using TPI dollars and using other funding sources

Objective 4: Deliver Results that Advance VTrans Strategic and Long Range Transportation Plans

- 40 data collection activities conducted specifically for VTrans

Objective 5: Provide a Mechanism for Improved Public Outreach and Education

NVDA facilitates a regional Rivers and Roads Working group made up of DEC Staff, County Conservation District Managers, Vtrans Maintenance District Staff, and other regional partners. We are continuing to assist Municipalities with various aspects of stormwater mitigation related to Town Highways and Private Landowner Access issues related to stormwater. We are also working on Rail Trail Councils (LVRT and Beebe Spur) to foster new partnerships to assist our towns. We also provided support to towns with repeated flooding damage to roads.

UNMET NEEDS

NVDA's varied services don't always neatly fall into distinct categories. However, as the regional planning commission AND regional development corporation, we have the ability to tailor services to meet the needs of unique challenges.

- **Professional Development and Associations:** In FY2025, NVDA staff continued its longstanding tradition of lending professional expertise through participation on boards and regional organizations. Participatory efforts included the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, Vermont Community Development Association, Rural Community Transportation, Vermont Council on Rural Development, NEK Collaborative, and the NEK Broadband CUD, and the Northeast Kingdom Development Corporation a 501(c)(3) that supports economic development initiatives in the region. The latter organization has been the catalyst for the redevelopment and leasing of the former Bogner Building in Newport, as well as the completion of the Hardwick Yellow Barn.
- **Municipal Services Complex:** In FY2025, NVDA completed the administration of \$75,000 Municipal Technical Assistance Program award to the Town of Hardwick. The funds were used to secure architectural and engineering assistance to schematic designs and cost estimate for a municipal services complex on town-owned property along the Creamery Road. The site already houses the Town Garage, which is significantly undersized for existing Town trucks. In addition to housing a new Town garage, the site will also become the new site of the Hardwick Fire Station, which experiences frequent flood damage in its location. The site also currently houses the non-profit Hardwick Rescue. This MTAP-funded initiative will support fundraising and implementation efforts.
- **East Haven Radar Base:** Developed as an Air Force base in the 1950s to detect and track potential Soviet threats in the northeast region of the US, the radar base on East Mountain closed in 1963, leaving behind a collection of now-decaying buildings. The non-profit, Radar Mountain

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Initiative (RMI) was established to acquire this property and position it as a recreational amenity for hiking and mountain biking enthusiasts. NVDA is working with RMI to develop reuse plans and is committed to assist in some capacity with brownfield remediation.

‘AT WORK’ MAP

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

NVDA At Work-FY2025

